Bad Temperament: Seneca, *E.M.* 2.3

Advising Lucilius to narrow his reading, Seneca makes a series of analogies from medicine and agriculture:¹

> Non prodest cibus nec corpori accedit qui statim sumptus emittitur; nihil aeque sanitatem impedit quam remediorum crebra mutatio; non venit vulnus ad cicatricem in quo medicamenta temptantur; non convalescit planta quae saepe transfertur; nihil tam utile est ut in transitu prosit.

In the third clause (*non venit vulnus . . . temptantur*), the paradosis is intolerable – Seneca is not impugning medicine in general – and the mediaeval supplements palaeographically implausible, also very awkward with *crebra mutatio* just before. Castiglioni’s is better, since *multa* might easily have been omitted by haplography after *menta*. The resulting thought has some resemblance to Plato’s aspersions on modern medicine in *Republic* III (405c-7a) and Seneca’s in *E.M.* 95.15-23, also to a Chekhovian aphorism: “If a large number of cures is suggested for a particular disease, it means the disease is incurable.”²

Though *multa* solves the textual problem, I have another suggestion along the same lines: emend the verb to *temperantur*. This would add a layer of witty paradox, since *temperatura* or *temperamentum* is normally a good thing.³ The resulting ditrochaic clausula is not one of Seneca’s favorites, but he uses it now and then.⁴

¹ Text and pertinent portions of the apparatus are quoted from L. D. Reynolds’ Oxford Classical Text of the *Epistulae Morales* (1965).


³ Also *temperies/temperatio*, but apparently not with this meaning in Seneca.