

Humanities Research Seminar

9.30-10.30am Friday 8 March 2019

Sarah Lawrence presents



Image: 'Scream' (2008) by Bogdan Rata: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/bogdan-rata-scream>

Imaginary Pain: verisimilitude and violence in Seneca's *Controversiae*

Given its potential drama and impact, it is not surprising that torture features in Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae* (e.g. *Cont.* 2.5, 9.6, 10.5). What is more surprising is the limited vocabulary used to describe torture, and the limited (and repetitive) discussion of the physical impact of torture on its victims, even where speakers aim to create sympathy for those tortured. For instance, while Pagán (2007) has argued that there is a degree of uncomfortable relish in the presentation of torture in the case of the wife of a tyrannicide (*Sen. Cont.* 2.5), little is actually said about the pain and damage the wife has endured. This could be viewed within Elaine Scarry's paradigm of physical pain's "resistance to language" and inherent unsharability (1985, 4), were it not for the fact that other *controversiae* in the collection are much more explicit. In particular, the physical damage experienced by children mutilated to increase their profit margin as beggars (*Sen. Con.* 10.4). The latter examples meet Quintilian's advice on the creation of imagery that will move and transport listeners (*I.O.* 8.67-71), but the understatement of 2.5 seems to indicate different parameters for the depiction of pain. This paper will argue that the depictions of physical torment preserved by Seneca in the *Controversiae* speaks to the complexity, and cultural specificity, of conveying pain.

Dr Sarah Lawrence studied Latin and Ancient History at the University of New England before completing a PhD at the University of Sydney. After some years teaching in the secondary school system, Sarah is now the Charles Tesoriero Senior Lecturer in Latin at the University of New England. Sarah is a passionate teacher and researcher with particular interests in Valerius Maximus, Seneca the Elder and the broader challenge of understanding how Romans of the early Imperial Period saw the world.

Warning: this paper contains graphic descriptions of torture & injuries inflicted on children.

Oorala lecture theatre, Oorala centre

All welcome

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