

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 aequae 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.

3 medicamenta <multa> Castiglioni : <crebra> med- vel <crebro> med-

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In the third clause (*non venit vulnus . . . temptantur*), the paradox 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).

² Spoken by Gaev in *The Cherry Orchard*, Act I. Entirely ignorant of Russian, I quote Lawrence Senelick’s translation (*Chekhov: The Complete Plays*, New York, 2006, p. 998).

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

⁴ I count ten examples of – U – X clausulae in the seven letters analyzed in B. L. Hijmans, Jr., *Inlaboratus et Facilis: Aspects of Structure in Some Letters of Seneca*, Mnemosyne supplement 38, Leiden, 1976.