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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Boethius, "The Consolation of Philosophy" by P. G. Walsh and Boethius

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P. G. WALSH (trans.): *Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy*. Pp. lvii + 171. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-19-815228-0.

Most classical texts are readily available in modern English translations, but good, new versions of the most important classics are, of course, always welcome. Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* certainly ranks as one of the most influential prose texts ever written in Latin, and the name of its latest translator, P. G. Walsh, is a guarantee of high quality. In recent years, W. published several fine translations, among others of the novels by Petronius and Apuleius. This new edition of Boethius' work, therefore, looks promising right from the start.

Fortunately, the book lives up to the high expectations with which one approaches it. It presents a clear, readable, and accurate rendering of Boethius' not always fully transparent Latin, and thereby allows us to read the whole text as a coherent piece of literature. The characteristic verse inserts have been rendered in different verse forms, a variety that deliberately matches the diverse metrical schemes and patterns adopted in the original. Inevitably, some of these are more convincing than others (personally I had some difficulty with the English verses that employ rhyme).

Although the book is aimed at a rather general readership, it provides a fair amount of additional information on the text. The explanatory notes (some fifty pages) and the excellent introduction (some forty pages), as well as a convenient summary of the treatise, a bibliography, and an index, provide all the necessary material to understand and interpret the text. The introduction earns special praise for an instructive section on the later history of the *Consolation*.

One cannot help wondering, meanwhile, whether this sixth-century work can still serve as a consolatory text today. Some of the contentions of Lady Philosophy, e.g. that evil men are necessarily unhappy and in a sense do not exist (p. 76), or that the wicked are happier if they suffer punishment than if they do not (p. 80), seem decidedly unmodern, to say the least, and not quite suitable as sources of comfort to those in distress.

Walsh, of course, is not to blame for this. On the contrary, he deserves full credit for producing an admirably accessible and practical version of the *Consolation*. The book will certainly be of great service to readers and scholars.

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