Eric Dodson-Robinson, ed.

Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy: Scholarly, Theatrical and Literary Receptions. Brill's Companions to Classical Reception, volume 5. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Pp. 330. Hb, \$163.

As a theater historian and not a Latinist, I have considered Eric Dodson-Robinson's interdisciplinary volume primarily in terms of its usefulness to scholars whose interests lie in understanding and appreciating more fully Seneca's many and varied appearances on stages not his own. Dodson-Robinson has provided a very useful and enlightening resource that successfully educates the non-specialist to the range of issues emerging from Seneca's tragedies and invites specialists to consider in greater detail the scholarly, theatrical, and literary receptions of these very influential Roman tragedies. Like Caesar's Gaul, the Companion is divided into three parts: "Antiquity," "Renaissance and Early Modern," and "Seneca in the Modern Age and Beyond."

After a very compelling introduction in which the editor "suggest[s] how Senecan tragedy can fruitfully complicate reception studies in general, and then briefly account[s] for why the tragedies and their receptions remain vital to broad audiences today," (1) three essays consider the reception of Seneca in the antique world. Christopher Tinacty's "*Imago res mortua est*: Senecan Intertextuality" deals with the philosophical, rhetorical, cultural, and aesthetic conversations taking place within and around the tragedies in which "Seneca shows himself to be intensely concerned with his poetry's ability to establish a dialogue with his precursors and offer metapoetic commentary on the innovative nature of his tragic poetics" (31). In "Seneca *Tragicus* and Stoicism," Christopher Star further complicates the already complex relationship between Seneca's philosophy and his tragedies, exploring how the plays "contradict, or at least challenge, Stoic theory," and demonstrate "the difficulties inherent in living a moral life in the world" (53). Ending the section on antiquity, Peter J. Davis's "Senecan Tragedy and the Politics of Flavian Literature" discusses the politics in "Statius' *Thebaid*, Valerius's *Argonautica*, and the anonymous *Octavia*" (57), arguing that "Seneca's tragic vision is an essential constituent of key works of the Flavian era" (72).

As one would expect, given the received wisdom regarding Seneca's influence on Renaissance and early modern dramaturgy, the book's second part contains the greatest number of essays and will be of particular interest to scholars working in dramatic literature and theater history. Gianni Guastella begins the section with "Seneca Rediscovered: Recovery of Texts, Redefinition of a Genre," reminding us that the career of Senecan texts—their availability and their interpretation—set the stage for their becoming "the paradigmatic

model of classical tragedy for European culture" (96). The subsequent essays consider the myriad ways in which these significant Senecan texts were appropriated by various cultural traditions. Tomás Martínez Romero discusses the reception of Seneca in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Aragon and Castile, while Florence de Caigny provides a very enlightening analysis of the shifts in the tragedies' influence in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. In "Germany and the Netherlands: Tragic Seneca in Scholarship and on Stage," Joachim Harst begins with a discussion of Senecan theatricality and considers its effects on, among other things, baroque rhetoric and religiosity. Harst's references to the work of Jesuits (e.g., Martin Delrio and Jakob Bidermann) and Jesuit-educated scholars (e.g., the neo-Stoic Justus Lipsius) may be of particular interest to readers of this journal. The section closes with two excellent treatments of Seneca in early modern England: Jessica Winston's "Early 'English Seneca': From 'Coterie' Translations to the Popular Stage" and Patrick Gray's "Shakespeare vs. Seneca: Competing Visions of Human Dignity." Winston observes that "while Jesuit colleges and universities on the continent used Seneca's plays as dramatic models, schools in England did not develop a similar system" (177); hence, translations and adaptations were the most significant modes of engaging Seneca's work, proving formative for playwrights who were "developing new kinds of dramatic stories" within an increasingly competitive theatrical environment (198). In considering Seneca's relationship to Shakespeare, Gray argues the compelling case that the playwrights differ in their conceptions of human dignity: "Shakespeare's Christian sensibility leads him to undermine and overturn Seneca's more typically classical sense of human grandeur" (203).

In the stimulating article that begins the third part of the volume, Helen Stanley explores the persistence of Senecan tragedy in elements of popular Gothic melodrama flourishing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (233). Francesco Citti's "Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Receptions of Seneca *Tragicus*" charts the shifting attitudes toward Seneca by the likes of Friedrich Schiller, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Heinrich von Kleist, and Miguel de Unamuno, among others., ending with the significant rehabilitation of his legacy by T. S. Eliot and Antonin Artaud. In "Seneca Our Contemporary: The Modern Theatrical Reception of Senecan Tragedy," Ralf Remshardt considers "the Senecan values...that communicate themselves most readily to current audiences, and [those] forms of *mise en scène* directors use to explore them" (282). Not surprisingly, Remshardt concludes that Seneca "is a perennial contemporary and that his drama is like a cracked mirror in which almost any unsettled age finds its reflection" (300). Siobhán McElduff's essay, "Rereading Seneca: The Twenty-First Century and Beyond,"

closes the volume by affirming that “our complex entertainment environment offers new ways to read and respond to Senecan drama” (304). Her challenges for “intervening in the future of Senecan reception” are a fitting close to a collection that attests to the continuing relevance of the author and the form (320).

Wide-ranging and thorough, *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy* is a very fine collection that will prove useful to both specialists and generalists. There are, however, some weaknesses regarding translation that call for comment, particularly given the book's hefty price tag. Martínez Romero's essay is clearly learned, yet the translation into English can be confusing and sometimes even opaque. For example, might the “crowns” of Aragon and Castile have been more smoothly rendered as “kingdoms”? And might not the following sentence have been revised for English clarity: “The reception of Seneca's works among the Spanish readership, and more particularly among writers, has a number of points in common with what happened in the Catalan-Aragonese Crown, but also has its own distinctive features”? A similar state of affairs presents itself in the translation of Caigny's essay. “Black,” for example, is confusing and/or misleading in the following instances: “Certain characters remain dominated by their pathos, whose blackness is often reinforced as in the cases of Phaedra...” (144); “While Phaedra plays a black role in Pradon's piece, Gilbert and Racine transfer her corruption to the nurse” (144). Clearly, the author means to underscore the sinister; rendering this thought by “black” or “blackness” seems infelicitous at best. These minimal critiques aside, the volume will certainly serve readers interested in Roman tragedy, dramatic literature, theater history, and even media/communication studies.

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