

Order in the Quotations of the Elder Seneca's Collection

The rhetorical collection of the elder Seneca makes for challenging reading. To the modern reader, particularly those coming to the work for the first time, the collection presents an unusual organization: declamatory premises (*themata*), a tripartite grouping of material (*sententiae*, *diuisiones*, *colores*), lists of obscure names followed by raw quotations, and the quotations themselves, which often seem jarringly disjointed. The organization *should* seem strange to us: the work is unique among our surviving ancient texts, anomalous even among other declamatory collections, and some of its most basic organizational features remain open to debate, when considered at all. This paper is concerned with the quotations in Seneca's work, particularly those grouped under the section of so-called *sententiae*.

It is widely recognized that quotations given under the *sententiae* consist of discontinuous pieces—excerpts—and that the borders between these excerpts are uncertain. Since the edition of Bornecque (1902), modern editors (Winterbottom 1974, Håkanson 1989) have attempted to identify boundaries between excerpts, marking them using modern conventions of punctuation—a practice that is perhaps helpful to modern readers, though prone to criticisms of subjectivity.

Besides the question of continuity within quotations, readers encounter another uncertainty in the same quotations, one surprisingly seldom mentioned: does the sequence of excerpts presented together under a speaker's name follow the order in which they were included in a speech? Bornecque thought that the seemingly disconnected sentences were not excerpts at all, that declaimers spoke the *sententiae* one after another, just as they appear in our text. Summers (1910), however, believed that sentences making up quotations were the “best things” out of a declamation and that the presentation of excerpts follows no logical order. Winterbottom remarked that the pieces of a quotation were extracted “like cherries from a cake,” and he

regarded the order of appearance of *sententiae* as reflecting the order in which they occurred in a speech. The core monographs on the elder Seneca (Sussman 1978, Fairweather 1981, Berti 2007) give only slight consideration to this question about the sequence of excerpts.

Questions about the continuity and sequence within quotations are related, and in fact they expose scholarly neglect of the more fundamental question: *how do the quotations work?* So, for example, none of the editors of Seneca's text lays out a detailed rationale for how to detect discontinuity within quotations, in the process identifying the principles that govern a quotation's organization.

This paper, first, confirms the view of modern editors that a quotation is not consecutive, but consists of discontinuous pieces. Second, it is demonstrated that the presentation of excerpts within a quotation is 'non-sequential.' This means that the order of excerpts was not designed to reflect a sequence of appearance in an original speech. Instead, other organizing principles take priority. The separate pieces that make up a quotation are defined not by a modern sense of logical discontinuity or by an original sequence, but rather by points shared in common with other declaimers. Excerpts from one speaker make their appearance in quotations precisely because something similar is said by other speakers. Therefore, excerpts within quotations should be read not only linearly, by moving sequentially through all the excerpts attributed to a given speaker, but also laterally—by comparing an excerpt from one speaker with spatially distant excerpts from speakers quoted elsewhere. The 'strangeness' of the quotations is thus resolved, in part, by looking for 'the points shared in common' by the speakers of a particular declamation.

Works Cited

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