Book Reviews

Bernardino Stefonio, S.J., *Flavia Tragoedia*, ed., and trans. Mirella Saulini. Quaderni Sabini, 2. Monte Compatri: Edizioni Espera, 2021. Pp. 396. Pb, €49.00.

This is a modern edition with an Italian translation of the *Flavia Tragoedia* (1600; printed Rome, 1621), the second martyr tragedy by sixteenth-century Roman Jesuit, Bernardino Stefonio (1560–1620), after his earlier hit *Crispus* (1597). Saulini nicely sets the scene in her informative introduction: Clement VIII is on the throne of St. Peter and the influence of Trent remains strong; it is a jubilee year and all eyes are on Rome; the Oratorians and Jesuits are competing for precedence in affective religious drama; no expense is spared by the pope in sponsoring impressive celebrations of the city's past and present glories. The *Flavia* was performed four times in 1600. The production was apparently elaborate, with music and dance, and lasted ten hours. The play was reperformed in 1621, when it was also printed, although Saulini finds evidence of an earlier attempt to revise and revive it—not, however, by Stefonio himself. There was no time for the busy Jesuit teacher to edit his own work, and authorial revision seems to have been frowned upon by the Society. In her introduction, Saulini does a brief reconnaissance of three (non-autograph) manuscripts and details the more significant variations on the printed text.

The *Flavia* is a “historical” play, set in the years 95–96 CE. Indeed, “history constitutes [...] not only the subject but also, in different ways, one of the topics of discussion by the characters; these often speak of the glorious past of Rome, recounting important episodes” (15). The heirless emperor Domitian has elevated the two sons of his Christian cousin, the ex-consul Titus Flavius Clemens, to the imperial family. The young Titus Flavius Vespasianus and Titus Flavius Domitianus, also Christians, represent the virtues of the soldier (*sagum*) and politician (*toga*) respectively. The *ludi saeculares* are underway but the pagan temples are empty. The emperor, through the vindictive machinations of the magus Apollonius of Tyana, is persuaded that his Christian kinsmen represent a threat to the old religion and the empire. Clemens is executed on stage, a departure

from classical practice; the deaths of the two young Caesars are reported in a long and edifying messenger speech; we are also told that their mother Domitilla, and her niece and namesake, are banished to the islands of Pandataria and Ponza.

Both of Stefonio's martyr plays draw on Senecan models—the *Crispus* on *Phaedra*, *Flavia* on *Thyestes*. (The tyrannical emperor reveals the severed heads of his heirs to their father.) Stefonio may have availed himself of the revised Seneca edition of Spanish Jesuit, Martín Delrio. Like the author of the *Magical Investigations* (1599–1600), our playwright has an (un)healthy fascination with the demonic. In Act 1, 1, Apollonius of Tyana summons the powers of the Underworld in a long incantation recalling Seneca's *Medea* (12). Stefonio also imitates other classical authors, notably Virgil, Horace, and Lucan. The style is "baroque," brimming with lists, digressions, and exhibitions of rhetorical technique. Yet, as Saulini observes, the play lacks the sensuality of, e.g., the *Iudit* by Federico Della Valle (c.1560–1628), the leading Italian biblical tragedian of the period, and there are no comic interludes. The newly published *Ratio studiorum* (1599) had forbidden the representation of female characters on the Jesuit stage. The play's *editio princeps* informs us that Stefonio obediently expunged the fourth scene of the second act, in which the two Domitillas appear. It is restored in the printed version.

As an edition of a Jesuit neo-Latin drama, Saulini's volume inevitably caters to different audiences. Her introduction is followed by a glossary of mythological figures that may seem superfluous to classicists; on the other hand, a list of meters deployed by Stefonio assumes a more advanced knowledge of Latin prosody. There is no commentary as such, but Saulini explains (ancient) historical terms and references and biblical allusions in concise and useful footnotes. She also picks out salient linguistic and stylistic features of Stefonio's Latin. Notes on the dramatic and performance aspects are less frequent, but when commenting on the ludic warrior dance "pyrrhice" in Act 1, 3, performed to the lyre, Saulini observes that such mock fights became a standard feature of Jesuit drama. It would be wonderful to locate the music for this play, apparently by Asprilio Pacelli (1570–1623), one-time boy chorister at the *Capella Giulia*, under Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525–94), and *maestro di capella* at the Collegio Germanico at the time of the *Flavia's* composition. The volume includes a select bibliography and an index of historical names.

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