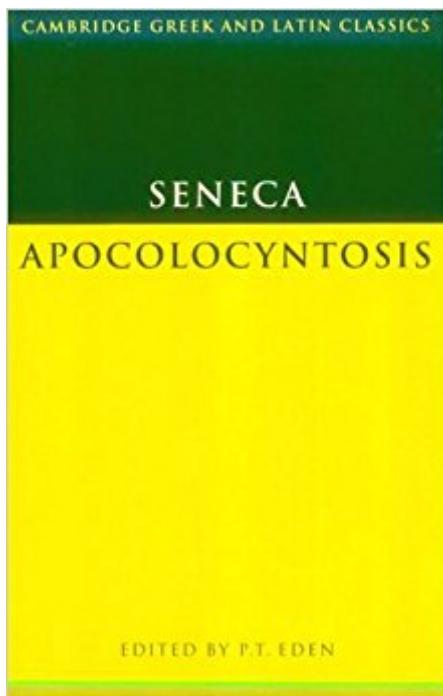


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# Seneca: Apocolocyntosis (Cambridge Greek And Latin Classics)



## Synopsis

The Gourdification of Claudius the God has instant and lasting appeal. It is a uniquely surviving specimen of prose-and-verse satire from the Roman world - and satire, a Roman speciality, is one of the few types of ancient literature to survive, and thrive, in modern society. Its author, Seneca, was not only gifted with intellectual virtuosity, but, at the time of writing, was the precarious power behind the throne of the dangerously developing Nero. Claudius, the target of his malicious wit, remains the most controversial of the first twelve imperial Caesars. The English version facing the text makes the work available to the general reader who may not have any Latin. The text, which is based on a critical examination of all the manuscripts, will be indispensable to scholars. The commentary, which is the first on this scale to have been written in English, is primarily addressed to university and other students.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Text: English, Latin --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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This is a review of P.T. Eden's commentary for the Cambridge green and yellow series on Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. This edition includes a 25 page introduction, 17 pages of Latin text (with an extensive apparatus criticus - it often takes up 1/3 to 1/2 of the page), 17 pages of facing translation, about 90 pages of commentary, a 4 page appendix on the historicity of Claudius's extension of Roman citizenship to certain groups of non-Romans, 5 pages of bibliography, an index, and (starting with the 2002 reprints) 7 pages of addenda and corrigenda to the introduction/commentary/bibliography. The most striking feature of this edition is the inclusion of a facing translation that is designed, according to the preface, "to supplement the commentary in helping the reader to understand the meaning and appreciate the flavour of the original". The editor has also sought to aid the reader with a Latin text that is as free of obeli/daggers as possible, printing the best conjectures available where the text is corrupt and discussing textual problems extensively in the commentary proper and in the apparatus criticus. The *Apocolocyntosis* dramatizes and satirizes the deceased Emperor Claudius's attempt (unsuccessful, at least in the context of this satire) to undergo deification like his predecessor Augustus and join him in the ranks of the Olympian gods. It is extremely funny. The humor ranges from witty literary allusions and incisive political digs to the crudest scatological jokes and withering *ad hominem* attacks. The Latin is generally very colloquial and breezy, except on a few occasions where a more lofty and formal tone is adopted for parodic effect. The *Apocolocyntosis* consists mostly of prose, although there are also extended portions written in verse, making it the only complete example of a so-called Menippean satire to survive in Latin. A large section of the introduction is devoted to defining the characteristics of this genre and elucidating how the *Apocolocyntosis* exemplifies them, and a major focus of the commentary proper is uncovering potential connections between this text and other examples of the genre, either lost or written in Greek. The editor also discusses verbal and thematic parallels from the full range of Latin Literature, but particularly from Petronius, Plautus, Juvenal, Tacitus's account of Claudius's reign in his *Annals*, and Seneca the Younger's other works. Beyond discussing intertexts, the notes in the commentary also unpack obscure historical and literary allusions, evaluate the historicity of Seneca's criticisms of Claudius, engage with textual problems, cite and assess the validity of other scholars' interpretive approaches to the text, and provide limited grammatical and lexical help. On the whole, then, this addition is pitched to an audience of scholars, graduate students, and very advanced undergraduates rather than students in their early years of studying Latin. The introduction also includes sections on the meaning and origin of the title, which are both controversial (the title and the attribution to Seneca do not depend on the manuscript).

tradition but on a reference in the historian Cassius Dio), as well as sections on the date of composition, the text's function (i.e. what the author hoped to achieve through the satire), its disputed authorship (the editor ultimately accepts the attribution to Seneca), and the textual transmission of the *Apocolocyntosis*. This last section is the most droll account of a text's progress through Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance and into the hands of modern textual critics that I have ever come across. It reads very much like a short story with its personified manuscript families, as this sentence (from pg. 20) can illustrate: "From the later thirteenth century onwards the S tradition also emerged from four centuries of unrepresented obscurity and made itself known", or this one (from pg. 21): "In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the L tradition went forth from France and multiplied". In every part of the introduction/commentary, though, the editor has manifestly sought to write with verve and wit that complements the comic spirit of the Latin text, and I found myself laughing along with the editor as often as I laughed along with Seneca. In sum, this is among the most entertaining ancient texts I have ever read; very reminiscent of Petronius's *Satyricon* in tone, language, and scurrilousness. The editor has done an excellent job making the sophistication and vigor of the *Apocolocyntosis* apparent and accessible, and a reader interested in ancient satire, Seneca the Younger, and the regime of the Julio-Claudians will find much of interest in this book.

Bryn Mawr makes nice commentaries for Classical texts.

Commentary is helpful for quick reference a la Cliff's notes and for a decent understanding of the work but too superficial for an in-depth study of the text.

Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* is a quasi-funerary speech given by Seneca on the Saturnalia concerning the (deified) emperor Claudius. The speech is hilarious, mocking a justly deserving tyrant, and is totally worth reading (in Latin it's better than English). Eden's volume has become the standard critical edition (w/ full apparatus) of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. Unlike others of the Cambridge texts, this one also includes a full translation in Loeb style with Latin and English on facing pages. If I had a gripe, it's only that the edition is only available in softcover. That's a real shame.

On the one hand, it is important to remember that Seneca wrote this book as a way of stroking the petty ego of Rome's newest emperor, Nero; thus his lampooning of Claudius and fawning

admiration of his successor should be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, it is a great Menippean satire - humorous, witty, well-composed, and imaginative. I only wish that the full text remained in our possession; some of it is missing, and I suspect that its absence does detract from the quality of the whole. Oh well.

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