

## Zitierhinweis

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imaginative reflection on what the material structure of the book may tell us about reading practices and expectations of readers in the Early Modern Period. The book is very easy to use and consult. All in all, I would call it a real triumph.

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A.J. BOYLE, *Seneca: Agamemnon*. Edited with introduction, translation, and commentary, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, 752 pp., \$155.00, ISBN 978-0-19-881082-7.

With this magisterial *Agamemnon*, Anthony Boyle comes close to completing a full set of commentaries on Senecan tragedy (only the *Hercules Furens* remains). In the mode of his previous OUP productions, this is a sprawling work that runs to more than 700 pages and represents the better part of 40 (or more!) years spent thinking about the dark dynamics of Senecan drama, its rhetoric, its violence, and its recursive visions of the past. The treatment is nothing if not thorough, and Boyle has performed a significant service to the discipline in raising the profile of this oft-neglected play. There is much of value in this volume. But it can also be overwhelming at times, which is why, in the interests of clarity, this review follows the book's own division into three main sections: introduction; text and translation; and commentary.

The book boasts a hefty introduction that includes historical and contextual information on Seneca and Roman theatre, discussion of Seneca's dramatic style, overviews of the myth, the play, and its reception, treatment of the play's various metres and some brief remarks about the translation. Boyle is particularly adept at situating Seneca's work within the rich tradition of Roman drama, and his overview of the play is as thrilling as it is insightful. His analysis of the *Agamemnon*'s content and structure stresses Seneca's innovation by drawing productive comparisons with earlier, especially tragic, Greco-Roman literature. Coverage of the *Agamemnon*'s main themes – repetition of the past; family relationships; anger and revenge; spectacle; similarities to Seneca's *Thyestes* – is perceptive and powerful, though not always persuasive (this reviewer was not convinced by the arguments about spectacle/theatricalization in particular). After many years of engagement with Seneca, Boyle has, consciously or not, adopted some elements of the playwright's style: sentences are clipped, the rhetoric punchy. His enthusiasm for the play is apparent throughout, and this, as much as his scholarship, works to inspire the reader's respect for Seneca qua dramatist.

The downside, though, is that a lot of Boyle's introductory material is familiar from his earlier OUP commentaries. The author himself admits that seven of the introduction's ten segments "are updated, recalibrated, and sometimes partial

versions of the similarly numbered sections in earlier Introductions” (p. x). This overstates the extent of his editorial interventions, most of which are very minor. Sections I-II (‘Seneca and Rome’ and ‘Roman Theatre’) reproduce almost verbatim the information printed in his commentaries on *Oedipus* (2011); *Medea* (2014); and *Thyestes* (2017), with only the most marginal of adjustments made to accommodate new scholarship. Section V reproduces the long list of propositions from Seneca’s *de Ira* that is also found in Boyle’s *Thyestes* (2017). Some of this repetition is to be expected: it is the unfortunate outcome of many serialised publications, where each instalment needs to provide the same or similar contextual information. It seems all the more inevitable when we consider that most readers will consult one, not all, of the commentaries, and that their appeal to scholars outside as well as inside Classics necessitates repeated, thorough treatment of the plays’ historical and literary context. Still, the recycling rankles: surely there is a better way for authors and publishers to communicate such essential information?

Following the introduction, Boyle’s text and translation continue to spark the reader’s enthusiasm for the play. Translation is powerful and sure-footed; Boyle works hard to capture the terseness of Seneca’s verse, which is no mean feat given the English language’s native verbosity. His rendition of Eurybates’ massive messenger speech, for example, is a *tour de force*, enthralling in its imagery and prolonged crescendo. As much as possible, Boyle preserves enjambment and reproduces Senecan vocabulary, sometimes adding clever touches of his own (e.g. his translating *caeco mari* at Ag. 542 as ‘blind-dark sea’, an obvious Homeric echo that suits, by acknowledging, Seneca’s grim recapitulation of the *nostoi*). English diction is contemporary, except in the case of hymns and prayers, where Boyle employs archaic forms. While understandable, this decision feels slightly misplaced, as though it pertained to classical Athenian tragedy, where diction really does change in the chorus, rather than to Seneca, where it doesn’t.

As in his previous Senecan commentaries, Boyle translates the play text in verse, rendering the *Agamemnon*’s iambic trimeters into ten-syllable English iambics, and composing lines of six to nine syllables for the anapests and of varying syllabic length for the choral odes and *cantica*. The effect is generally successful; Boyle’s verse is pleasant to both ear and eye. His principles of anapestic colometry are sound, as is his cautioning against Fitch’s excessively rigid treatment of anapests in the Loeb editions. Overall, Boyle’s metrical arrangement of the text has much in common with that of Tarrant’s 1976 commentary on the *Agamemnon*, and Zwierlein’s 1986 OCT; there is very little change here, but there is also no need for it.

In his handling of the text, moreover, Boyle deserves praise for adopting a position of minimal intervention and preserving manuscript readings as far as possible. He appends at the end of his text/translation a selective critical apparatus and a separate list of departures from Zwierlein’s OCT. His choices are sensible, on the whole, but could sometimes be supported by clearer analysis of Latin, or Senecan, usage. For instance: in lines 33-4, Boyle keeps the MSS reading, *fert*

*uterum gravem / me patre dignum*, in preference to Zwierlein's *utero gravi* and Tarrant's (unimplemented) suggestion of *utero genus*. Both emendations operate on the assumption that *dignum* should denote Aegisthus rather than Pelopia's womb per se; Seneca seems to slip from talking about the girl's belly to talking about its contents. Boyle's decision not to alter the received text seems sound, and he defends it well in terms of *dignum*'s thematic significance. But it would be helpful if this discussion were accompanied by some references to parallel phrases (do they exist?) or other, similar examples of conceptual slippage in Seneca. For, as it stands, Boyle's third claim that the womb is worthy because of its offspring (see p. 122), merely repeats the problem acknowledged by Tarrant, Zwierlein et al, without resolving it.

Finally, we come to the commentary, which occupies the bulk of the volume and contains a lot of excellent material. This is where Boyle's synoptic knowledge of Senecan tragedy really comes into its own, facilitating insightful remarks about, e.g., Seneca's structuring of scenes in the *Agamemnon* in comparison to his other plays; the *Agamemnon*'s dramaturgy and where/how Seneca signals stage action; the play's ending in *antilabe*, which is combative, resistant to closure, and unique within the Senecan corpus; and the composition of the *Agamemnon*'s two choruses, whose gender and number may be Senecan innovations and are, in any case, substantially different from their Aeschylean model. Boyle is ever ready to propose positive interpretations of long-standing scholarly issues and/or perceived problems with the play's composition. Hence: he regards Clytemnestra's change of heart in Act II as deliberate and performed, rather than genuine (and therefore, as is sometimes assumed, indicative of Senecan inconsistency), and he reasons that Act V's choppy, episodic quality is not a failure of Senecan dramaturgy but reflective of the chaos attendant upon a monarch's death.

Equally fruitful are the connections Boyle draws with Renaissance and Early Modern drama, in which he is well versed. Discussion of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in the introduction and throughout the commentary, is noteworthy for its depth of insight; this reviewer had not realised – and was excited to learn about – just how much the latter play resembles Seneca's *Agamemnon*. Also useful are the parallels Boyle notes with Seneca's prose works, an approach that encourages a unified view of the Senecan corpus as well as illustrating the play's Stoic elements.

Some entries would, however, have benefitted from more stringent editing, chiefly to avoid repetition (e.g. two consecutive entries on pp. 207-8 contain the same reference to, and make the same point about, *de Ira* 1.1.1), but also to prevent novice readers such as undergraduates from being buried under avalanches of information. For, despite Boyle's stated aim of appealing to "drama students, [and] to Latin students at every stage of the language" (p.ix), this commentary is suited more to established scholars than to those just beginning to navigate Classics' deep waters. A lot of knowledge is assumed, and Boyle provides little in the way of grammatical/syntactical assistance for his undergraduate audience. This is a pity, because if the *Agamemnon* is to be studied more frequently and

productively, it must be taught to and read by undergraduates; grass roots matter for changing dominant scholarly paradigms.

Still, Boyle's commentary is a fine achievement overall. His appreciation of Seneca's dramatic power ensures a continued and welcome flourishing of scholarly interest in Senecan tragedy. For decades now, Boyle has been in the vanguard of a major Senecan revival; much of the progress made in the past forty years of Senecan studies is in some measure due to him. His current commentary on the *Agamemnon* indicates that this is still the case: its appeal is wide, its learning deep, and its zeal infectious. The volume leaves one with a lasting impression of the *Agamemnon*'s value, and of its pervasive influence over later European drama. With such a useful resource to hand, the *Agamemnon*'s stock will, it is hoped, continue to rise for a long time yet.

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LEOFRANC HOLFORD-STREVENS, *Auli Gelli Noctes Atticae: Praefatio et Libri I-X*), Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, 464 pp., £50.00, ISBN 978-0-19-969501-0.

LEOFRANC HOLFORD-STREVENS, *Auli Gelli Noctes Atticae: Libri XI-XX*), Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, 384 pp., £50.00, ISBN 978-0-19-969502-7.

LEOFRANC HOLFORD-STREVENS (ed.), *Gelliana: a Textual Companion to the "Noctes Atticae" of Aulus Gellius*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, xx+204 pp., £65.00, ISBN 978-0-19-969393-1.

Another edition of Aulus Gellius is to be welcome, and this one certainly – to give back the slightly modified words, Holford-Strevens wrote in his *Wiener Studien* review of a commentary on the 9th book of Aulus Gellius in 2006, written by the reviewer<sup>1</sup>. This review takes into account both Holford-Strevens' new critical Oxford edition of the *Noctes Atticae* and the *Gelliana*, a textual companion to this edition, which guide the reader through emendations and annotations made in the edition. Because I owe Holford-Strevens so much for his advice during my own Ph.D work, this review can of course not remain neutral, but tries however to be as detached as it can.

<sup>1</sup> This review was written during a research project thankfully granted by Gerda Henkel Stiftung (project: Die gromatischen Traktate des Iulius Frontinus – Wissenstransfer im Spannungsbogen von Vermessungstechnik und Recht im Römischen Reich, at Freie Universität Berlin, Department of Law, (Prof. Dr. Cosima Möller).