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SENECA
MORAL ESSAYS
VOLUME II



Translated by
JOHN W. BASORE

SENECA

MORAL ESSAYS

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JOHN W. BASORE
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SENECA

II

LCL 254

INTRODUCTION

OF the essays contained in this volume, the three *Consolationes* are outstanding as interesting survivals in Latin prose^a of a literary *genre* that was better known to the Greeks—a heritage from the philosophers that had fallen into the hands of the rhetoricians. These rather late specimens from Seneca, consequently, show little spontaneity, and abound in stock arguments, rhetorical commonplaces, and declamatory catalogues of examples from history.^b

The origin of the type is to be associated with most of the ancient schools of philosophy,^c but it remained for Crantor, an Academic philosopher of the fourth century B.C., to give it definite form in his famous letter to his friend Hippocles on the death of his children. Cicero by his praise^d and by his use of the work in the *Tusculans* and in his own *Consolatio*^e testifies to its ancient prestige.

The earliest Latin examples of the type are supplied

^a Examples of the poetic *consolatio* are more common: e.g., Statius, *Silvae*, ii. 6, iii. 3; Juvenal, xiii, and the *Ad Liviam* ascribed to Ovid.

^b Favez, Introduction to *Ad Marciam*, p. xxvii.

^c Buresch has collected the material in *Leipz. Stud.* ix. 1-164.

^d *Academ.* ii. 135.

^e Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* Praef. 22.

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by the corpus of Cicero's correspondence—notably by his own letter to Titius^a and that of Servius Sulpicius^b to Cicero upon the loss of his daughter Tullia. Of Cicero's own *Consolatio* devised for self-comfort in this crisis only a few fragments remain.

Seneca's experiments with the *genre* include examples of the epistolary form^c and the three more studied dialogues that appear here. Of these, the *Ad Marciam* and the *Ad Polybium*, with their theme of death, are marked by the stock arguments that belong to the type^d—all men must die; there is no need to grieve on our own account or that of the dead; time will ease the sorrow, but let reason do it first.

The *Ad Marciam*, for all its show of Stoic hardness, has much that is noble and tender, and closes with a rapturous picture of the blissful existence of the sainted dead. The date of its composition is assigned by Waltz^e to the period between A.D. 37 and 41.

The *Ad Polybium* and the *Ad Helviam* were written in exile and are interesting, but sad, commentaries on the quality of Seneca's Stoic fortitude. The first is seriously marred by much weakly complaint and base flattery of the emperor Claudius, while the other wins praise from its show of reasoned and cheerful acceptance of untoward fortune.

The mishaps^f that might call forth a *consolatio* were as various as the misfortunes of men, but Seneca

^a *Ad Fam.* v. 16.

^b *Ad Fam.* iv. 5.

^c e.g., *Epist.* lxiii, xcix.

^d Cf. Summers, *Introd.* to Letter lxiii. in *Select Letters of Seneca*.

^e *Vie de Sénèque*, *Introd.* p. 7, note 2.

^f They are listed by Cicero in *Tusc. Disp.* iii. 81.

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had no model for his task of penning comfort to Helvia; for here the mourned, "lifting his head from the bier," must himself give comfort to the chief mourner. Because of the novel situation the essay shows more eclecticism in argument, and is, consequently, the most original and human—and likewise the most orderly—of the three. The reasoning, developed from the two main propositions that neither the exile himself nor his mother is to be considered really unfortunate, smacks of the cleverness of Stoic paradox and is, on the whole, more ingenious than convincing.

The *De Vita Beata*, placed by Waltz in A.D. 58 or 59, is ostensibly a consideration of the questions of what true happiness is and how it is to be obtained. To live according to Nature or, in other words, to be able to rejoice in Stoic virtue is, clearly, the answer to the first; to pursue philosophy is, by implication, the answer to the second. In the actual showing, after a polemic against pleasure, reasoned discussion gives place, first, to a scathing arraignment of those who sneer at philosophy and, later, to a defence of the ownership of wealth, in which, believably, we may see Seneca's effort to answer his own critics.

The chronology of the *De Otio*—and of the *De Tranquillitate Animi* next in order—is wholly conjectural; the first is placed by Waltz after the return from exile in A.D. 49, the second in Seneca's declining years. The fragment of the *De Otio* opens with an attempt to reconcile the Stoic and the Epicurean attitude towards participation in public affairs, and closes with a plea for the life of philosophic leisure and contemplation.

In the *De Tranquillitate Animi* the author gives

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much wise counsel to his young friend and disciple, Serenus, who is troubled by irresolution in coping with the appeal of luxury, public affairs, and literary fame. After an analysis of the causes of universal restlessness and boredom, guidance to inner peace and joy is given in a lengthy series of practical rules based broadly on reason and virtue.

The thesis of the *De Brevitate Vitae* is that the only true living consists in the pursuit of philosophy. To the philosopher life is never "short," for through books he may have access to all past ages, and learn from the sages both how to live and how to die. A discussion of how we waste time, and why consequently life seems too short prepares the way for the positive doctrine. In the spirited indictment ^a of scholarly research as a misuse of leisure it is tempting to see a covert satire upon the antiquarian interests of the eccentric Claudius. A clue to the date of composition is found in the author's apparent ignorance ^b of Claudius's extension of the *pomerium* in A.D. 50. The conclusion is that the treatise was written before that date, but after the return from exile.^c

In the critical apparatus, A designates the *Codex Ambrosianus* at Milan, of the tenth or the eleventh century—the most important manuscript of the *Dialogues*. For the *Ad Marciam* and the *Ad Polybium*—of the latter A preserves but a scanty fragment—there is further a Florentine manuscript of the fifteenth century (designated F), and for the *Ad Polybium* alone a series of late manuscripts—one at Berlin (B), two at Milan (DE), one at Copenhagen (H),

^a Ch. 13.

^b Ch. 13. 8.

^c Duff, *Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age*, p. 215.

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one at Breslau (V), and one at Wolfenbüttel (G). The symbol O designates a consensus of BDEFH; C a consensus of any three or four of these.

The text is, with some necessary or desirable modifications, that of Hermes, Leipzig, 1905.

References to proper names, it will be found, are elucidated in the Index.

J. W. B.

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SENECA
MORAL ESSAYS

L. ANNAEI SENECAE DIALOGORVM

LIBER VI

AD MARCIAM

DE CONSOLATIONE

- 1 1. Nisi te, Marcia, scirem tam longe ab infirmitate muliebris animi quam a ceteris vitiis recessisse et mores tuos velut aliquod antiquum exemplar aspici, non auderem obviam ire dolori tuo, cui viri quoque libenter haerent et incubant, nec spem concepissem tam iniquo tempore, tam inimico iudice, tam invidioso crimine posse me efficere, ut fortunam tuam absolveres. Fiduciam mihi dedit exploratum iam robur animi et magno experimento approbata virtus tua.
- 2 Non est ignotum, qualem te in persona patris tui gesseris, quem non minus quam liberos dilexisti, excepto eo quod non optabas superstitem. Nec scio an et optaveris; permittit enim sibi quaedam contra bonum morem magna pietas. Mortem A. Cremuti

* The particulars of Marcia's loss are known only from this dialogue. She was an intimate friend of the empress Livia (ch. 4), and the mother of four children, two sons and two daughters, of whom only the daughters survived (ch. 16). Her protracted mourning for a son Metilius (ch. 16) calls forth this effort of Seneca. In the opening

THE DIALOGUES OF LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA

BOOK VI.

TO MARCIA

ON CONSOLATION

IF I did not know, Marcia,^a that you were as far removed from womanish weakness of mind as from all other vices, and that your character was looked upon as a model of ancient virtue, I should not dare to assail your grief—the grief that even men are prone to nurse and brood upon—nor should I have conceived the hope of being able to induce you to acquit Fortune of your complaint, at a time so unfavourable, with her judge so hostile, after a charge so hateful. But your strength of mind has been already so tested and your courage, after a severe trial, so approved that they have given me confidence.

How you bore yourself in relation to your father is common knowledge; for you loved him not less dearly than your children, save only that you did not wish him to outlive you. And yet I am not sure that you did not wish even that; for great affection sometimes ventures to break the natural law. The death of your

chapters elaborate reference is made to an earlier loss, when her father, the historian, A. Cremutius Cordus, accused of treason under Tiberius (A.D. 25), committed suicide.

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Cordi parentis tui quantum poteras inhibuisti; postquam tibi apparuit inter Seianianos satellites illam unam patere servitutis fugam, non favisti consilio eius, sed dedisti manus victa fudistique lacrimas palam et gemitus devorasti quidem, non tamen hilari fronte texisti; et haec illo saeculo, quo
 3 magna pietas erat nihil impie facere. Ut vero aliquam occasionem mutatio temporum¹ dedit, ingenium patris tui, de quo sumptum erat supplicium, in usum hominum reduxisti et a vera illum vindicasti morte ac restituisti in publica monumenta libros, quos vir ille fortissimus sanguine suo scripserat. Optime meruisti de Romanis studiis: magna illorum pars arserat; optime de posteris, ad quos veniet incorrupta rerum fides auctori suo magno imputata; optime de ipso, cuius viget vigebitque memoria, quam diu in pretio fuerit Romana cognosci, quam diu quisquam erit, qui reverti velit ad acta maiorum, quam diu quisquam qui velit scire, quid sit vir Romanus, quid subactis iam cervicibus omnium et ad Seianianum iugum adactis indomitus, quid sit homo ingenio,
 4 animo, manu liber. Magnum me hercules detrimentum res publica ceperat, si illum ob duas res pulcherrimas in oblivionem coniectum, eloquentiam et libertatem, non eruisses. Legitur, floret, in manus hominum, in pectora receptus vetustatem nullam

¹ mutatio temporum *editors*: mutato tempore *AF*.

^a The military terminology in the setting and the rhetoric point to this interpretation of *fudisti*. It is commonly considered the equivalent of *effudisti*.

^b i.e., to commit no outrage on a parent.

^c According to Tacitus, *Annals*, iv. 34. 1, Cordus was charged with treason for having lauded Brutus, and for styling Cassius "the last of the Romans."

TO MARCIA ON CONSOLATION, I. 2-4

father, Aulus Cremutius Cordus, you delayed as long as you could ; after it became clear that, surrounded as he was by the minions of Sejanus, he had no other way of escape from servitude, favour his plan you did not, but you acknowledged defeat, and you routed ^a your tears in public and choked down your sobs, yet in spite of your cheerful face you did not conceal them—and these things in an age when the supremely filial was simply not to be unfilial ! ^b When, however, changed times gave you an opportunity, you recovered for the benefit of men that genius of your father which had brought him to his end, and thus saved him from the only real death, and the books which that bravest hero had written with his own blood you restored to their place among the memorials of the nation. You have done a very great service to Roman scholarship, for a large part of his writings had been burned ; a very great service to posterity, for history will come to them as an uncorrupted record whose honesty cost its author dear ^c ; and a very great service to the man himself, whose memory now lives and will ever live so long as it shall be worth while to learn the facts of Roman history—so long as there shall be anyone who will wish to hark back to the deeds of our ancestors, so long as there shall be anyone who will wish to know what it is to be a Roman hero, what it is to be unconquered when all necks are bowed and forced to bear the yoke of a Sejanus, what it is to be free in thought, in purpose, and in act. A great loss, in very truth, the state had suffered, had you not rescued this man who had been thrust into oblivion for the sake of two of the noblest things—eloquence and freedom. But he is now read, he lives, and ensconced in the hands and

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timet; at illorum carnificum cito scelera quoque, quibus solis memoriam meruerunt, tacebuntur.¹

- 5 Haec magnitudo animi tui vetuit me ad sexum tuum respicere, vetuit ad vultum, quem tot annorum continua tristitia, ut semel obduxit, tenet. Et vide, quam non subrepam tibi nec furtum facere affectibus tuis cogitem. Antiqua mala in memoriam reduxi et, ut scires² hanc quoque plagam esse sanandam, ostendi tibi aequae magni vulneris cicatricem. Alii itaque molliter agant et blandiantur; ego configere cum tuo maerore constitui et defessos exhaustosque oculos, si verum vis, magis iam ex consuetudine quam ex desiderio fluentis continebo, si fieri potuerit, favente te remediis tuis, si minus, vel invita, teneas licet et amplexeris dolorem tuum, quem tibi in filii locum superstitem fecisti. Quis enim erit finis?
- 6 Omnia in supervacuum temptata sunt. Fatigatae adlocutiones amicorum, auctoritates magnorum et adfinium tibi virorum; studia, hereditarium et paternum bonum, surdas aures irritum et vix ad brevem occupationem proficiente³ solacio transeunt; illud ipsum naturale remedium temporis, quod maximas quoque aerumnas componit, in te una vim suam
- 7 perdidit. Tertius iam praeterit annus, cum interim nihil ex primo illo impetu cecidit; renovat se et corroborat cotidie luctus et iam sibi ius mora fecit

¹ tacebuntur *inferior mss.*: tacebunt *A.*

² ut scires *Schultess*: vis scire *A.*

³ proficiente *F*: proficientes *A*: proliciente *Waltz.*

TO MARCIA ON CONSOLATION, I. 4-7

hearts of men he fears no passing of the years ; but those cutthroats—even their crimes, by which alone they deserved to be remembered, will soon be heard of no more.

This evidence of the greatness of your mind forbade me to pay heed to your sex, forbade me to pay heed to your face, which, since sorrow once clouded it, unbroken sadness holds for all these years. And see ! —I am not stealing upon you with stealth, nor am I planning to filch from you any of your sufferings. I have recalled to your memory old misfortunes, and, that you may know that even this deep-cut wound will surely heal, I have shown you the scar of an old wound that was not less severe. And so let others deal with you gently and ply soft words. I myself have determined to battle with your grief, and your eyes that are wearied and worn—weeping now, if I may speak the truth, more from habit than from sorrow—shall be checked by measures that, if so it may be, you welcome, if not, even against your will, even though you hug and embrace the sorrow that you have kept alive in place of your son. Else what end shall it have ? Every means has been tried in vain. The consolations of your friends, the influence of great men who were your relatives have been exhausted. Books, your love for which was a boon bequeathed by your father, now void of comfort and scarcely serving for brief distraction, make their appeal to unheeding ears. Even time, Nature's great healer, that allays even our most grievous sorrows, in your case only has lost its power. Three whole years have now passed, and yet the first violence of your sorrow has in no way abated. Your grief is renewed and grows stronger every day—by lingering