

REVIEWS

They Said It First: The Wisdom of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. By Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr. Mundelein: IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2019. Pp. xxi + 326. Paper. \$19.00.

Kitchell has given us an assortment of Latin and Greek phrases on such topics as “bragging,” “human nature,” “love,” “money,” and “work.” Each is given in the original and in translation, with a reference. For example, on p. 158 we find *Dux femina facti*, translated as “The leader of the deed is a woman, Vergil, *Aen.* 1.364.” All this is straightforward enough, and there are any number of quotation books that do this much, such as the venerable *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*.

But what makes Kitchell’s book more fun than *Bartlett’s* are the modern parallels and comparanda. After Vergil’s line about Dido, we see “Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, except backwards and in high heels,” with a note about the various sources for this line (it’s complicated). Other modern analogues come from Elton John, the Beatles, Mark Twain, Goethe, Cervantes, and even Dr. Seuss. Some mean more or less the same as the ancient versions; for example, with Cicero’s *esse oportet ut vivas, non vivere ut edas* (p. 204; “You should eat in order to live, not live in order to eat”) Kitchell pairs “Eat to live, and not live to eat,” from Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. In other cases the connection between the ancient and modern sayings is looser, as when Kitchell pairs Seneca’s *Minus habeo quam speravi: sed fortasse plus speravi quam debui* (p. 200; “I have less than I hoped, but perhaps I hoped for more than I deserved”) with Mahatma Gandhi’s “The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need but not for every man’s greed.”

The various phrases are grouped thematically, with a final catch-all category of “proverbs and sayings,” clichés in English that have no obvious source, such as “dirt cheap” (p. 251, paired with *Itaque illo tempore annona pro luto erat*, “at that time you could get grain for mud,” from Petronius). There is a brief and sensible appendix on the pronunciation of Greek, though nothing about Latin pronunciation. A second appendix identifies all the ancient authors quoted or mentioned in the text, from archaic Greek through late antiquity, plus the *Suda* and Erasmus. For each one Kitchell gives dates, a couple

of sentences of description, a list of titles of works cited in the text, and an “L” or “G” to say whether the person wrote in Latin or in Greek. The book ends with an index by authors, ancient and modern, and here the modern authors are briefly identified.

Kitchell observes that “a collection of quotations such as this offers a candid look at the values of a society” (xvii), showing off the biases and limitations implicit in anyone’s popular culture. He recommends that readers think about what these quotes say about the values of the societies that produced them. He also talks about the difficulty of finding the actual origin of some common sayings: any witty line is apt to be attributed to a famous person, rightly or wrongly, and Kitchell has tried hard to find correct attributions.

Elsewhere in the introduction (xx), Kitchell says that “due to the need for economy of space” verse texts (in any language) are run together, with a slash at line breaks. In fact, there’s a lot of white space in the text, as each thematic section begins on a new page and the print is quite large; it would surely have been possible to set the verse as verse. Moreover, slashes aren’t even always used, as in *Citharoedus ridetur chorda qui semper oberrat eadem* (p. 64, “A lyre player who always makes a mistake on the same string is laughed at,” Horace *Ars P.* 355–356), in which *citharoedus* is last word of line 355. Aside from this design decision, the book is well done; I noted a couple of typos in the Greek but no significant errors.

I found many of my own favorite lines in here, from Solon, Ovid, Shakespeare, and many others. It was particularly gratifying to see a line from Sappho’s “Brothers” poem, discovered only in 2014 (248). Most of the modern parallels are cited in English, but there are bits of Spanish, Italian, and German as well. Of course, part of the fun is adding to the list, noting other similar phrases that aren’t already in the text: this is a book to write in, not just to read.

The book is a gold mine for any teacher who uses a “phrase of the day” with language, literature, or history classes. With its translations, explanations, and modern parallels, it’s also accessible to non-specialists, or not-yet-specialists.

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