as Calder has forcefully argued (art. cit., 189)? In a word, what was Seneca's purpose in writing the tragedy? D.'s rejection of the philosophical interpretation of the character Thyestes might lead one to expect more emphasis on these political questions, but he does not take an unambiguous position.

This surprises a little, since the final chapter ('Reception', pp. 81–133) documents how the drama's political themes in particular captured the imagination of later writers, from *Octavia* and Statius' *Thebaid* to European Renaissance drama and beyond. D. reviews both familiar texts (Kyd, Shakespeare, Marston, Jonson) and introduces lesser known reworkings: an outrageous parody by one John Wright (1647), domestic dramas by Crowne (1681) and Crébillon (1707), the political myth again in adaptations by Voltaire (1770) and the Belgian dramatist Hugo Claus (1966). With this most recent rewriting, aimed at 'a generation which had direct experience of maniacal and sadistic tyranny, and lived constantly with the threat of nuclear war' (p. 130), we have come full circle. Together with the cognate second chapter, this overview demonstrates the continuing vitality of the drama and should encourage students of the classical tradition to turn to the original. All in all, D.'s volume is a welcome addition to a valuable series.

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SAINT SENECA

P. VEYNE: *Seneca. The Life of a Stoic*. Translated by D. Sullivan. Pp. xii + 191. New York and London: Routledge, 2003 (originally published as the introduction to *Sénèque: Entretiens, Lettres à Lucilius*, 1993). Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-415-91125-7.

Paul Veyne's preface to Seneca *philosophus* is aimed principally at cultured nonspecialists, in the great French tradition of *haute vulgarisation*. Still, classicists with literary, historical, and especially philosophical interest in Seneca will find ample matter here for reflection, fulmination, and pleasure. But let it be said at once: if you read French with ease, pass over this well enough translated but hastily produced volume (*crimine ab uno*: the first chapter's title, on p. 1, contains a wrong date—for '65 C. E.' read '63 C. E.'). Acquire instead, at a slightly lower price, the handsome 1,312-page paperback French original, now in its fourth reprinting from Robert Laffont in the marvelously successful *Bouquins* series. V.'s preface there accompanies translations of all the extant philosophical prose texts of Seneca save the *NQ*. V. has briefly introduced each separate work, lightly revised the Budé translations, and added useful, interesting notes throughout. The *bouquin* paints a vastly more impressive picture of V.'s engagement with ancient evidence and modern scholarship on Seneca and Stoicism than the book under review, from which even V.'s excellent critical bibliography, with work in English well represented, has unaccountably been excised. Hard not to lament the missed opportunity in all this. Had Routledge engaged an anglophone Senecan scholar to collaborate with the translator (a dozen eligible names spring to mind)—to supply the common English translations of philosophical technical terms, perhaps to add some explanatory comments and further references to V.'s footnotes, and at least to give citations for

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all the unreferenced (!) quotations of Seneca in V.'s text—the present volume's usefulness to its envisaged readership could have been increased very substantially at little cost.

On to happier themes. Once we establish, as V.'s preface quickly does, that the philosophy professed by Seneca is at least unconnected with, and at most diametrically opposed to, the resigned long-suffering and stringent moralism long associated vernacularly with the word 'stoic', two questions arise. First, what is a present-day thinking person to make of the seemingly odd things ancient Stoics actually said about how to live? And secondly, in what measure can said thinking person really take Seneca—a philosopher, perhaps, but also a privy counsellor, and a rich investment banker to boot—as authentically representative of Stoic ethics? V.'s arresting answer to this familiar pair of questions is spun of two paradoxically disparate strands. These he develops together over the course of the book's three chapters: a long, allusive, narratively gripping, and more dialectic than systematic exposition of Seneca's thought (Chapter 2), sandwiched between two short chapters on his life up to his 'final disillusion' and on his 'final witness' and death. This third and final chapter includes a provocative reinterpretation of *Letter* 73, often taken for an estranged courtier's last-ditch effort at abject flattery, as a courageous insistence on 'philosophy's right to exist' and refusal to accept 'the ideological monopoly toward which Neronism tended' (p. 161).

The first strand in V.'s answer has him ultimately debunking Stoic 'happiness' as an 'empty fortress' and seizing every opportunity along the way to liken its grand promises, with delicious if predictable Voltairean irony, to the castles built in Spain by certain more familiar modern utopian schemes: Marxism, especially as pursued by European intellectuals during the cold war; Catholicism, especially in its more Augustinian and authoritarian strains; and even Freudianism: 'Stoicism incites a passion for Stoicism just as psychoanalysis, even if it fails to cure the patient, at least procures a new passion, that for psychoanalysis' (p. 116). The second strand, harder to characterize, is wondrously unexpected. It begins with the acknowledgement of something in Stoic ethics 'so attractive that one wishes to believe it' (p. ix) and continues in a series of momentary suspensions of disbelief in the possibility of genuine self-transformation through lifelong work on oneself and pursuit of the 'art of living' that ancient philosophy took itself to be. Here V.'s thinking is deeply indebted, and acknowledged as such, to the work of Pierre Hadot on ancient 'spiritual exercises', and more deeply still to his mentor and lifelong friend Michel Foucault.

V.'s impeccably poised writing owes much of its compelling urgency to the fact that his central questions about Seneca—what is the relation of an *ars vitae* to conventional morality? What can the pursuit of life as art (in the ancient sense) eventually realize over the course of a human life?—are precisely his deepest questions about the life and work of Foucault. The shortest route to situating this book in its own contemporary intellectual context is to read V.'s essay 'The Final Foucault and His Ethics', in A. I. Davidson (ed.), *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago and London, 1997), pp. 225–33. V. there recalls the late Foucault's almost naive admiration for the 'superb' letters of Seneca, his courage in the face of approaching death, and his continued insistence on the possibility of making meaning and beauty. All those richly affective memories of a teacher and friend subtly find their counterpart in V.'s account of Seneca's life and thought. For all its apnoea-inducing fast and loose moments, there is a strangely elevated (and more strangely bearable) tone of tragedy and even heroism in this brief intellectual biography of a thinker whose central importance is now

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coming back into focus for the first time since the seventeenth century. It will fire the imaginations of students, and with due cautions it should be put into their hands.

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A SELF-MARGINALIZING GENIUS

J. HENDERSON: *Morals and Villas in Seneca's* Letters. *Places to Dwell.* Pp. x + 189. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Cased, £45, US$65. ISBN: 0-521-82944-5

Since scholarship on the *Epistulae morales* has mostly grappled with preliminary questions (reality, unity, etc.), it is refreshing to open a book that takes the text's 'epistoliterary' qualities as a given. Seneca is now a stopover in John Henderson's first-century itinerary, which most recently gave us *Pliny's Statue* (Exeter, 2003). As H. notes, Seneca has taken on different flavors in scholarship in English, French, Italian, and German (he might have added Spanish). But his Seneca is in another language again: his distinctive style of scholarly writing is used here to expose an unfamiliar philosopher. The book will give readers a new sense of what Pliny the Elder meant when he referred to Seneca as *princeps eruditorum* while discussing, yes, vine-growing (*HN* 14.51).

The book meditates upon just three letters, each a 'mimetic parable' describing a visit to a villa: Seneca's own crumbling house just outside of Rome, an image of his own old age (*Ep.* 12), the villa near Cumae that belonged to Servilius Vatia, a refugee from Rome in the time of Tiberius (*Ep.* 55), and the ruin at Liternum where Scipio Africanus Maior lived out his exile (*Ep.* 86). The early chapters present Letter 12 ('SENECA'S') amid a whistle-stop tour of the whole correspondence. The rest of the book presents aspects of Letters 55 and 86 that distinguish their respective villas ('VATIA'S', 'SCIPIO'S'), and the polysemy which Seneca reads into them. To aid the reader in a heavily cross-referential text, H. presents full Latin texts of the focus letters early on, together with his own translations. The book is rounded off with indices and appendices, one of which catalogs all the places and persons named in the *Epistulae*.

Readers familiar with H.'s work will not be surprised to find that many of the book's insights are drawn from naming. H. documents a tendency toward omission of names or lack of external reference (a form of 'sensory-deprivation therapy', p. 6, which puts the reader '*very* alone with Seneca, with the texts of philosophy', p. 44, and ensures maximum impact for the highly descriptive villa-letters). At the same time, names, when used, come in patterns. An example of both tendencies comes at *Ep.* 11.10, where H. reads the tricolon of exemplary figures, Cato + Laelius + whomever you please, as prefiguring (of course) Scipio (pp. 17–18). H. also plays up metaphor: Letter 2's comparison of reading to travel, digestion, and transplantation already defines the terms through which spatial, corporeal, and horticultural symbols in the villa-letters will need to be read. Indeed, metaphor itself is scrutinized as a vehicle of cultural transmission. There is also a political backdrop, though the 'nightmare' is suppressed together with all mention of Nero's name and virtually all mention of Rome itself—which is partly what motivates the search for the villa-haven. At the same time, H. shows, readers of Seneca's text (Lucilius or 'Luciliuses') are actively involved in the creation of meaning, not only parsing the onomastic, metaphorical, and political codes, but also complicit in the text's inculcation of ways of reading. H. himself as a

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