

**Damschen, G., Heil, A. (with the assistance of Mario Waida) (eds.)**

*Brill's Companion to Seneca, Philosopher and Dramatist.* Leiden/Boston 2014. xii, 883 pp. Pr. €162.00 (hb.). ISBN 9789004154612.

In the surge of companions to classical authors or genres we witness in our time, a companion to Seneca and the whole range of his works was still missing. Brill's (sub)series *Brill's Companions in Classical Studies* has been running since 2001, with volumes on e.g. Ovid (2001), Herodotus (2002), Cicero (2002), pastoral (2006), Propertius (2006), Thucydides (2006), Hellenistic epigram (2007), Apollonius Rhodius (2008), Hesiod (2009), Silius Italicus (2009), Greek comedy (2010), Callimachus (2011), Lucan (2011), Sophocles (2012), and Horace (2012), to mention the most important names. Now, an impressive volume dedicated to Seneca has been added in the series.

With its breathtaking 883 pages the book obviously intends to be more than a mere introduction to the life and works of Seneca. The editors' high ambitions are made explicit right from the start: their aim is to give "a well-ordered and concise presentation which places the philosophical works and the tragedies on equal footing and deals with them accordingly", and secondly "to create a valuable standard work for the purposes of international Seneca research" (p. xi). Fifty-five essays of unequal length, ranging between one and almost fifty pages, are grouped in six main parts entitled "Life and legacy", "Philosophy", "Tragedy", "*Apocolocyntosis*", "Other works" and "Synthesis". Among the contributors are many renowned scholars. I hesitate to name one or two examples, so as not to do injustice to anyone in particular, but an exception may be made for Michael von Albrecht, who is mentioned with honor by the editors as "our teacher" and who has contributed an extensive essay on Seneca's style (699-744).<sup>1</sup>

The volume follows a clear order, starting from elementary matters, such as a general introduction by Thomas Habinek (3-31), who deals with "Seneca's life and career". Unspectacular as this may sound, the author has brought real life into this traditional subject matter by zooming in on some topics with social dimensions, such as "writing", "gender", "slavery", and "wealth and economic transformation". Part I ends on two wider reaching essays on Seneca the philosopher, and Seneca the dramatist.

The same basic divide between elementary, informative essays on the one hand, and more analytical approaches on the other hand, has been adopted in parts II and III. As to the former class of contributions, every philosophical

<sup>1</sup> A full table of contents may easily be found at <http://www.brill.com/brills-companion-seneca> or with the usual internet tools.

work (II) and every tragedy (III) by Seneca has been given a separate, mostly brief chapter, which presents the current state of knowledge. This is extremely useful both for students of Seneca who wish to have a convenient overview of current research as an introduction to their reading of any Senecan work, and for scholars looking for points of departure for further study. As a rule, such chapters have been clearly arranged with helpful subtitles. An average chapter on any single work will have the following: “date”, “content”, “topics”, “language and style”, “sources”, and “reception”. This is, however, not a fixed format rigidly applied to every work alike, and small differences between chapters occur, partly dependent on the subject in question and the personal style of the writing scholar.

Small variations do not pose a problem, of course, but in some cases a really different structure has been followed. Notably the chapters on the *Epistulae morales*, the *Naturales quaestiones*, the tragedy commonly known as *Troades*, and the tragedies *Medea* and *Agamemnon* stand out from the rest: here no clear subdivisions have been made at all, and in some cases the text is considerably longer than the rest. This breaks the continuity and coherence of the volume as a whole. Again, one may feel inclined to accept exceptions for such large corpuses as the *Letters*, but on what account does the *Troades* earn 13 pages, while the *Phaedra* gets only 7,5?<sup>2</sup>

After the basic, informative essays, both parts II and III continue with more analytical essays which zoom in on thematic issues and which will satisfy readers who prefer a more academic, theoretical approach. In the case of philosophy this results in papers on topics such as “ontology and epistemology”, “free will and emotion”, “death and time”, “theology”. In the case of tragedy, the topics are of a rather more literary nature, such as “space and time in Senecan drama”, “vision, sound, and silence in ‘the drama of the word’”, “Greek and Roman elements”, and “philosophical tragedy?”<sup>3</sup>

Parts IV and V form a relatively small part of the book (pp. 671-696) and seem to have been given rather much weight in the structure of the volume. It would perhaps have made more sense to put them together as a single, short appendix on “*opera minora*”. Having said this, I did like the paper on the epi-

2 The author of the *Troades* essay, Wilfried Stroh, goes so far as to entitle his essay *Troas*, in line with his own defense of this title of the Senecan tragedy in a paper from 1994. This seems a little self-indulgent in what is presented as a companion volume. To the reviewer’s taste, a brief discussion of the title issue within the essay itself might have been a more sensible approach.

3 The examples given here are meant as an indication of the companion’s general contents, and do not constitute an exhaustive list.

grams, which convincingly pleads for the authenticity of at least ten of some seventy epigrams ascribed to Seneca.

The concluding part VI however, is very well placed. In two large essays, one on Seneca's style, and one on "systematic connections between Seneca's philosophical works and tragedies", the traditional gap between the two main parts of his oeuvre is effectively bridged, while both comprehensive pieces also unite the volume as a whole, highlighting the elements that are typical for all of Seneca's work. The style chapter (by Michael von Albrecht) does not merely present 'handbook' labels of rhetorical figures and stylistic devices, but has interesting sections on e.g. "short sentences: an anti-Cicero?", "Greek (...)", "between archaism and everyday speech", "emotional means of persuasion", and "self-address".<sup>4</sup> The concluding chapter (by Susanna E. Fischer) has sections on "Seneca and poetry", "Seneca's ideal of good kingship", "Passions and fighting the passions", "God, Gods, Providence, Fortune, and Fate", themes which are eminently suitable to describe what seem truly unifying elements in Seneca's oeuvre.

All in all, the volume appears to fulfill its stated aims, while offering much material for several groups of users alike. It contains both informative introductions and deeper analysis. Always starting from philological data, it consistently reaches out into rather more theoretical approaches. Brief, it combines the two main Senecan threads of philosophy and tragedy. The volume is an impressive achievement and seems indispensable for any serious institutional library of classics.<sup>5</sup>

*Vincent Hunink*

Radboud University Nijmegen

*v.hunink@let.ru.nl*

---

4 In the section "Seneca's ideas on language and style" (pp. 741-744) I would have liked some further remarks on *Epist.* 114, where Seneca's heavy criticism of Maecenas is mainly carried out by a heavy attack on his particular style, which shows that for Romans like Seneca, style was more than merely a matter of literary taste and personal choice.

5 Another Seneca companion has been announced by Cambridge University Press for 2015, with many famous names appearing on the list of contributors. At least there will be no shortage of suitable material on Seneca in the years to come.