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This book is the fourth commentary Boyle has written on the Senecan tragedies (if you include the Octavia under the rubric of Senecan). Nor is he stopping there, as he is already at work on his next one, the Medea, which will be published by OUP in the same format as this one. This commentary is significant for a number of reasons. It is the first commentary in English on this important play, and its publication could be seen to complete the series of modern commentaries on Seneca’s plays that began with Costa’s Medea in 1973. When you put this Oedipus commentary against Costa’s commentary by the same publishers, you can gain a sense of how the status of Senecan scholarship has risen in that time and why Boyle would be looking to produce a more substantial commentary on the Medea. It is over three times the size of the earlier commentary.

Boyle characterizes the intended audience of the book when he says it ‘should be useful to drama students, to Latin students at every stage of the language, to professional scholars of Classics, Drama, and Comparative Literature — and to anyone interested in the cultural dynamics of literary reception and in the interplay between theatre and history’ (x). The facing translation to the text benefits this broad audience, as do the lemmata in the commentary that are generally in the format ‘Iam/Now:’ (1.1). And Boyle’s concern to elucidate the text both dramatically and philologically (x) is amply demonstrated in the introduction and in the commentary. The book would indeed be an invaluable resource for its intended audience, but, though admittedly handsomely produced, its price is unlikely to make it attractive as a set text even at graduate level.

Readers of Boyle’s other commentaries will be familiar with the format and style of this one, and even some of the content. The introduction is extensive (125 pages) and draws upon, in places, the introductions of his earlier commentaries, Phaedra (Leeds 1987), Troades (Leeds 1994), Octavia (Oxford 2008), and his monographs,
Tragic Seneca (London 1997) and Roman Tragedy (London 2006). This refinement of ideas from earlier works is evident in the first three introductory sections; 'Seneca and Rome', sets the play in the context of the theatricality of contemporary Rome, 'The Roman Theatre' discusses the theatrical background of the play in both the Republican and Imperial periods and finishes with a brief review of the performance debate, while 'The Declamatory Style' argues that the rhetoric in the play is more than just a product of Seneca's upbringing, but is part of what allows his plays 'to achieve a non-Greek focus on the psychologies behind the mask' (xlviii). The next three sections, 'The Myth Before Seneca', 'The Play' and 'The Reception of Seneca's Oedipus', are particular to this commentary. The last of these is a comprehensive discussion of the reception of the play, from antiquity through the Renaissance, in the modern languages of Europe. Particular emphasis is given to the play's performance in modern times and its relationship to Freud's treatment of the myth, arguing that Freud's Oedipus is more Senecan than Sophoclean, something not noticed by Freud or many later commentators. For instance, Freud's claim that Sophocles' play is a 'tragedy of fate' involves 'the imposition of Senecan metaphysics' (cix) onto that play.

The text of the play follows Zwierlein's 1986 OCT with 36 variant readings and a Selective Critical Apparatus. It is printed with a facing translation that follows the Latin line by line as much as possible in blank verse (ten-syllable iambics for the dialogue and more varied for the choral sections). The style of this translation will be familiar to readers of Boyle's earlier commentaries, and it is one in which he is well practised.

In reading this book I found the commentary comprehensive, in contrast to the much slighter commentary of Boyle's earlier Troades, which I have used as the set text when teaching the play to an undergraduate class. As already noted, it is also largely accessible to the Latinless. However, there is perhaps a small issue with the technical vocabulary. While one might expect the reader to know, or know how to find out, the meanings of rhetorical and
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metrical terms, the status of German terms in a text intended for a wider audience is debatable: 'Schreirede' is not explained when it first occurs (lxiv), and it is hard to track its definition down in the index (ll. 868-81, the third entry in the index). 'Stichworttechnik' is another term, though more directly referenced. However, such a minor point aside, this book will be welcomed by students of Seneca's plays as an invaluable resource.

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