

FRANCESCA ROMANA BERNO, *L. Anneo Seneca: Lettere a Lucilio Libro VI: Le Lettere 53–57*, Pàtron Editore: Bologna, 2006, pp. 419, ISBN 88-555-2864-5.

The greatest desideratum in Latin prose scholarship is, perhaps, a modern, full-scale commentary on the whole corpus of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*. Currently, we must make do with commentaries on individual letters (Blankert 1940; Stückelberger 1965; Scarpat 1970; Hamacher 2006) or groups of letters (Summers 1962; Scarpat 1975; Bellincioni 1979; Op Het Veld 2000; Laudizi 2003; Hönscheid 2004). To this last group we may now add the volume under review, which provides text, translation, commentary and introduction for the first five letters of the sixth book of the *Epistulae Morales* (*epist.* 53–7). Berno's (hereafter B.) book is useful and there is much to be learned from her detailed commentary. I outline some reservations below, but the book is nevertheless recommended. Libraries should purchase a copy for their collections, and scholars of Senecan prose and the Latin epistolary tradition will want to keep the book within easy reach. The price is affordable.

Although each of the letters collected in this volume have been subjected to commentary before, they have not yet been brought together and treated as a whole to the extent B. has done. (Summers' commentary treats all five but in far less detail.) The five letters included are *Reisebriefe* from Seneca's travels around the Bay of Naples, but they are much more than that, and one of the great virtues of B.'s work is that she treats this series of letters as a unified and coherent literary program. It would have been helpful for B. to have articulated why she chose to examine only these five letters instead of the entire corpus of *Reisebriefe* (which begin at *epist.* 49, book 5). If there is a significant break in literary purpose (or tone or content) between these letters and those that precede it, as B.'s choice implies, then perhaps this is evidence that the book divisions are Seneca's own.

The general introduction (pp. 11–27) covers a wide range of topics, beginning with short introductions to the *Epistulae Morales*, Lucilius, and the genuineness of the letters (B.'s position: they are real letters but stylized in view of publication). There is nothing new here. B.'s careful analysis of the five letters as “un nucleo tematico-narrativo,” on the other hand, is quite clear, insightful, and innovative (pp. 16–24). She acutely outlines the thematic, structural, and linguistic links among the letters that make these a unified whole within an even larger whole. In particular, B. emphasizes both the structural similarities—specifically, how each letter has three distinct but interrelated sections: 1) personal anecdote, 2) philosophical reflection, and 3) exhortation—as well as the thematic links that tie individual letters together. In this regard, B.'s analysis will serve as an advance on and useful complement to G. Maurach, *Der Bau von Senecas Epistulae Morales*, Heidelberg 1970. The introduction ends with a short piece on language and style (pp. 24–7).

For the text of the letters B. essentially reproduces that of Reynolds' *Oxford Classical Text*, differing only on two occasions, 53.6 and 54.4, returning to the manuscript reading in each case. She is not a textual critic, nor will one find comprehensive discussion of such matters in the commentary. The reader should also be aware that there are many misprints in the Latin text; most of them will not lead scholars astray, but they are nonetheless regrettable. Given the nature of the misprints, I suspect that Reynolds' text was scanned electronically and, inexplicably, not proofread: on p. 116 (*epist.* 54.1) read “desinit” for “desiniti;” p. 118 (54.7) the comma after *eiciaris* has become a semi-colon; p. 166 (*epist.* 55.1) read “ambularemus” for “ambularernus;” twice, on p. 326 (57.1) and p. 328 (57.3) “illo” has become “ilio;” the most confusing certainly is found on p. 328 (57.3), where for “ab nomine tolerabili” read “ab homine tolerabili.” Several necessary hyphens have also been lost from the text. One should keep Reynolds nearby.

The facing Italian translations are accurate, modern, and vigorous.

The *raison d'être* of the volume is obviously the commentary, and B. on the whole does an admirable job discussing each passage, revealing intratextual links, and informing the reader of Seneca's

overall rhetorico-literary strategy. It is clear that B. is an attentive and insightful reader of Seneca's letters. One of B.'s strongest qualities as a commentator is her ability to elucidate Seneca's train of thought when the connections are not so apparent. To take but one example, at 57.6–9 (pp. 352–3) B. insightfully corrects Summers' judgment that the seventh paragraph is inorganically tied to what precedes it and clearly identifies the link, which is, as often in Seneca's case, more rhetorical than purely logical. Readers will doubtlessly benefit from B.'s close attention to Seneca's style and her own clarity of expression.

This is not to say that B. always lives up to her job as a commentator. My main concern is that B. does not always investigate a problem as thoroughly as possible. Naturally, a commentator cannot do everything and must make choices. But I consistently encountered matters where more could and should have been done. A few examples should suffice to show the sort of unevenness that is characteristic of B.'s work.

1) On p. 46 (*ad epist.* 53.1), under the lemma "*sed putavi tam pauca milia a Parthenope tua usque Puteolos*," B. begins auspiciously, noting that Seneca only here uses the name *Parthenope* for Naples (elsewhere *Neapolis*) and that this is likely owed to Seneca's desire for alliteration and isocolon with *Puteolos*. So far, so good. But what about the name 'Parthenope'? Where does it come from? B. merely quotes Kölle (1975: 14), "der alte, auf Mythologisches anspielende Name für Neapel," and does not go that last step and provide the reader with the full explanation of that mythological allusion. For that one may see Pliny, *nat.* 3.62 (*Neapolis Parthenope a tumulo Sirenis appellata*) or Servius *geor.* 4.563. But Seneca's clever choice of Parthenope as home of the Sirens instead of Neapolis is not merely stylistic but has a broader literary importance, for Seneca is preparing his readers for a comparison of his own hardships with those of Ulysses—a comparison made explicit in 53.4. Although B. argues that Seneca's tragicomic account of himself as a modern Ulysses is an important motif in these letters, she fails here to note how the choice of Parthenope operates within the literary conceit—all the more surprising since the Bay of Naples was notably identified as the location of some of Ulysses' travels.

2) On pp. 355–6 (*ad epist.* 57.6), under the lemma “*quid enim interest utrum supra aliquem vigilarium ruat at mons? Nihil invenies,*” B. comments only briefly on the rare word: “*Virgilarium* [*sic!*] sembrerebbe *hapax* assoluto nei testi letterari.” The word is indeed only found here in literary texts, but it does occur four times in inscriptions, not only at *CIL* 14.527—as is reported in Reynolds’ apparatus that is reprinted in the volume—but also at 6.29772, 6.37789, and 14.1868. Surely these epigraphic sources are worth noting and perhaps even quoting, for it is not exactly clear what the term means in Seneca’s letter (B. translates reasonably “torretta di guardia”) or why he chose this particular word over, say, *turris*.

3) p. 334 (*ad epist.* 57.1), under the lemma “*totum athletarum fatum mihi illo die perpetiendum fuit: a ceromate nos happe excepit,*” B. writes the following: “*ceroma* (κῆρομα [*sic!*]), l’unguento per il corpo (per i capelli in Mart. 14.50)...”. Not only has B. garbled the Greek, she has also completely misunderstood the word *ceroma*, which refers to wrestling-floor clay. Pliny *nat.* 28.13.51 reports that a grimy mixture of *ceroma*, oil and sweat may be used for medicinal purposes (that is, a “mud-pack” of sorts [= *gloios?*]). But it is not an unguent. Furthermore, B. has somehow entirely missed the point of the Martial epigram, which in full reads (the title is *galericulum*, ‘leather cap’): *ne lutet inmundum nitidos ceroma capillos / hac poteris maddas condere pelle comas*, “so that the filthy mud doesn’t soil your glistening hair, / you can hide your dripping locks in this leather [cap].” How one can misconstrue *ceroma* here to mean some sort of unguent for the hair is hard to see. And although the misunderstanding of *ceroma* as a body-salve is not uncommon among scholars, a quick glance at O. W. Reinmuth, “The Meaning of *ceroma* in Martial and Juvenal,” *Phoenix* 21, 1967, 191–5 would have dispelled any false notion of *ceroma* as unguent or ointment.

It is deeply unfortunate that the book betrays such lapses, for on the whole B.’s exegesis is insightful and informative. It is also regrettable that there are many misprints. In addition to those in the Latin text already noted, I list the following in the hopes that the publisher might correct them in a second edition: p. 16 n. 14 read “als alleinigen Empfänger” for “als alleingen Empfänger;” p.

31 n. 5 read “from” for “fron” and “victory” for “victory;” p. 120 (lemma, ch.1) read “dederat” for “dedit;” p. 141 (in citation of *Tro.* 636) Greek *tô* needs an iota subscript; p. 142 read “securius” for “sicurius;” p. 143 (bottom, quote from *Othello*) read “Promethean heat/ that” for “Promethen heat/ tha;” p. 172 (apparatus) read “cumsedimus” for “circumsedimus;” p. 270 (second paragraph) read “serrarius” for “serrarius;” p. 282 (ad Ap. Rhod. 3.749f.) Greek *thpoos* should read *throos*; p. 286 (*ad de tranq. an.* 9.2.4) read “semper” for “sempre;” p. 342 (last line) read “Abel 1983a” for “Abel 1983;” p. 304 read “luxurious” for “luxorious;” p. 359 read “Seneca non sembra fare” for “Seneca non senbra fare;” p. 363 (Stat. *Theb.* 885) read “indignantem” for “indignatum.”

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