SENECA'S NINETIETH LETTER

T. NIKOLAIDES: *Σενέκα, Ἐπιστολὴ* 90. *Σενέκας ἐναντίον Ποσειδωνίου. Μιὰ ἀρχαία διαμάχη γιὰ τὴ συμβολὴ τῆς φιλοσοφίας στὴν ἐξέλιξη τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Εἰσαγωγή—μετάφραση—σχόλια.* (*Βιβλιοθήκη Ἀρχαίων Συγγραφέων* 33.) Pp. 300. Athens: *Στιγμή*, 2002. Paper. ISBN: 960-269-187-5.

This elegantly produced volume forms part of a larger initiative taken by Professor G. A. Christodoulou (University of Athens) to rehabilitate Greek and Latin literature in translation in Greece. The translations of the texts in this series face the original, are both authoritative and adequately annotated, and are meant to be not only useful as set texts at university level but also of interest to the average Modern Greek reader. This balance is difficult to achieve, and the fact that this thick volume deals only with Seneca's ninetieth epistle to Lucilius (fourteen pages in the volume of the OCT series) makes one think that Professor Nikolaides ought to have cast his net more widely in the corpus of Senecan epistolography. But the decision to concentrate on Seneca's disagreement with Posidonius' ideas about the contribution of philosophy to the development of civilization has allowed N. to produce a tightly focused study with a wealth of information in the commentary (149 pages) on matters both philosophical and literary regarding the Greco-Roman perception of concept of the Golden Age (a topic conveniently discussed also in the appendix).

The Introduction (twenty-eight pages) begins in an unorthodox, yet intriguing, fashion. We are plunged so suddenly into the discussion of the philosophical dispute about the rôle played by philosophy in the organization of the earliest human societies, and the place of Seneca's ninetieth epistle in this discussion, that the ensuing sections on Posidonius and Seneca as individuals seem to come as afterthoughts. But the information given in those sections is neither redundant nor out of sequence, for it is filtered through, and adds to, the philosophical perspective of the volume. The remaining three brief sections on Lucilius, the literary context and instructive purpose of the *Moral Epistles to Lucilius*, and the modern view that Seneca was not practising what he was preaching, rehash well-known, yet essential, issues in Senecan scholarship. Regrettably, there is no section on Senecan prose style.

The Latin text facing the translation is reproduced *verbatim* from Reynolds's edition in the OCT series except in three passages, on which N. either returns to the MSS tradition (§16) or adopts emendations suggested by other scholars (§§28 and 36). The translation is generally faithful to the original, and aims at both rendering the spirit of the text and producing a version that is elegant in its own right. This N. achieves admirably (a rare specimen amongst Modern Greek translations of Latin texts currently available). Students in Greek universities will profit from studying the Latin text with the aid of N.'s translation. Whenever words are paraphrased or given an unusual meaning, N. explains his reasons for doing so in a note in the commentary. I have some minor queries about the accuracy of the translation on a few occasions, but my alternative suggestions would be duller and more pedantic.

The commentary is impressively erudite and detailed, and comprises brief explanatory notes on various matters (for example, the identity of people Seneca talks about, the Greco-Roman ancestry of Stoic ideas mentioned in the text, the juxtaposition of these ideas with Epicureanism, problems of textual criticism) and lengthier comments (some of them up to four pages long) on prominent issues in Seneca's argumentation against Posidonius. Most of these notes could have been more

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 1 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.1.103 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concise, if N. had refrained from regularly citing (and quite often translating) entire passages from Greek and Latin texts that are somehow 'parallel' to an idea included in a passage of Seneca's text. Such long lists of intertexts (the useful *Index locorum* at the end of this volume occupies thirty-six columns) feature in many modern commentaries, but are potentially confusing, because they obscure the issue of real and fruitful intertextual dialogue. I would have been happier both if N. had highlighted more clearly the passages that either influenced directly or were themselves directly influenced by Seneca's views in this epistle, and if he had been more prone to excluding rather than including intertexts of a more general nature. Had this been done consistently, I would have been able to appreciate more clearly what happened before and after the transmission of a philosophical idea from one author to the next, or from the text of an author to another text of the same author. What, for instance, is the point of adducing passages from Seneca's tragedies (mostly, *Phaedra*) to corroborate Seneca's own views against Posidonius, if the reader is not told about the speaker and function of the tragic quotation in its context, and if there is no discussion of the relationship (if any) between the tragedy in question and Epistle 90?

University of Glasgow COSTAS PANAYOTAKIS

SNAKEBITTEN

C. R. Raschle: *Pestes Harenae. Die Schlangenepisode in Lucans* Pharsalia *(IX 587–949)*. Pp. 445. Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 2001. Paper, £40. ISBN: 3-631-36666-3.

This lightly revised dissertation submitted to the University of Fribourg offers a lengthy introduction, text, translation, and detailed scholarly commentary to roughly one-third of the ninth book of Lucan's *Bellum civile*. It covers the last part of the march made by Cato and his army across the Libyan desert toward Leptis Magna, the highlight of which is a deadly encounter with a menagerie of poisonous snakes. The rhetorical strategy of the dissertation is to defend the so-called snake-episode against a long tradition of criticism that finds it inappropriate, absurd, or a failure. Raschle does this well by showing how Lucan masterfully orchestrates a variety of sources and discourses (epic, mythological, didactic, zoological, and medical) so that they harmonize with the larger plan of his epic.

R. follows the lead of scholars who assume that Lucan structured *Bellum civile* in three units of four books, and that the twelfth and final book would have ended with Cato's suicide at Utica. R. understands the ninth book as the beginning of the poem's final tetrad, in which Lucan re-introduces Cato as the true hero of the poem who champions republican *libertas* through his Stoic opposition to the tyranny of Caesar. Within this framework, the snake-episode is no extravagant digression, but a defining moment in which Cato's character, when put to the ultimate test by *Fortuna*, exhibits the Stoic ideals of *virtus*, *patientia*, and *duritia*, in contrast to the *voluptas* to which Caesar will succumb on visiting Egypt in Book 10. R.'s reading of Cato's heroism in the snake-episode is obviously an inherited one, but it gains renewed energy by disagreeing with 'Anglo-Saxon' critics (particularly Johnson and Leigh) who argue that Lucan's purpose in the snake-episode is either to parody Cato's Stoicism or to show its futility. R. may be a little too quick to rattle his saber against 'deconstructive' interpretation, given the fact that his own 'constructive' reading of the episode involves

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 1 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.1.103 Published online by Cambridge University Press