

historical figure, by moving him from the margins to the centre of the canon, is his potential for disrupting our view of ancient culture lost?

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doi:10.1017/S0075435823000163

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GIULIO CELOTTO, *AMOR BELLI: LOVE AND STRIFE IN LUCAN'S BELLUM CIVILE*.
 Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. Pp. 242. ISBN 9780472132874. \$75.00.

Has the pendulum swung too far, dear reader? Have we all gone Derrida [on Lucan]? Celotto certainly thinks so, and in his Florida PhD thesis book poses a challenge to the prevalent (at least in my post-code area) deconstructionist interpretation of Lucan's civil war epic which reads the poem as characterised by confusion, fragmentation and irrationality, dissolving the epic genre and disregarding conventional norms. C. is aware that many are quite comfortable with this position and see no need for change. O'Hara nails it: 'the case for Lucan being fractured is looking pretty good, and attempts to put him back together again have not worked' (*Inconsistency in Roman Epic* (2007), 138, quoted by C. at 4). Nevertheless, C. argues 'that Lucan composed a poem characterized by unity, coherence, and linearity, to convey a specific and unambiguous political message' (4). Using structuralist methodology, in particular Saussure's notion of binary opposition and Lévi-Strauss's propositions on deep structures as sets of binary oppositions, C. sets off to explore how 'Lucan uses the dialectic of the opposite forces of Love and Strife to create a coherent narrative structure that conveys a cohesive political vision' (4). After surveying other epics for Aristotelian unity, however, C. reminds us that, according to Hainsworth, different rules apply in historical epic (*The Idea of Epic* (1991)): Lucan's lack of a central hero means that a sense of unity can be found only if one considers that the *Bellum Civile* is built not around such a hero or an event but instead showcases a theme: the demise of the Roman Republic (5). In addition, he surveys Quint's analytic tools of Iliadic and Odyssean plots (*Epic and Empire* (1993)), the former linear and continuous, the latter circular and repetitious; the former a model for the 'epic of winners' (and that then also applies to the *Aeneid*), the latter (and that then also applies to the *Bellum Civile*) a model for the 'epic of losers'. C. questions this dichotomy and suggests seeing unity and linearity in not just the *Aeneid* but also *Bellum Civile*. The former is ascending toward a positive end, whereas the latter is descending, moving towards a negative end, thereby adapting the—in Aristotelian terms—ideal tragic plot to epic poetry. C. then suggests a reading of the *Bellum Civile* along the lines of Lucan's adaptation of the cosmological dialectic of Love and Strife. These Empedoclean terms (which are often perceived as polar opposites, one constructive, the other destructive) can be refined to include destructive epic romances counterbalanced by constructive conflicts. Accordingly, the *Aeneid* features destructive forces followed by constructive forces in a kind of ascending path, while Lucan offers his readers the opposite sequence and a descending path. After an introductory chapter tracing the notion of Love and Strife in Greek and Roman thought and the epic genre in particular, C. develops his argument in four chapters followed by a coda on the reception of the cosmological dialectic of Love and Strife in Flavian epic. Ch. 2 highlights the influence of Empedoclean philosophy on Latin epic and proposes that Lucan equates civil war itself with the second phase of the Empedoclean cosmic cycle in which Strife progressively overcomes Love, and the Principate to its third phase characterised by complete chaos, a systematisation which lends narrative structure to the epic. Ch. 3 traces Love in the form of interpersonal relations in Lucan's epic, which while frequently doomed (Julia), often remain infertile (Cato, Alexander the Great) or resemble Aeneas' destructive affair with Dido (Caesar and Cleopatra). Love fades away and Strife takes over. Ch. 4 in turn emphasises the lack of constructive Strife in Lucan's epic using the *Aeneid* as foil, which in contrast to the *Bellum Civile* offers the victory of cosmos over chaos, *aristeia* displaying *virtus* and granting immortality through fame, athletic games and finally *clementia* as mitigation for destructive strife. Indeed, Love and Strife combine rather than contrast to facilitate the annihilation of Rome, a feature which C. interprets as an *imitatio negativa* of the *militia amoris* developed in Roman Love Elegy which

Lucan turns into an *amor militiae* (ch. 5). C. thus establishes Love and Strife as useful and convincing tools for reading, analysing and (as far as possible) systematising Lucan's epic. While I—even after reading this book—shall continue to live on the wild side of Lucan studies, I found C.'s study particularly fruitful for illuminating Lucan's constant and surprisingly systematic dialogue with the *Aeneid*, a much observed and not sufficiently explored characteristic of our favourite maverick author. This feature will make this book useful set reading for any class on Latin epic—deconstructionist or not.

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doi:10.1017/S0075435823000722

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ERICA M. BEXLEY, *SENECA'S CHARACTERS: FICTIONAL IDENTITIES AND IMPLIED HUMAN SELVES* (Cambridge classical studies). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. x + 388. ISBN 9781108477604. £90.00.

Erica Bexley's monograph stakes new ground in the study of Seneca's tragedies by returning to one of the basics of all drama — the characters of the play. But this is no stale return to Aristotle's *Poetics* or even T.S. Eliot's maxim: 'In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. His characters all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn' (*The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 3* (2015), 196). On the contrary, B. expertly synthesises much of the recent scholarship on Senecan tragedy — from Bartsch and Star on Stoicism to Schiesaro and Littlewood on intertextuality and metatheater — but always with an eye to the literary creation of the characters and their reified 'life' as implied human beings. She strongly believes that character analysis has been underrepresented in much of Senecan scholarship, despite the vivid *dramatis personae* of the plays, and aims to correct that trend. The work consists of a short introduction that highlights her holistic approach to Seneca (i.e. she will take into consideration his philosophical works as well), four chapters on coherence, exemplarity, appearance and autonomy respectively, and concludes with a poignant afterword.

The first chapter focuses on the characters of Medea and Atreus and the way in which their consistent behaviour challenges many Stoic ideas about character and redefines tragic *anagnorisis*. Recognition scenes in *Medea* and *Thyestes* highlight how wickedness befits both Medea and Atreus and is part of their being 'in character'. When the internal (and external) audiences realise who Medea and Atreus actually *are*, one can observe that the interplay between these fictional creations and real human behaviour may blur. B. teases out how this could lend a Stoic colouring to both characters and, intriguingly, how possible comparisons with Roman comedy would add to the meaning of these scenes. Both Medea and Atreus enjoy looking at themselves as *exempla* and take additional mythological tales (e.g. Tereus and Procne in *Thyestes*) as paradigms for their actions. The second chapter discusses such *exempla* in more detail with *Troades* and *Hercules Furens* as the primary texts under the microscope. *Troades* features characters struggling to act like their fathers (both Pyrrhus and Astyanax) and B. underscores how such an inherited paradigm influences their actions and self-conception. There is a strait-jacket effect when paternal *exempla* such as Achilles and Hector loom over their sons and B. shows how their mindset and actions recall larger Roman ideas of exemplarity. Might there be something tragic in this? I believe more could be done investigating the female characters of the play from this angle, including the chorus (who seem to be well aware what 'Trojan Women' in tragedies are supposed to do), and Ulysses himself who has to summon 'all Ulysses' (*totum Ulixem*, 614) to uncover Andromache's subterfuge. In *Hercules Furens*, Hercules attempts self-*aemulatio* as well, but doing so leads to actions that could be considered tyrannical and dangerous for himself and his loved ones. In a subtle and convincing analysis, B. concludes that Lycus becomes the most important analogue for Hercules: 'this is the mirror in which Seneca reflects the danger of Hercules' detached, self-reflexive *exemplum*' (179).

The third chapter continues to probe the significance of character through their appearance. B. frames her argument by delving into ancient physiognomy and the way that