

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Cambridge Companion to Seneca*. Edited by SHADI BARTSCH AND ALESSANDRO SCHIESARO. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 361. Paper, \$32.99. ISBN 978-1-107-69421-7.

Seneca himself has taught us about the close affinity between buildings and virtue.<sup>1</sup> The title of the first essay in Bartsch and Schiesaro's *Cambridge Companion to Seneca* thus puts us on guard: Braund's "Seneca *Multiplex*" would seem to presage a locale for shopping malls, movie theaters, and other temples to capitalist enterprise. Companion-books, like the 3-D blockbuster summer movies populating the cineplexes, are often considered easily-digestible, eminently-sellable ventures. Thankfully, Bartsch and Schiesaro's installment in the Cambridge Companion franchise is not a series of CGI-powered explosions and monsters, but an exploration into a complex man who sought to cut beyond mere appearances.

The volume presents twenty-three new essays, subdivided into four sections: (1) "The Senecan Corpus" provides an introduction to each of the many genres of Seneca's catalogue; (2) "Texts and Contexts" broadens the scope to the historical, literary, and philosophical *milieux* of Seneca's work; (3) "Senecan Tensions" explores some of the most prevalent criticisms of Seneca: ambivalence, duplicity, and incoherence; and (4) "The Senecan Tradition" rounds out the volume with a diachronic treatment of Seneca's *nachleben*. I will here forego a summary of each essay, as Bartsch and Schiesaro ably do so in their introduction.<sup>2</sup> The book is laudable for its even treatment of all aspects and genres of such a multifaceted figure.

The collection, written by a veritable who's who in Senecan studies, is brisk: with 317 pages for twenty-three essays, most submissions clock in at under a dozen pages. The contributors for Section 1, in particular, do a fine job not only

<sup>1</sup> *Epistulae Morales* 12, 55, 86, 96, and John Henderson's *Morals and Villas in Seneca's Letters*, CUP 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The first 10 pages of the 12-page Introduction is available at the CUP website as a "Marketing Excerpt": [http://assets.cambridge.org/97811070/35058/excerpt/9781107035058\\_excerpt.pdf](http://assets.cambridge.org/97811070/35058/excerpt/9781107035058_excerpt.pdf)

of introducing their allotted genre and the current state of scholarship in that area, but also of forwarding their own new observations, to boot—a sizeable task for a dozen pages. Standouts are Christopher Trinacty on tragedy, Catharine Edwards on the letters, and Kirk Freudenburg’s laugh-out-loud funny take on—what other than—the *Apocolocyntosis*. All of the essays in the collection are up-to-date on scholarship, and many are theoretically-informed, if not explicitly. Rather, many of these essays could be fruitfully paired in the classroom with the theoretical texts from which they draw in order to illustrate the utility and stakes of literary theory to students new to it. To wit, each essay concludes with suggestions for “Further Reading,” sensitively selected for those without facility in Latin or various modern languages.

Indeed, accessibility is one of this volume’s best attributes. All Latin is translated.<sup>3</sup> Virtually no previous knowledge of Seneca, his works, or their scholarly treatment is assumed. As such this book is ideal for advanced undergraduates or graduate students new to Seneca. In combination with Oxford’s “greatest hits” collection, *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Seneca* (with whom it shares contributors), this volume will provide a good foundation in scholarly work on Seneca. The essays in Bartsch and Schiesaro may be read independently of one another, though the relevant chapter from Section 1 would seem requisite for the later chapters on a particular genre or text.

The book’s greatest virtue is that it seeks, as do many in this most recent wave of Senecan studies,<sup>4</sup> to understand Seneca on his own terms, rather than in negative comparison to his predecessors, e.g. Greek tragedy, Cicero, Lucretius. The new *imago* of Seneca that emerges is not of one who attempts to emulate others and fails (though Seneca’s own rhetoric is designed to encourage this misreading), but rather of one who is aware of precedent and chooses nonetheless to do his own thing. The final section of the book, on the reception of Seneca, nicely points up his influence on the western literary and philosophical traditions, and puts our modern, tarnished, “Silver” Seneca in proper context. It is important reading for those approaching Seneca in today’s environment.

A difficulty of this book reflects one in the Senecan corpus itself. Seneca *multiplex*, or perhaps merely *duplex*, has been the oft-repeated chorus of Senecan

<sup>3</sup> In many of the essays the original Latin is not printed. Specialists may quibble with this decision, but decent texts of Seneca are found easily enough.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. *Seneca and the Self*, ed. Schadi Bartsch and David Wray; *Reading Seneca* by Brad Inwood; *The Deaths of Seneca* by James Ker. University of Chicago Press’ series of new translations of Seneca’s works also contributes to this revival in Senecan studies.

studies, and this despite Seneca's own desires to "play one role in life" (as Trinacty 37 nicely puts it). Some essays in the volume reinforce these traditional dichotomies (*proficiens/sapiens*, actual/ideal, past/present, political/philosophical, *tragicus/philosophus*). David Wray's contribution, however, with his emphasis on *pudor* as a developing "semivirtue" (which he credits to Miles Burnyeat) nicely regards the Senecan self as one explicitly in development, thereby unifying many of the above dichotomies. Bartsch's "Senecan Selves," while pushing on the faultlines in Senecan selfhood, similarly locates the self in the very inconcinnity between the selves. Indeed, multiplicity seems fitting for a philosopher whose entire corpus was to some extent dialogic (if not, as Matthew Roller's essay observes, in the full Bakhtinian sense): the *Apocolocyntosis*, tragedies, *dialogi*, *de Beneficiis*, *Naturales Quaestiones*, and letters all embroil another in dialogue. Perhaps, then, Senecan dialogism is a recognition that philosophy happens best not in an empty room that echoes the sound of one's own voice, but in the authentic and sometimes messy interactions of real friends and real life.

It is commonplace in reviews of collections to bemoan that there is not better engagement among the contributions, and indeed, while the authors and editors have ensured that chapters are cross-referenced (and there are threads on theatricality and metaphor that run through the book), there are missed opportunities to discuss the (sometimes discordant) viewpoints on, for example, the philosophical "view from above," the use of second vs. third person references, and the scholarship of Justus Lipsius. Nonetheless, it seems overmuch to demand such repeated and significant revision from contributors to a collection (particularly one that does not originate in a conference). Do we somehow expect the denizens of Seneca *multiplex* to lunch together in the food court on a daily basis to confab about their respective domains? Perhaps that task is left to us readers, who ought to sample from the many different kiosks and tuck into this Senecan *satura*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A final note about the production of the book: the text is not without typographical inconsistencies and errors, but they are so few as to be unproblematic. One error, however, should be corrected for future printings: Harry Hine's entry in the bibliography has stripped him of his surname.