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Lend Me Your Voice: Discovering Romanity in Seneca's De otio and De brevitate vitae

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LEND ME YOUR VOICE: DISCOVERING ROMANITY IN SENECA'S DE OTIO AND DE BREVITATE VITAE

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by

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Dedication and Acknowledgments

DEDICATION

Pro parentibus meis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would sincerely like to extend my most deeply felt gratitude to Dr. E. Del Chrol, Dr. Caroline Perkins, and Dr. Christina Franzen of the Department of Classics at Marshall University, as well as to any and to all who have helped in some way, no matter how miniscule it may at first appear.

Qui grate beneficium accipit, primam eius pensionem soluit.—Seneca the Younger

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is primarily concerned with the theory that the writings of Seneca the Younger display an array of stylistic choices theretofore unprecedented in the production of philosophical works in Latin, as well as that, in so doing, Seneca is able to cultivate an approach to Latin literature that is uniquely Roman in character. By using two of the "dialogues" of Seneca—*De otio* and *De breuitate uitae*—as representative of his prose works, particularly those philosophical in nature, I analyze the author's specific use of language in order to highlight and to detail those methods which he employs in an effort to appeal to singularly Roman sensibilities as opposed to the cultural menagerie Imperial Rome had become. Through careful philological investigation dedicated to understanding the source of contention between certain concepts and Senecan ideology, I come to conclude that Seneca's approach to writing fits perfectly not only the Stoic platform to which he is primarily devoted, but also the sociopolitical climate of his day as he diligently attempts to communicate with his Roman audience on a level that they can truly comprehend.

INTRODUCTION

On the Author

Early Life and Education

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in approximately 4 B.C.E. at Corduba (presently Córdoba, Spain) to a wealthy equestrian family. Early in life, he would have been introduced to the republican sentiments of his native Corduba, for the citizens here had sided with Pompey during the civil wars. This allegiance to the ideals of the Republic is evident when Sullivan reports that, later in his life, Seneca "…deplored most vehemently the tendency of Claudius' regime to centralization and absolutism."[1] Likewise, following the accession of Nero to the imperial throne, Seneca was able to exercise more actively the influence of his childhood home[2] in state government, ushering in "…the celebrated period of Nero's good government, based on principles of balance and conciliation between the powers of the princeps and the Senate."[3]

Seneca began life perfectly positioned to enter the political arena. He carried with him the republican birthright of his Baetican[4] heritage, as well as a substantial academic and political inheritance from his father, so one would expect a swift entrance into political life. However, perhaps as a result of some maternal imprint, Seneca's penchant was more for the world of philosophical pursuits.[5] As a child, he was brought to Rome and placed under the care and tutelage of a *grammaticus*, the bland barrenness of whose teachings Seneca met with only disdain. His training in rhetoric at the hands of such as Gallio and Mamercus Scaurus and at the indubitable insistence of his father offered some educational relief and would have a profound

[1] Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero 117
[2] Although he left Spain at a young age, Seneca was apparently surrounded by Spaniards in the formative years of his life. For more on the education of Seneca and its connections to Spanish influence, see Bloomer, Latinity and Literary Society at Rome, Chapter IV.
[3] Conte 408
[4] Corduba was the principal city of Baetica, "…which was the most civilized province of Spain" (Duff 159).
[5] Seneca's mother Helvia, as opposed to the rhetorical studies favored by her husband, possessed "a philosophical bent" (*Op. cit.* 160).

effect on his style.[6] Nevertheless, Duff still alerts us to the fact that "[wi]th [Seneca's] philosophical studies came a fuller satisfaction for intellect and spirit."[7]

Under the guidance of three Sextian "graduates,"[8] Seneca began to develop his initial philosophical notions. The lasting impressions of his teachers molded even some of the most basic aspects of his life. Based on Pythagorean argumentation from Sotion, Seneca decided to abstain from the consumption of meat, and the Stoic Attalus "…induced him to renounce perfumes, wines, oysters, mushrooms and a soft bed…" due to their contemptuous designation as *luxuriae*.[9] Early on, Seneca was most attracted to the precepts of Stoicism and approached them with nearly religious fervor. He devoted himself utterly to the study of these philosophical, particularly Stoic, ideals and was a consummate student, so much so that he would fast vigorously until his health began to deteriorate and his father warned him against perception by some as a practitioner of foreign superstitions.

Political Career

Perhaps as a result of the faltering condition of his wellbeing, Seneca departed for Egypt in around 26 C.E. where he would spend the next five years in the home of his aunt[10] and her husband who was the governor there. Following his return to Rome, the same aunt also made use of her apparently considerable influence in the government to garner for Seneca the position of quaestor. Seneca's declamatory prowess soon became widely recognized in this capacity, as did Caligula's envy in turn. The boyish emperor would often make snide remarks concerning Seneca's skills as an orator, even going so far as to exclaim "…*Senecam tum maxime placentem 'commissiones meras' componere et 'harenam esse sine calce' diceret* ("…that it was then

[6] I will more thoroughly discuss Senecan style at a later point in the Introduction.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Sotion, Attalus, and Papirius Fabianus
[9] *Op. cit.* 161
[10] Seneca does not provide us with a name for this family member, but he refers to her at *Ad Helu.* XIX.ii, iv-vi.

chiefly reported that pleasing Seneca composed 'mere speeches' and that he was 'sand without lime.'").[11] Eventually, unable to bear the thought of inferiority to another,[12] Caligula would have sentenced Seneca to execution; however, one of the choice members of court is likely to have persuaded him against such a harsh and unmerited verdict, primarily due to the rumors of existing terminal illness.[13]

Having dodged death at the hands of Caligula, Seneca's endeavors continued to flourish. It is around this time that he decides to embark upon more literary and philosophical pursuits; however, this did not prevent him from attaining prominent status in the court of Claudius. Unfortunately, his success here was to be short-lived. As a member of the entourage for Julia Livilla and Agrippina, nieces of Claudius, he came under suspicion of immoral liaisons with the former, some think as a result of Messallina's own political agenda.[14] The accusation was brought before the Senate and the emperor, with the subsequent trial resulting in the senatorial verdict favoring the death penalty. Claudius, though, lessened the severity of the sentence and thus chose to relegate Seneca to Corsica, where he would reside from 41 until 49. Agrippina, then wife of Claudius, ultimately convinced the emperor to consent not only to Seneca's return, but also to his appointment as praetor.

Life in the Court of Nero-Death at the Hand of Nero

[11] Suetonius, *De uitis Caesarum: Vita Gai* liii

[12] Cassius Dio this appraisal of the situation, alleging, that it was an emperor envious of Seneca's oratory skill that relegated that statesman to Corsica: Δομίτιος μὲν δὴ καταγνωσθεὶς μηκέτι δεινὸς εἶναι λέγειν ἐσώθη: ὁ δὲ δὴ Σενέκας ὁ Ἀνναῖος ὁ Λούκιος, ὁ πάντας μὲν τοὺς καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν Ῥωμαίους πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ ἄλλους σοφίᾳ ὑπεράρας, διεφθάρη παρ᾽ ὀλίγον μήτ᾽ ἀδικήσας τι μήτε δόξας, ὅτι δίκην τινὰ ἐν. ("On the one hand, he no longer estimated Domitius to be considered [so] terrible; on the other hand, though, [there was] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, [who] of his own merits utterly surpassed all those touting wisdom, as well as many other Romans, besides. For this reason, with such a standard set, he neither was nor was expected to be comparable to one of a lower station.")—*Historiae Romanae* LIX.xix.vii

[13] See Duff 161

[14] *Op. cit.* 162

Before his banishment, Seneca had cultivated quite a literary reputation at Rome. Taking this under consideration, Agrippina thought it advantageous to commission him as a tutor for her son, the would-be emperor, Nero. Upon his return, the empress enlisted Seneca, along with praetorian prefect Afranius Burrus, to attend to the young boy's schooling. Together with his co-educator, Seneca instructed Nero in the widest array of subjects accessible; yet, there were purportedly two areas of study in which the prince was forbidden to partake. The first was actually that of philosophy, for Agrippina found it ill-befitting an imminent Roman ruler to waste time in this manner. The second curricular limitation was set by Seneca himself. He refused to instruct Nero in the ways of the older orators in an effort to promote his more modern approach to the subject, or, as Suetonius reports, *a cognitione ueterum oratorum Seneca praeceptor, quo diutius in admiratione sui detineret* ("Seneca, as instructor, detained [Nero] as long as possible from knowledge of the old orators in admiration of himself.").[15] At any rate, under the watchful eyes and careful guidance of Seneca and Burrus, the power behind Nero's throne would bring about a time of tranquility following the death of Claudius in 54. In the five years that followed, the two instructors managed to maintain a steady course for their pupil, and the relatively temperate sociopolitical climate provided during this *quinquennium* would even be admired decades later by another Roman emperor.[16] In the course of this span of time, Seneca ascended to the height of his political potential, and comrades and critics alike would praise him, along with Burrus, for the direction in which the state seemed to be headed at the time. Nevertheless,

[15] *De uitis Caesarum: Vita Neronis* lii

[16] The emperor Trajan reportedly lauded the accession of Nero to such a degree that he even held the leadership during this brief period in Roman history in higher esteem than that found in the Republican era: *Qui cum longe adolescens dominatum parem annis vitrico gessisset, quinquennium tamen tantus fuit, augenda urbe maxime, uti merito Traianus saepius testaretur procul differre cunctos principes Neronis quinquennio...*("Who, for a long while when he was a young man, ruled over a domain paralleled in the years of his stepfather (Claudius); nevertheless, there was such a wonderful period of five years, during which the city was chiefly increased, leading Trajan to proclaim rather frequently the all the other leaders of Rome combined were by far deficient [compared to] the *quinquennium* of Nero.") —Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus v*

Nero never fully committed himself to the decent disposition that his mentors would have him display. The situation was already deteriorating around the time of Agrippina's death in 59 at her son's command, but things quickly became unsalvageable after the passing of Burrus in 62.

For Seneca, remaining in a court or in any capacity on behalf of which his efforts were ineffectual was a direct affront to his conception of the ability of the Stoic *sapiens* to recognize his loss of influence and to subsequently remove himself from the equation: *si res publica corruptior est quam adiuari possit, si occupata est malis, non nitetur sapiens in superuacuum* …("If the Repbulic is more corrupt than can be helped, if it is overrun with evils, the wise man will not strive on in superfluity.").[17] Ofonius Tigellinus, the replacement for Burrus as chief of the Praetorian Guard, along with the emperor's wife Poppaea, stalwartly opposed Seneca in his role as advisor to Nero. Consequently, also in 62, Seneca submitted to the emperor his request for retirement and withdrew to his studies. Suspicious gazes would follow him now into this self-imposed exile, however, and he was eventually implicated in the Pisonian Conspiracy of April 65. Following an indictment on the charge of conspiracy, Seneca, like his nephew Lucan, was forced by order of Nero to commit suicide at his home later that year, and it is Tacitus who provides us with the most famous account of his death in the penultimate extant book of his *Annales* (XV.lxi-lxiv).

His Works and Style

The Senecan corpus is vast and varied. He devoted himself to literary endeavors ranging in genre from the epistolary to the poetic and beyond. Unfortunately, though, several works are lost to us, and many of those that are extant are difficult to date conclusively. Among Seneca's writings that have disappeared are anthologies of discourses and poetry, a biography of his father, a treatise on physics (*De motu terrarum*), as well as one on the religious practices of Egypt (*De*

[17] Seneca, *De otio* iii

ritu et sacris Aegyptiorum), various other geographic and ethnographic works, the *Moralis Philosophiae Libri*, and at least two of the books comprising the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. The surviving works include the posthumously collected and christened *Dialogi*, twelve treatises primarily focused on philosophical and ethical issues, among which the *Ad Serenum de otio* (viii) and the *Ad Paulinum de breuitate uitae* (x) rank.[18] The seven books *De beneficiis*, the *De clementia* (addressed to Nero), 124 *Epistulae Morales*, nine *cothurnatae* tragedies[19], the *Ludus de Morte Claudii* (*Apocolocyntosis*), and the *Naturales Quaestiones* in seven, or maybe originally eight, books.

Regardless of genre, the works of Seneca that remain—if not overtly philosophical in nature—all possess an underlying characteristic of similar cogency and meticulous attention to personal examination. This distinguishing mark of his work results of course from the author's known penchant for such a contemplative milieu, but his other training was also put to use in the construction of these works. Owing to the extensive education Seneca received in rhetoric, his style may be considered "disconnected, pointed, antithetic, metaphorical and piquant."[20] The convergence, then, of Seneca *sapiens* and Seneca *rhetor*[21] imbues his products with the ability to express philosophical concepts within the confines of carefully crafted rhetorical discourse—an achievement perhaps attained to such an extent previously in Roman literature only by Cicero. However, in terms of their identities as writers, similarities between Seneca and his Republican predecessor stop there. Duff notes that "[i]t is clear to a lover of Cicero's polished amplitude will

[18] The remaining books of the *Dialogi* are arranged as follows: i, *Ad Lucilium de prouidentia*; ii, *Ad Serenum de constantia sapientis*; iii-v, *Ad Nouatum de ira libri III*; vi, *Ad Marciam de consolatione*; vii, *Ad Gallionem de uita beata*; ix, *Ad Serenum de tranquilitate animi*; xi, *Ad Polybium de consolatione*; xii, *Ad Heluiam matrem de consolatione*.
[19] Ordered as they appear in the Etruscus manuscript the tragedies are as follows—*Hercules Furens, Troades, Phoenissae, Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes,* and *Hercules Oetaeus*.
[20] Duff 160
[21] Not to be confused with the appellation granted to Seneca's father by later scholars. For more on this term as it is applied to the Elder Seneca, see Bloomer 115.

not feel drawn to the Senecan sentence which, by comparison, must appear offhand, and, despite frequent use of pointed balance, to a large extent formless."[22] Although I would disagree with Duff's assertion that Seneca's work is without coherent structure (*De otio* offers, for instance, an example of ring composition comparable to the Thucydidean juxtaposition of Perikles' Funeral Oration and the narrative of the Plague of Athens.), it is quite noticeable that Seneca departs from traditionally accepted modes of expression when producing his works. In lieu of Ciceronian *eloquentia,* Seneca chooses Stoic *breuitas.* Instead of employing a register of language inaccessible to some, Seneca's works are characteristically lined with colloquialisms, common idiomatic expressions, and references and wordplay immediately accessible to the addressee.[23] Because he is guilty of transgression against a proper Latin style that Cicero in large part established and ossified, such critics as Quintilian[24]—a noted proponent of Ciceronian style—and Fronto[25]—an antiquarian writing in the century following the time of Seneca—malign him harshly as a writer. However, there were still those in antiquity who recognized his genius. Among them was Tacitus, who noticed in Senecan style an aspect that is highly pertinent to the task at hand: *fuit illi uiro (Senecae) ingenium amoenum et temporis eius auribus accommodatum* ("There was for that man (Seneca) an innate talent agreeable and accommodating to the ears of his day.").[26]

Despite any praise or condemnation, however, the fact yet remains that Seneca's style has its share of complexities and inconsistencies. He does not choose to adhere to a universal model

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[22] Duff 184

[23] For instance, consider Seneca's analogy of taking stock of one's life compared to accounting for the grain supply at *De breu.* XVIII, which was addressed to the current *praefectus annonae.*

[24] *Ex industria Senecam in omni genere eloquentiae distuli, propter uulgatam falso de me opinionem qua damnare eum et inuisum quoque habere sum creditus* ("Out of due diligence, I have defamed Seneca in all manner of eloquence, due to a rumor spuriously circulated concerning me, I am thought to condemn him, as well as even to consider him detestable.")—*Institutio oratoria* X.i.cxxv.

[25] Fronto referred to Senecan phrases as *Senecae mollibus et febriculosis prunuleis* ("Seneca's soft little cough-inducing prunes") in his *Ad M. Antonium de orationibus liber* (I.ii).

[26] *Annales* XIII.iii

that he applies to all of his works; rather, his variations appear to attempt to capture the character of each individual instance of writing. Even though Seneca strives to operate within the realm of "popular" speech, there is an inescapable artificiality of language inherent in the production of literature as opposed to the infrequency with which we find it in quotidian oral exchange. Ultimately, though, if we are to concur with Duff, we may find that "…perhaps it is more profitable to ask whether, with his style, [Seneca] fulfilled his main object in writing."[27] So, now we are left with the question of what that "main object" may have been. Returning once more to Duff, he finds that Seneca "…had to face the fresh problem of composing readable tracts on ethical questions mainly Stoic…,"[28] and it is this task of tailoring his literature to a purely Roman audience that I posit was of a primary concern for Seneca and which forms the foundation of this thesis.

On the Project

Overview

In this work, I will be primarily concerned with the examination of two of Seneca's *Dialogi—Ad Serenum de otio* and *Ad Paulinum de breuitate uitae*—in an effort to demonstrate the importance the author places on appealing "to the ears of his time." Provided the harmonious theme and genre of these two treatises, I hope to avoid questions of style that could pertain to either of these two aspects of the works so that I may focus my attention specifically on the ways in which the style in them reflects the author's plea to purely Latin sensibilities. Secondarily, I also hope that, through this pointed literary exercise, I perhaps will be able to contribute in some way to the rehabilitation of Seneca as a preeminent author in his nation's heritage and of his era's Latin as a means of Roman expression every bit as effective and worthy of study as the works of Cicero or Virgil.

[27] Duff 184
[28] *Ibid.*

The overarching impetus behind this thesis is an investigation of two of Seneca's *Dialogi* in an effort to demonstrate how I have found the author to be expressive of a purely Roman character in the execution of his writings in Latin. As the work progresses, I will be examining four different words or concepts in order to illuminate those aspects that Seneca would find "obscene" or a general affront to Roman sentiments in order to demonstrate the author's culturally-attuned pen. In the first chapter, we will take a look at the problematic idea of "philosophy" and how it serves as the foundation for the issues that arise in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter II, "preoccupation" will serve as the focal point, and we will discuss the manners in which diversionary activities rob not only the *sapiens*, but also the common Roman citizen of his life and essence. The final chapter will be devoted to the exploration of "numbness" and "inexperience" as perilous obstacles to *sapientia*, as well as to an empire mired in its own decadence.

Brief Notes on the Texts

Ad Serenum de otio

It is commonly agreed upon that the addressee of Seneca's treatise *On Leisure* is Annaeus Serenus, Nero's prefect of the watch. Several issues, however, including a missing opening sentence and an absence of any referential matter throughout the work, make it difficult to substantiate conclusively claims to Seneca's correspondent. Consequently, definitively dating the work also presents its difficulties; nevertheless, provided that conjectures concerning Serenus' identity are correct, scholars tend to agree that 63 is the very latest date that it could have been produced.

Listed as eighth in the catalogue of *Dialogi*, *De otio* broaches the subject of the Stoic ideal of leisure and to what effect it should be obtained. Here, Seneca speaks out in protest of a conception of leisure that is idle (*iners negotium*) in favor of an enlivened retreat from the

fastidious in the course of which the *sapiens* may have time to enjoy the rewards of contemplation and subsequent action.

Ad Paulinum de breuitate uitae

Although almost certainly written prior to its counterpart mentioned above, this treatise *Concerning the Brevity of Life* appears as tenth in the canon of Sencan *Dialogi*. Addressed to the *praefectus annonae* and *eques* from Arelate, Pompeius Paulinus, it must have been produced some time between 48 and 55 C.E.

The thematic similarities between *De otio* and *De breuitate uitae* are many, with their primary concerns focused on the manners in which people permit their schedules and other diversions to restrict their movement through life. With the absence of this vital mobility, the victims become unaware of the passage of time and thus curse the temporal nuisance as the responsible party to their own inefficiencies.

Sources

J. Wight Duff is certainly not wrong when he proclaims "[t]he jungle of literature which has grown up around Seneca testifies to the manifold inquiries stimulated by his personality and works. The bare enumeration of representative treatises or essays on Senecan subjects becomes oppressive."[29] However, with Duff's metaphor, let us also be mindful of a likewise sylvan adage that admonishes against loss of perspective. Though many and varied, available sources on Seneca do not often speak to the author specifically as a conservator of Romanity as I will here postulate; therefore, secondary documentation on the subject may appear sparse at times.

Of the ancients, Tacitus, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Seneca himself offer us the most complete biographical portraits of the author, and their resources are used gratuitously throughout. In terms of contemporary secondary scholarship on the philosopher and his work, I

[29] *Op. cit.* 159

have made it a careful effort to include as many sources as possible that could offer any credence to my arguments. In general, the works of Conte, Williams, Duff, and Long will serve as the principal source material for citations and general information.

Initial Difficulties: Paucity of Language and the Validity of the Latin Literary Tradition

> Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta
> difficile inlustrare Latinis uersibus esse,
> multa nouis uerbis praesertim cum sit agendum
> propter egestatem linguae et rerum nouitatem...
>
> "Neither does it escape me, [a man] of intellect, that it is difficult
> to capture the obscure inventions of the Greeks in Latin verses,
> especially when many must be delineated by means of new words
> due to the poverty of language and the novelty of things…"
> —Lucretius, *De rerum natura* I.cxxxvi-cxxxix

The opinion posited above is one that is actually quite pervasive throughout the Republican era of Rome, a period during which the growing expanse of her holdings and influence forced the social elite of the city to form an appraisal of their place among the rich cultural accomplishments found throughout the Mediterranean. For centuries, Greek ideas and various modes of thought had been proliferated in this region and beyond by the sprawling effects of hegemonic domination seen in the ever-expanding hellenephonic world. Even following the death of Alexander and the division of his empire, the lands that had succumbed to his campaign felt no dissipation of Greek cultural influence, for it had become so imbedded in societies throughout the eastern stretches of the known world. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the Italian peninsula also witnessed this force. Greek was the *lingua franca* of commerce, of culture, and, most importantly for our consideration, of education. Latin, even after those who held her as their native tongue conquered the reaches of the East formerly held under Greek dominion, would never there become more than the language of governmental operation. This

sentiment toward Greek linguistic authority was found not only in the provinces, but also at home among the Roman working classes who relied on a pragmatic grasp of the language for trade purposes, as well as with the aristocracy who viewed Greek as "'the other' Roman language alongside Latin..."[30]

The question of lingual dominance becomes an entirely different one, though, when we consider the evaluation of literature. To help place things in perspective, Bloomer reminds us that "[a]t the very time Greek scholars in Alexandria and Pergamum were editing Homer and reflecting, both in theoretical fashion and poetic works, on the nature of language and the essential differences of literary language, the Romans had no 'literature.' This alone makes the Roman invention of a native style more problematic than the Hellenistic creation of a Greek one had been."[31] Now we see that it not really even a matter of dominance at all, but rather one of the mere existence of a Latin literary identity. It would seem that the time-honored Greek tradition and its expansive following proved daunting even to some who would make lasting contributions to the Latin corpus. The playwright Terence thus expresses his sentiments on the issue:

> Tum si quis est qui dictum in se inclementius
> existumauit esse, sic existumet
> responsum non dictum esse, quia laesit prior;
> qui bene uortendo et easdem scribendo male ex
> Graecis bonis Latinas fecit non bonas.
>
> "Then, if there is anyone who has quite harshly found
> there to be a remark against him, thus is the response—
> there is no remark, because the ancestors have struck the blow;
> Those who, in transforming well and writing the same products poorly,
> [could] not fashion Latin treasures from those of the Greeks."
> —*Eunuchus* iv-viii

[30] Clackson and Horrocks 2007: For more on the wide-spread influence of Greek on Roman linguistic practices, both at home and abroad, see Chapter III of The Blackwell History of the Latin Language.
[31] Bloomer 3

Of course, Terence is writing in a genre which owes heavily its origins to Greek comedy, making some hesitancy on his behalf understandable. Nevertheless, it is actually the fortuitous product of Roman comedic adaptation that "Latin was secure as the prestige language of Italy, and good Latin had been nicely distinguished from bad…" by the time of Terence's supposed death in 159 B.C.E.[32] What, then, would compel him, Lucretius, or others like them to judge the applicability of the Latin language to verse composition in such a manner? With a cursory glance, we will notice that the two passages recently cited from Lucretius and Terence are poetry, with many of their prosodic elements being inherited from the Greeks. However, it would not be until Ennius' credited introduction of the hexameter in the late third century B.C.E. that Greek versification would become an issue. In fact, when translating the *Odyssey*, Livius Andronicus—the first extant producer of Latin literature—chose to do so in saturnians, and Naevius also selected this meter to compose his epic, *Bellum Poenicum*. It should make little sense, then, to suppose that later writers of poetry would feel any compunction to adhere to a Greek model for the production of their art, which leads us to the question of what is actually being praised in their works.

For Cato the Elder, the message is not so oblique. Considered the father of Latin prose literature,[33] Cato is not concerned with the *Graicorum obscura reperta* or the *Graecis bonis*, but rather with the extension of Roman hegemony. For this reason, he maligns the tribune Marcus Caelius for "…bursting into song, performing Greek verses, and telling jokes."[34] The charges brought against Caelius are those of engaging in distinctly non-Roman behavior, highlighted by the inclusion of the performance of Greek material among them. For all that the Romans culturally owe to the Greeks, as well as to others amid the conquered, the primary objective was always the edification of Rome. Therefore, it should be no surprise that any assimilation or

[32] Habinek 44
[33] *Op. cit.* 38
[34] *Op. cit.* 42

absorption on behalf Rome would be taken on solely in the interest of bringing the world of her empire into herself—an example of evolution at its finest as the culture bent on domination envelops and manipulates its acquisitions to ensure their continued subjugation. In short, the Romans were able to perpetuate their own sovereignty by incorporating the cultures they had conquered into their own while yet maintaining stark distinctions between themselves and outsiders[35]. And so a sense of Latinity is born. Embracing the Roman quest for superiority, Latinity evolves as a competitive response: "[a]s a legacy from the Hellenistic world, strictures about style and proper language in Rome can be seen as a translation of a process of cultural rivalry…"[36] Nevertheless, the ways in which Latin literature manifests its influence in Roman society are markedly different from those that characterize Greek (particularly Hellenistic) and its meaning to hellenophones. It maintains the comparable traits of grammatical rigidity and verbal and syntactical exclusivity, but the resulting experience for the reader of Latin differs from that of the Greek reader inasmuch as one who would engage in the reading of Greek feels neither compelled nor encouraged to consider himself as belonging to a shared cultural identity, especially considering the extensive and broadly socially varied territories the Greek-speaking world encompassed. Out of initial isolation and then antagonism develops a type of cultural solidarity among readers of Latin—"Within Roman literature claims to an authenticating style structure and reinforce the ambitious status of literature: the text promises that it confers Romanness."[37]

For all their literary progress, however, Latin authors seemed to have relegated one genre permanently to Greek papyri: philosophy. It is such aristocrats and champions of Latin letters as

[35] This cultural identity will become a serious issue for many Romans by the time of the fall of the eastern Empire in the fourth century C.E.; however, the statement above still maintains for Seneca and those of his generation.
[36] Bloomer 5
[37] *Op. cit.* 6

Lucretius or Cicero who take the idea even further, confessing difficulties with Latin expression of this field that was (and, to some extent, still is) held as predominantly Greek. Epic, history, ethnography, and even comedy had felt the impression of Roman influence and innovation, but philosophy, for reasons both linguistic and cultural, would remain the province of the Greek tongue for some time.

Seneca the Innovator

Stoicism, a philosophical system endowed with an allure to the disenfranchised and a cosmopolitan worldview, fundamentally recognized no distinctions of class, station, or nationality. As a result, it becomes the perfect vehicle for bridging the gap perceived between Greek philosophical discourse and the ability of Latin to convey it in the hands of Seneca, perhaps one of Rome's most avid acolytes of Stoicism. Despite such intrinsic cultural mobility, however, Seneca needs still extend the boundaries of Roman literature[38] in order to accommodate his ethical project. As if on a mission to renovate conceptions of Latin's semantic scope, Seneca devises the Latin philosophical essay and letter.[39] Of the 145 extant Senecan works, 124 of them belong to the latter genre of his own invention, leaving only fifteen percent of the remainder of his life's work devoted to other modes of literature. In contriving the structure of his clearly favored medium, Seneca most likely relied on Plato and Epicurus (in

[38] The extension is truly one of the scope of the Latin tongue as it now, in the hands of Seneca, can apparently express complex and innovative philosophical concepts in a manner that is strictly bound by Roman vocabulary. Unlike his predecessors and some of his contemporaries he finds it completely feasible to explore the bounds of philosophical exercise in Latin and accordingly he affects the language in a way that is certainly noticeable: "When Cicero wrote philosophy, he created a basic Latin vocabulary for the expression of Greek philosophical ideas. This vocabulary was foundational for later attempts to write philosophical works in Latin, though it was certainly not final or determinative. When we read Cicero, we can almost always do so against the background of our knowledge of the kind of Greek philosophy and terminology which he faced. As a result of this, and because he wrote for the most part to bring Greek philosophical ideas to his Roman audience, we can usually read through his Latin terminology to see the Greek…In Seneca things are different. Despite a smattering of technical terms which he deliberately introduces from Greek…we find little…What this shows about Seneca's attitude to writing philosophy in Latin is simple: that he prefers to work his ideas out in Latin, in Latin terms, because that is the language he thinks in. Seneca, much more than Cicero, is thinking creatively and philosophically in Latin" (Inwood 73-74).

[39] See Duff 184

particular) to act as models[40]. As a consequence, he is writing letters in a manner with which his fellow Romans are yet unfamiliar, but this serves as no indication that he has strayed from his endeavor to produce material perfectly compatible with the sensibilities of the *Quirites*. Quite the contrary, in fact. By siring the Latin philosophical letter, Seneca is able to adapt the rich Roman history of letter-writing to fit his didactic aims, creating a medium through which he may more effectively convey his messages to a Roman readership. The efficacy of this material one finds in the personable (yet instructive) character Seneca hopes to achieve:

> Taking up a topos that is very common in ancient epistologography, Seneca emphasizes that epistolary exchange makes it possible to hold a *colloquium* with the friend, to create with him an intimacy that, by being a direct example of life, shows itself to be pedagogically more effective than doctrinal instruction. More than the other genres of philosophical literature, the letter is close to the reality of ordinary life, from which it picks up various elements, using them as points of departure for moral considerations and so lending itself perfectly to the daily practice of philosophy. [41]

With this in mind, one may be tempted to ask why it is, then, that I have decided to focus on *De otio* and *De breuitate uitae*, two of Seneca's *Dialogi*. The answer to such an inquiry lies within the uncanny similarity between the letter and Seneca's particular brand of dialogue. The Platonic precursors to the Senecan examples typically contain Socrates as the primary conversationalist, along with one or more persons with whom he is engaged in seeking out the roots of the philosophical precept or problem in question by means of intimate discussion. However, although Plato's dialogues may be reflective of a *colloquium* real or imagined, they are entirely in the third-person realm where the reader may only observe from afar the philosophical processes at work. Seneca on the other hand chooses to take on the role of sage for himself and engages his addressees as the interlocutors of his dialectic. Although they are corporeally absent, Seneca provides these comrades in conversation with a voice that is distinctly their own when he often raises and addresses issues conceivably held by his correspondents. It is transgression

[40] See Conte 414
[41] *Ibid.*

against this Platonic form that has engendered some reticence to designate Seneca's works as *bona fide* dialogues,[42] and I have my own doubts concerning such an appellation. Yet it is also this affront to convention that borrows for Seneca the most crucial aspects of the Roman letter—namely, those personal, organic, and familiar as opposed to the detached, artificial, and foreign character of much previous philosophy—for use in his repurposing of an established Greek genre. In the dialogues of Seneca, the reader is the one who is truly most involved with the writer, and it is this characteristic that most resembles the format of dialogue. With such a stylistic choice, what Seneca has created certainly appears to be a dialogue in the sense that it is a conversation between two people, only they are separated by space and time. Due to this separation, the *dialogi* then become much more similar to the epistolary tradition, making it considerably more apt to see these works not as dialogues, the designation of which evokes such a standoffish Platonic image as we discussed recently, but rather as letters. And these letters can be said to be addressed to and for the edification of each individual who has ever read or who will ever read these Senecan masterpieces as though each one of us could cultivate a relationship as intimate as that which he shared with Lucilius.

As we turn now to the opening chapter of this work, let us be reminded of our title. It is, of course, an allusion to a most famous speech rendered on the lips of Marc Antony to a crowd of funerary onlookers in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Given the renown of these words, I do not feel it necessary to repeat them here because we are well aware whom the speaker is addressing. And so it is for Seneca. Letters and treatises written for the eyes of friends were also composed for the betterment of his countrymen, for his Romans. However, in applying this particular address to Seneca, we must first consider the request. By asking for the audience's attention in

[42] Williams also suggests that "[a] more promising explanation for the title [of Seneca's collection of ethical treatises] is that it refers to *dialogus* in the technical rhetorical sense of a branch of the figure prosopopoeia, i.e. words attributed to a definite or indefinite speaker" (4).

such a manner, Antony, or perhaps even the Bard himself, has forgotten one crucial detail: communication. And, in order to truly commune with one's audience, he or she must have the most intimate understanding of the interlaced nuances of culture and language. An understanding that I hope I will prove throughout the course of this thesis was firmly in the possession of Seneca the Younger. So, as we look now to the evidence that I have compiled to substantiate this claim, let us first agree that a listening ear as Antony would have is but a small part of reception. For, what is there for ears to receive if there is no voice to fill them?

CHAPTER I: "PHILOSOPHY"

Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.

"The mountains will be in labor; a ridiculous mouse will be birthed."

—Horace, *Ars Poetica* cxxxix

In this first chapter, we will explore the notion of "philosophy" as it provides definite impediments to the Senecan agenda. Now, before any dispersions can be cast on the fact that Seneca himself is enrolled amongst the philosophers of Rome, we must understand that our conception of the term has had numerous centuries to evolve into what we label "philosophy." For this reason, I have deemed it necessary to concern the opening of the chapter with the distinction of what exactly is meant when the word appears here. For the remainder of the chapter, we will explore how Seneca expresses his distaste for the subject, bringing into focus his deconstruction of philosophical exercise and his separatist stance not only toward the infection of harmful Greek influence in Roman society, but also toward philosophical schools in general, as well as even toward earlier Roman philosophical endeavor.

In order to understand Seneca's attitude toward "philosophy," we must first distinguish what exactly we mean by the term. That is not to say that I will now embark upon some frivolous and exhausting lexical excursion. Instead, I intend to illuminate precisely how we are to handle the phraseology of our discussion henceforth. Perhaps risking the same error in judgment that befell his predecessors with the present analysis of my own native tongue, I nonetheless find it difficult to convey in English the notion of "the love, study, or pursuit of wisdom, or of knowledge of things and their causes, whether theoretical or practical"[43] without usage of the word "philosophy." What was once a narrower term, even as late as the Middle Ages, is now

[43] Oxford English Dictionary, "philosophy" s.v. 1a

employed rather extensively to describe anything from the formalized study of ideas to one's own personal opinion. For this reason, "philosophy" cannot mean the same for us as *philosophia* would have for Seneca, and it is not even the Latin word, per se, that proves to be problematic for him. *Philosophia* is only troublesome inasmuch as it is a derivative of φιλοσοφία—a word Greek not only in origin but also (if not wholly Athenian) in character. Throughout the course of the matter now at hand, it will be safe to assume that any appearance of "philosophy" will actually be in reference to this word and the connotations it holds.

Continuing henceforth, we must discern why φιλοσοφία is such an obscene concept for Seneca. The very foreign nature of the word plays a role in making it problematic, and we will discuss this issue momentarily. However, for now, let us examine some of the contrasting philological characteristics between φιλοσοφία, an admittedly general and certainly ethereal term, and the pinnacle of Roman Stoic aspiration: *sapientia*. First of all, what we find in the word φιλοσοφία is a term that allows for the existence of wisdom independent from that of the philosopher. For those engaged in the practice of φιλοσοφία, then, that wisdom—the obvious object of their cerebral affections—becomes indelibly separate. And the key to understanding this problem lies in an observation I have just made. If the philosopher thus objectifies σοφία, causing it to become something disconnected from his being, he must always be in search of it. Now, the relative ease or difficulty with which each person finds σοφία is of course variable, but not at the heart of the matter itself. On a fundamental level, the dilemma arises from the very fact that σοφία and the philosopher share such a relationship as pursuant and prey. Because they cannot be efficiently integrated as a single unit, the value of σοφία begins to diminish. While it is true that the philosopher can apply all the principles and precepts of σοφία to his life, there is no

tangible presence for him. And so the philosopher must ever be concerned with ensuring that he is engaged in those practices that permit him access to that which he seeks.

On the other hand, we find that *sapientia*, as well as those who would search for it, exist not exclusively of one another, but in a symbiotic continuum. Both philologically and practically, *sapientia* presupposes the presence of the one in search of it. The present active participle of *sapio* forms not only the stem of this term, but it also serves as the designation forever conferred on a member of the Roman branch of Stoicism: the *sapiens*. So, we see here in the interrelation between *sapientia* and the *sapiens* quite the reverse of that between σοφία and the *philosophus*. If the *sapiens* were not present in the world, then, on a very real level linguistically, *sapientia* would not exist. Likewise, if there were no experiences and observed situations (*sapientia*), then there would be no one (*sapiens*) living said experiences and simultaneously creating them. The *sapiens-sapientia* relationship is one in which form is perfectly married to function, as opposed to one in which the function is in a state of constant flux in order to come to terms with the form. Already latent in what I would call the Roman cultural genetics is an expression of the tendency toward practicality and pervasive usefulness and the rejection of things frivolous, foreign, and fortuitous,[44] so we should have no difficulty in availing this model of wisdom and practitioner to a Roman public. In fact, what we find is that it fits perfectly the preexisting tropes of Roman society; therefore, when Seneca speaks of the Stoic *sapiens*, he has accessed the cultural lexicon and has reintroduced his audience to a character with whom they are already quite familiar.

Another equally important trouble with φιλοσοφία can be found in the fact that it is indeed Greek, and this fact begins to illustrate the difficulty that it would face as part of Seneca's verbal and conceptual repertoires. This is because φιλοσοφία at least partially alludes to a

[44] For more on the Roman "national self-image" and its proclivity toward discipline and autonomy see Shelton's introduction. Also, we find here a comparison relevant to our discussion concerning the barriers between Greek and Roman ideologies in Shelton's analysis of Ulysses and the Roman hero, Horatius.

segregation (here a linguistic one) that he would be hard pressed to legitimize in his particular way of thinking. It is the very idea of separation that leads to the fracturing of any collection of people, and Seneca has certainly more than one prime example of the chaos—the utter absence of reason and restraint so crucial to his ethical project—that ensues whenever factions are set at odds. These *exempla* are provided him via the often sordid sociopolitical history of Rome to that point, as well as by his own contemporaneous cultural climate.[45] It is such unitary deterioration that is often a product of the discord that arises amongst acolytes of a given school of philosophy and which Seneca hopes to avoid, for it in no way provides the requisite environment for the "superior detachment of the sage from earthly contingencies."[46] Therefore, how are we to avoid such collective disagreements? Succinctly, by eliminating the collectives. Although Seneca is universally acknowledged as a Stoic philosopher, nowhere in *De otio* or *De breuitate uitae* does he explicitly refer to himself as such.[47] Instead, he works to create quite a contrary impression: he belongs to all and to none of the philosophical schools prevalent in his day. In the beginning of *De otio*, the jibing interlocutor attempts to link him to the Stoics, referring to them as *Stoici uestri*;[48] however, Seneca refuses even to hint as to where his allegiances lie. His short yet effective response to his critic's attempt to subvert his stalwart position on the matter ends with a

[45] The conditions at Rome were such that people were in desperate search of means of expression for their discontent with the principate, so an effigy of Republican sentiment was eventually erected in the character of Cato the Younger. This statesman "becomes extremely important in the ideological and literary debates that thrived in Neronian salons and contemporary publications" (Sullivan 118). Sullivan also notes here that the anxiety felt by the public of the Neronian period enabled them to turn a blind eye to many vices of which Cato was guilty that would have formerly engendered considerable social discomfort, and this dismissal only demonstrates more crucially for me the level of sociopolitical disintegration apparent in Rome due to the willingness of some its citizens to sacrifice widely held mores for the comfort they could extract from a decidedly tarnished symbol of Republican peace, prosperity, and "normalcy." Luckily for Seneca, however, Cato was also a Stoic of some renown, which would enable the Neronian author to build his arguments on a platform to which his Roman audience of the day would have been more receptive.

[46] Conte 412

[47] The interlocutor's continued allusion to Seneca's Stoic inclinations, as well as the author's own frequent return to Stoic subjects imply Seneca's connections to the discipline and illustrate his intimate familiarity with the school of thought, but they are not permitted to affix the title of "Stoic" to Seneca outright.

[48] *De ot.* I.iv

poignant exposition of Seneca's opinion on the indoctrination that was too often for him a result of the pandering of various members of the philosophical schools: *non quo miserint me illi, sed quo duxerint ibo.*[49] Throughout the remainder of *De otio* and in *De breuitate uitae*, Seneca continuously refers to the Stoic school of philosophy itself. Additionally, even more remote from the author are the founders of Stoicism, Zeno and Chrysippos, whom he conjures on more than one occasion to display his complete detachment from them and the edifice that has been constructed on the foundations they prepared.

If Seneca is this overtly dissociative even from the school that proved to be so influential for him, then his reaction to the remainder of the philosophical world should be even more standoffish. Although subtle to our eyes, perhaps, his disdain for φιλοσοφία lacks no force in terms of Roman cultural comprehension. In the fourth chapter of *De otio*, Seneca produces a thought experiment through the consideration of two hypothetical republics. The first is *vere publica*, a truly common or shared political environment in which people are not bounded by definite borders, but rather in which they may view a true universal expansiveness reflective of Stoic cosmopolitanism.[50] The other is one that limits people according to heredity, extending liberties only to a chosen few. It is this latter society that he says belongs to Athenians and Carthaginians (*haec aut Atheniensium erit aut Carthaginiensium*, IV.1). On the surface, it is the inherent inequality of these societies that earns Seneca's censure; however, the Roman culture also contained some discrepancies between classes and other affiliations, even if these oligarchical tendencies were often unspoken. Considering, however, that Athens was the cradle of philosophy following the ascension of the pre-Socratics, Seneca's attitude toward the city takes on a new texture. It is already clear that he views Athens and cities like it as the antithesis

[49] *Op. cit.* I.v
[50] For more on the origins of Stoicism and the intrinsic appeal of inclusivity therein, see Shaw's "The Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology."

of the ideal Stoic society, but the consideration of Athens as analogous to Carthage contains specific relevance to Roman readers. For Romans well aware of their history and tradition, the mention of Carthage here could conjure any number of images, from an aged Cato's impassioned calls for the city's destruction, to the home of an exotic queen whose demise enabled the founding of Rome, to comedic fodder for Plautus. At any rate, the correlative biases toward anything of the Punic persuasion would be less than positive at Rome, so expressly coupling it with the seat of Greek philosophical practice does not come without its miasmatic repercussions.

If this comparison to one of Rome's most heinous enemies is not enough to express Seneca's displeasure with philosophical exercise as a product of Greek inheritance, there remains his open disapproval of the study of useless matter. Seneca recognizes in contemporary pedagogy a problem stemming from the sophistic modes of instruction employed at Rome: *nam de illis nemo dubitat quin operose nihil agant qui litterarum inutilium studiis detinentur, quae iam apud Romanos quoque magna manus est* ("For, concerning those men, no one wonders why those who are detained by the studies of useless literariness offer nothing of value—[this trend] which is now a great presence even among the Romans.").[51] With this recognition, Seneca has revealed to his audience that there is a "great presence" of ineffectual knowledge being cultivated in the Rome of his era and he goes even further to illuminate the origins of this threat to Roman education. The next sentence following his assessment prominently displays *Graecorum* as its initial word, alerting the reader to the fact that Seneca is now concentrating on the Greeks, ostensibly shifting his focus. Nonetheless, he will actually prove to hold Greek influence as the cause of the woes he just described. Seneca continues by stating that *Graecorum iste morbus fuit quarere quem numerum Ulixes remigum habuisset, prior scripta esset Ilias an Odyssia, praeterea an eiusdem esset auctoris*…("It was that plague of the Greeks to question the

[51] *De breu.* XIII.i

number of rowers Odysseus had, whether the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* was written first, whether the author of the former was the same…").[52] First of all, we notice that, instead of a "presence" (*manus*) such as that which exists at Rome, the pedagogical climate that existed among the Greeks was a "plague" (*morbus*). Normally, the fact that Seneca includes the juxtaposition of *iam* and *fuit*—relying on the perfect system of the verb to demonstrate the detachment from the current temporal frame denoted by *iam*—could alleviate at least partially the culpability of the Roman learned class in the crime of propagating erudite frivolities. However, no leniency is actually granted when we consider the force of the alliterative terms he uses to describe the condition (*magna manus…morbus*) in conjunction with the appearance of ***iste*** *morbus*. With this in mind, the continued, extensive list of studies in which the Greeks were engaged serves as a stifled rebuke of the Romans, as well, and it is by means of this reproach that Seneca wishes to divert their current educational path away from Greek influence and thus away from distraction.

In order to display ultimate dominance of the Stoic *sapiens* over the *philosophus*, Seneca directly engages in semantic combat with one of the few other Roman thinkers to compile their thoughts in Latin: M. Tullius Cicero. In the fifth chapter of *De breuitate uitae*, Cicero is quoted as saying *moror in Tusculano meo semiliber* (I tarry half-free in my Tuscan villa.").[53] Only a sentence thence, Seneca then repackages Cicero's statement in indirect discourse—*semiliberum se dixit Cicero*—which allows us to see via the mirrored placement of *semiliber* at the end of Cicero's thought and at the beginning of his own that Seneca is preparing to restructure the philosopher's words in an opposing argument. Immediately following the indirect statement, Seneca continues—*at mehercules numquam sapiens in tam humile nomen procedet, numquam semiliber erit…*("But, by the gods, the wise man never goes forth under such a humiliating

[52] *Op. cit.* XIII.ii
[53] *Op. cit.* V.ii

appellation, he will never be half-free.").[54] G.D. Williams, a commentator on Seneca's text, finds the single appearance of *semiliber* in the extant works of Cicero to be of particular interest considering the varying contexts in which both authors use the word. Williams goes on to suggest that Seneca is here interpreting *semiliber* "in a partisan way,"[55] but I find that the surrounding Senecan context proves otherwise. We do not have to pore over volumes of material in search of various usages of *semiliber* in order to understand Seneca's point here. The emphasis provided by the anaphoric *numquam* and *semiliber* (particularly in combination with one another) illustrates rather clearly the distinction Seneca is drawing between the *sapiens* and the *philosophus*. Where the *philosophus* (i.e. Cicero) is ostensibly able to operate in gradients and degrees, as connoted by the notion of *semiliber*, the *sapiens* (i.e. Seneca) permits no such luxury.

It is this concept of being "half-free" that most solidly illustrates Seneca's difficulty with "philosophy." Whether it be to a particular ideal or group of proponents, those indentured to the pursuit of "philosophy" are indissolubly tethered in some manner. Of course, those with the time and resources requisite to engage in such study belong to the upper echelons of society, so it is quite safe to say that they would not otherwise be confronted with a loss of liberty. Nevertheless, if they are to be given over to the diversions of "philosophy" as opposed to involvement in worthwhile endeavors they will, as Seneca has demonstrated, become enslaved to all that such entails, effectively surrendering perhaps the most highly valued aspect of Roman society—the advantage of a life unfettered.

[54] *Op. cit.* V.iii
[55] *De breu.* V.3n

CHAPTER II: "PREOCCUPATION"

ecce deus ramum Lethaeo rore madentem
uique soporatum Stygia super utraque quassat
tempora, cunctantique natantia lumina soluit.

"Behold, the god brandishes the bough dripping
with Lethaean dew and stupefied by Stygian power
above either temple, and swimming eyes dissolve to delay."
—Virgil, *Aeneid* V.dcccliv-dccclvi

If Seneca is ultimately concerned with ensuring the freedom of his readership, then an attack against the evils of a preoccupied psyche is certainly in due order and forms the topic for this chapter. As we can see from the previous chapter, "philosophy," or at least the pursuit of it, can definitely be considered a preoccupying force. However, abandonment from the virtue of industry seems to oppose rather directly mores fundamental to Roman culture. With this in mind, we will examine Seneca's assessment of the "industry" of his day as he finds it to be one of the leading causes in preventing ascension to the ranks of the *sapiens*. As we see Seneca ostensibly undermine the Roman value system, we will eventually come to see how the appropriation of one's time, money, mind, and energy to trivial matters ultimately results in the revocation of freedoms that are essential to proper human function—those of mind, will, and expression.

The very act of generating an entire treatise dedicated to the notion of *otium* clearly demonstrates that Seneca's conception of "leisure" is a far cry from a descent into mere idleness as some may think it to be. In *De otio*, he poses a very short yet palpable question concerning the state of mind in which the *sapiens* should withdraw into *otium*. The forthcoming answer is equally succinct and direct, telling us exactly what the merits of Stoic leisure are to be: *ut sciat se tum quoque ea acturum per quae posteris prosit* ("That he then may know himself, as well as

those things he plans to do through which he might be of service to posterity.").[56] The manner in which Seneca has constructed this reply illuminates the character of *otium* perhaps even more fully than the words themselves could alone. The fact that his answer is fragmentary, evolving a purpose clause that is solely dependent on the sentence that precedes it, offers a directness that grabs the audience's attention and makes the message inescapably clear. And this is particularly so when combined with the force of alliterative dentals (*sciat se*) and plosives (*per...posteris prosit*). Rather than using *ut* and the subjunctive to express purpose (*sciat*), Seneca could have just as easily utilized the construction of *ad* and a gerundive; however, it is the dual appearance of the mood expressing purpose and potential (*prosit*) that embodies the practice of contemplation. Perhaps taking advantage of the propensity of the Roman tongue to elide successive vowels,[57] he perfectly balances the vocalization of *ea* between *quoque* and *acturum* respectively, demonstrating rather effectively the ultimately inseparable natures of knowledge and action in Seneca's Stoic curriculum. In fact, in his mind, *contemplatio* is in and of itself an action; therefore, the contemplative pursuits of the *sapiens* cannot ever fully abdicate from *actio*. It is the secession (the verb *secedere* is a favorite of Seneca's in this dialogue in particular) to *contemplatio* that forms the ultimate goal for the *sapiens*; however, it is unattainable unless he engages in the practice of *otium*.

Once again, we arrive at the conclusion that *otium* cannot be inherently inert, for it must be actively sought and exercised in order for it to be effective. It is our discovery that *otium* operates in the rejection or, at the very least, to the exclusion of such institutions as *negotium* and *occupatio* that leads to our erroneous preconception which holds the Stoic vacation (*uacare* is

[56] *De otio* VI.iv
[57] The fact that "Latin hexameter, unlike Greek, poets increasingly aimed at the agreement between the verse rhythm and the linguistic accent" may help lend credence to the common practice of elision in Roman speech when we consider that elision can affect the manner in which sounds are accented (Allen "Latin pronunciation").

also a favored term for Seneca) to leisure as a descent into inactivity and slothfulness. Nevertheless, nothing could be more contradictory. We, even if it does lie in some similarly bygone semantic register, like the Romans[58] before us find *negotium* and *occupatio* to be invaluable and worthy social resources, thus my reference to them as "institutions." Accordingly, we feel ill at ease when the value of such perceived industry is drawn into question or otherwise compromised. For Seneca, however, the trouble arises from the complacent acceptance of their benefits to the individual, as well as to the society at large. He utilizes his audience's deep familiarity with the concepts in order to cause "...the normally rather colourless but respectable *occupatio* and *negotium* [to] become the generic terms for all these despised activities…"[59] In this way, if Miriam Griffin's assessment of *occupatio* and *negotium* stands, Seneca is able to draw the stark contrast between impotent preoccupation and the ultimate potential of Stoic leisure by using language that had so proliferated the Roman consciousness that it had presumably been taken for granted. In so doing, he is able to access some of the more intimate relationships between Latin language and Roman culture and carries it even further by bringing *officium* into the equation. At one point, Seneca makes use of asyndeton to demonstrate just how inextricably linked to the pursuits of wealth and pleasure he finds the usually honorific titles of public office to be. Elsewhere, he draws into question the efficacy of burdening oneself with various *officia* to the point that he has harried himself by day's end.[60] Griffin argues that

[58] As in the last chapter, Shelton's introduction to the traditional Roman mindset can help us understand more fully the extent to which these people reportedly considered industry and productivity a cultural virtue. See Note 44 in Chapter I.

[59] These "despised activities" are summarized by Griffin as "political life, literary activity, the pursuit of luxury and pleasure that constitutes the vulgar *otium*" (318).

[60] *De breu.* VII.iv: *cum diuitiis* ***officiis*** *uoluptatibus* and XIV.iii: *isti qui per* ***officia*** *discursant, qui se aliosque inquietant, cum bene insanierint, cum omnium limina cotidie perambulauerint nec ullas apertas fores praeterierint, cum per diuerissimas domos meritoriam salutationem circumtulerint, quotum quemque ex tam immensa et uariis cupiditatibus districta urge poterunt uidere*?

"*officium* with its honourable connotations is transferred to the study of philosophy;" however, there is another motivation to use the term that may be even more plausible.[61]

The idea of *officium*—the concept of performing one's "duty" or "service"—was one that had already been applied colloquially to any number of sexual behaviors, both active and passive in nature. However, it is the elder Seneca who tells us of a declaimer's[62] mismanagement of the word which led to an expansion of *officium*'s semantic scope as it simultaneously narrowed its common connotative usage.[63] If as nothing else, the mention of the orator's faux pas functions as a cautionary tale for students of rhetoric concerning the importance of properly selecting and arranging one's diction. It operates in this way inasmuch as the apparently suggestive juxtaposition of *impudicitia* and *officium* in the speech thereafter renders an "unintentional double entendre [that] gave rise in the rhetorical schools to a spate of puns, in which *officium* at one level meant 'duty,' but on another 'homosexual *patientia.*'"[64]

Having access to his father's anecdote, as well as to his own experiences in the training of his youth, the younger Seneca could quite possibly be drawing on the "pathic" sexual connotations attached to *officium* at this point to intentionally equate the subjugation of oneself in pointless public offices to the role taken on by a submissive party in a homosexual relationship.[65] His intention in this particular matter is irrelevant, however, and there is little concrete philological proof that Seneca does indeed intend to evoke this imagery in the passages

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[61] Griffin 318

[62] Adams names the declaimer as Haterius (163).

[63] *Memini illum, cum libertinum reum defenderet, cui obiciebatur quod patroni concubinus fuisset, dixisse: inpudicitia in ingenuo crimen est, in seruo necessitas, in liberto officium. Res in iocos abiit: 'non facis mihi officium' et 'multum ille huic in officiis uersatur.' Ex eo inpudici et obsceni aliquamdiu officiosi uocitati sunt.* ("I remember this one freedman, his patron's catamite, who was called for testimony [and], when he gave [his] account, said '*Impudicitia* is a crime against nature/one's child, *Necessitas* against a slave, *Officium* against a freedman. The matter dissolved into jokes/taunts: 'Don't think up a 'duty' for me' and 'That guy is turned in 'duty' many times for this one.' From that point forward, for quite some time, those with responsibilities were called 'perverse' and 'obscene.'")—L. Annaeus Seneca senior, *Controversiae* IV.x

[64] Adams 163

[65] "Pathic" is the term used by Adams to describe such behavior.

I have cited in my notes. Nevertheless, whether Seneca meant to conjure these linguistic connections in the admittedly euphemistically sensitive minds of his audience or not matters little when we consider that merely the appearance of *officium* provides the possibility that it will be interpreted as a pathically sexual label, and interpretation via personal and cultural channels cannot be avoided by the author.

At any rate, it is clear that Seneca finds these trappings of public life to be no more than chronophagic distractions from the true occupation of the *sapiens*. And it is this conflict between *otium* and the *res publica* that forms a solid point of unification between *De otio* and *De breuitate uitae* and proves to be a point of some imaginable contention for Seneca in particular, considering his own personal struggles with the ties of public affairs. While the later arrival into the public sphere would reflect the concept he is trying to put forth; conversely, his necessarily gradual recession from the court of Nero[66] would bely personal investment in his own argumentation. Nevertheless, Seneca finds it neither demeaning nor detracting to rely on his own life's experiences—the sum of all his *sapientia*—to convey a point of interest, even if the example it provides for his audience is a negative one.[67] As we discussed in Chapter I, this reliance on personal experience is what heavily characterizes Seneca's Stoicism as opposed to dependency on philosophical exercises and adages. It would then be paradoxical to consider that Seneca actually employs two such proverbial passages in his own work; however, by doing so, he draws into focus their inefficacy in conveying the relationship the *sapiens* should have with the *res publica*.

[66] There was much turmoil in the Neronian government around 62, and Seneca had previously tried to retire; however, he eventually "saw the loss of his influence as a political adviser and gradually withdrew into private life, devoting himself to his studies" as he had wished even before the machinations of Poppaea were an issue (Conte 408).

[67] Seneca is known to call upon obvious aspects of his own humanity: his health, his age, his shortcomings, his very mortality. In so doing, he is able to establish a connection to his readers that supersedes any offered by hypothetical scenarios and theoretical argumentation.

He begins the third chapter of *De otio* by explaining that there are tenants to two schools of thought—Epicureans and Stoics—that have formed theories on *otium* as it applies to one's involvement in public affairs. When addressing these theories, he speaks in the voices of the respective founding fathers: *Epicurus ait: 'non accedet ad rem publicam sapiens, nisi si quid interuenerit'; Zenon ait: 'accedet ad rem publicam, nisi si quid impedierit'* ("Epicurus said 'The wise man will not contend with the Republic unless something intervenes;' Zeno said 'He will approach the matters of State unless something impedes him.'").[68] Given that these are not genuine quotations,[69] Seneca is able to manipulate them however he chooses. This ability to speak through the mouths of Epicurus and Zeno in turn enables him to illustrate the problem that arises when people overcomplicate the matter with their propensities to differentiate for the purpose of classification, which in itself hinders the progress of (or to) *otium*. Perhaps the most obvious hint that Seneca has provided us that simplification is the essence of what he is attempting to discuss is his use of the somewhat superfluous *nisi si* in both "quotations." The notion of "except if" or "unless" could have just as easily been denoted by the appearance of *nisi*. Instead, he chose to make use of the occasional[70] iterative form *nisi si*, which draws out the thought with no other addition than extra syllables. Similarly displaying the inefficiency and error in approaching *otium* in such a manner, Seneca also utilizes word placement to discredit the practice of parroting. Upon inspection, we notice that the *sapiens* is placed spatially closest to the *res publica* in the statement that ostensibly discourages public involvement except when the provided stipulation is met. On the other hand, the lines attributed to Zeno, who would apparently suggest it necessary for the *sapiens* to be involved with the affairs of state unless

[68] *De ot.* III.ii-iii
[69] These sayings of Zeno and Epicurus are merely Seneca's own contrived summaries (see Williams, *De otio* III.ii*n*).
[70] Allen and Greenough only offer knowledge of the fact that the usage of *nisi si* "sometimes...occurs" (§525.3a). Given the sparseness of explanation on the form and its usage, it may be suggested that it is either a truly rare occurrence in Latin or used only colloquially.

somehow deterred, display a complete absence of the Stoic sage. This contradictory arrangement of words, combined with the use of *nisi si* and even the inversion of typical Latin word order,[71] creates for Seneca's audience a glimpse into his reservations concerning the secession to *otium* as dependent on activity that would taint it. He much prefers to simplify the matter, postulating in a succinct turn of phrase[72] that both actually advocate the same behavior, only with differing motivational stimuli.[73]

Seneca at Leisure

Now that we have seen how Seneca would prefer not to approach the subject or practice of *otium*, we may take a look at the manner in which he decides to characterize the true nature of Stoic leisure. Once more with poignant brevity, he pontificates on the classification of those whom he would consider practitioners of the art of *otium*: *Soli omnium otiosi sunt qui sapientiae vacant, soli uiuunt* ("They alone of all (others) who make time for wisdom are at leisure; they alone live.").[74] In the sections that follow, he expounds on this notion by primarily qualifying exactly what it is he intends in the usage of *uiuere*. Namely, he finds that those who truly live—those who are genuinely at leisure—are those who have access to all the ages before them via the *exempla* they have relinquished for posterity. As the *otiosi* proceed in such manner through life, they experience freedom from temporal constraints, the complaints against which Seneca has only recently criticized. As we explore further, however, we discover that there is indeed quite a bit of freedom (as any interpretation of *otium* should suggest) to be had under the conditions of this lifestyle. These are freedoms that many have tried to achieve through the efforts of activities and behaviors Seneca has classified as impediments to *otium*: freedom of mind, freedom of

[71] The main verb occupies the primary position of each clause it governs rather than the generally expected ultimate.
[72] *alter otium ex proposito petit, alter ex causa.* (*De otio* III.ii)
[73] See Griffin 329
[74] *De breu.* XIV.i

expression, freedom of will. In the remainder of this chapter, I will be concerned with the investigation of these liberties as they are illuminated by Seneca's use of language in this quasi-ekphrastic description of the *otiosi*.

Seneca recognizes that the most fundamental difficulty that the *ocupati* face is the obsessive compulsion to be occupied. The notion of incessant intrusions into the public and political spheres has captivated them so that they are set on a perpetual course eternally divergent from the path of the *sapiens*. To illustrate this idea of compulsive behavior Seneca employs the relative clause of tendency[75] when he exclaims concerning those whom the *ocupati* encounter on their daily rounds: *quam multi erunt quorum illos aut somnus aut luxuria aut inhumanitas summoueat!* ("How many there will be either whose slumber or extravagance or barbarity may drive those men away!").[76] Simply by making use of this particular sense of the relative clause, Seneca is able to display his comprehension of the essential inherent disorder shared by those who would abandon the quest for *sapientia* in exchange for more worldly pursuits. However, if the *sapiens* is to be so persistently engaged in the pursuit of *otium* and the true wisdom that it brings, he too is guilty of the obsessive behaviors of his antithesis. If both the *ocupati* and the *sapiens* function under the same basic *modus operandi*, what, then, becomes the point of distinction between the two? To find the answer to this question we must examine the manner in which Seneca chooses to qualify the remainder of his statement. He summarily finds three hindrances—*somnus*, *luxuria*, and *inhumanitas*—to be the source of woe for the *ocupati* as they endeavor to accomplish their goals.

Freedom of Mind

[75] Williams cites G-L section 631 as support for the claim of the grammatical construct's appearance here in the lines of Seneca (*De brevitate uitae* XIV.iv*n*).
[76] *De breu.* XIV.iv

At the opening of this chapter, I included a quote from Virgil's *Aeneid* that possesses some resonance with our subject. The *deus* to whom the poet is referring is named in a few lines prior[77] as Somnus, the god of sleep. It is this deity who is charged with victory over Aeneas' helmsman Palinurus, ultimately leading him to desert his vigil in a violent wrench of the rudder. In this scenario, the ship is offered as collateral for the defeat; however, there is more to be lost in Seneca's model. On the surface, already we find that *somnus* and its obvious denotations inevitably defeat the *ocupati* in their presumable efforts to attain vigilance through preoccupation with their environmental goings on. Just beneath the surface, though, lies the explication of effects of *somnus*, for slumber is only the eventual outcome of his influence. In order to achieve a sleep state, *somnus* must first dull the senses and lull the mind into creating a sense of security. Once their sensibilities are overrun and their faculties fatigued, the *ocupati*, like Palinurus, inevitably succumb to the wiles of Sleep. In the haze of figurative repose, their minds are laden with the weight of their onerous tasks, their innumerable house calls, their debilitatingly overwrought schedules. Where once they would have been said to be in dutiful search of utility, they now reside in a realm often tied to slothfulness and indolence[78] rather than to accomplishment.

What we find here is that the unavoidable outcome of this rhetorical sleep becomes the forfeit of one's freedom of mind. No longer are we able to govern the world that exists there, so we then also become unable to affect any change elsewhere. Without freedom of mind, one

[77] *Aen.* V.dcccxxxviii

[78] The Latin cognate *indolentia*, although somewhat different in meaning from its modern English counterpart, also plays a role in Seneca's view of proper behavior for the *sapiens*. In one of his letters to Lucilius, Seneca berates *indolentia* as possessing nothing of worth at *Epistulae Morales* LXXXVII.xix: *Itaque indolentiam numquam bonum dicam: habet illam cicada, habet pulex* ("And so I will declare that freedom from toil or pain (*indolentiam*) is never good—the cicada has that freedom, [as does] the flea."). Here, we find that those in possession of this characteristic are insects, or more aptly, parasites. Instead of offering aid and direction to the *res publica* as is the charge of the *sapiens* if at all possible, those who engage in this practice drain time, resources, and energy that they are either unable or unwilling to replenish.

develops the inability to engage in the manner Seneca prescribes: *disputare cum Socrate licet, dubitare cum Carneade, cum Epicuro quiescere, hominis naturam cum Stoicis uincere, cum Cynicis excedere* ("It is permitted to dispute with Socrates, to doubt with Carneades, to question with Epicurus, to conquer human nature with the Stoics, to exceed it with the Cynics.").[79] Seneca's use of *licet* here begins to reflect how important it is for the *sapiens* to possess freedom of mind. The impersonal nature of the word demonstrates that the Stoic sage is able to operate without any force of personal agency. The importance of this concept lies in the fact that it not only applies to those who would seek to hinder his progression on the path *sapientiae*, but also to the *sapiens* himself. With this in mind, we see that, given the optimal scenario, the *sapiens* surrenders the influence his own desires and compulsions would hold over his progress, an influence which would lead to an analogous scenario to that of the *ocupati*. Verbs such as *disputare*, *dubitare*, and *quiescere* also display solid connections to mental activity. What is more, however, is that these mental activities are performed with notable members of various and not necessarily complimentary schools of philosophy. Here, Seneca is able once again to allude to his disdain for the paltry divisions that preoccupy those who become involved in philosophy, showing that one is actually quite free to explore any and all of them if that person has achieved the freedom of mind that *sapientia* has to offer. Furthermore, while the verbs connected to the Stoics and Cynics (*vincere* and *excedere*) do express some agency on behalf of the *sapiens*, their direct object of and its correlative genitive of characteristic—*hominis naturam*—show that the *sapiens* is still free from the fetters of his mind. This is because he has conquered and exceeded the nature of humanity that would inevitably lead to his being mired in the mental activities of want and impulse thereby diverting his attention from more worthwhile pursuits.

[79] *De breu.* XIV.ii

Freedom of Will

Even though we have seen that personal agency can be somewhat of an impediment to satisfactory interaction on behalf of the *sapiens*, we must differentiate between said agency and the freedom of will. Now, considering that the determinism of one's own nature is a concern for Stoics from their Greek beginnings to the time of Seneca, we are left with the problem of how this coincides with freedom of will. Stoics find that "...since things and events have different natures...the result of any individual's action accords with its specific nature."[80] We have already discovered that the ultimate goal of the *sapiens* is to triumph over and to surpass his nature, the *hominis natura*. It is here in this victory that we see the exertion of will rather than of agency, for agency is merely the product of human action, and "human action is controlled from within by assent and impulse, and the fact that man has no choice but to act by these powers tells us nothing against his freedom to act *as a man.*"[81] In Long's assessment, we find that there is indeed a differentiation between will and agency, and it is the latter that falls short of truly propelling the *sapiens* forward. Without the products of will, there is little in the way of *sapientia* remaining for those who would seek it because they are unable to separate themselves from their own natures in order to ascend to harmony with *Natura*.[82] In yet another of the *Epistulae Morales,* Seneca relates to Lucilius that *nihil tibi luxuria tua in futuros annos intactum reseruauit* ("Your own extravagance has left nothing intact for your future years.").[83] With the entanglements of *luxuria*, there is nothing remaining for the *ocupati* that is unspoiled (*intactum*) by the absence of will that it engenders. Consequently, it is impossible for one to light upon the

[80] Long 180
[81] *Op. cit.* 181
[82] The attainment of harmony with Nature is one of the primary concerns for practitioners of Stoic teachings. For more on its importance, see Shaw's "Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology."
[83] *Epistulae Morales* LXXVII.xvi

path of the *sapiens* while so mired in the throes of *luxuria*, causing the state to become an enemy of Seneca's prescription for *sapientia*.

Freedom of Expression

When I speak of the freedom of expression, it is not in reference to that liberty identified as an American constitutional right; rather, I intend that ability to exercise the other freedoms I have just described. Given the etymological connections to *sapor*,[84] it is essential that the *sapiens* ultimately exercise the freedoms he has acquired. Therefore, the inability to access expression becomes a serious problem. Motto alerts us to the fact that humane behavior was of utmost importance to Seneca, for she finds that "goodness and humanitarianism are among the most significant of Seneca's ideas."[85] However, it is not solely an appeal to humanitarianism that Seneca makes by means of his employment of *inhumanitas* in *De breu.* XIV. This term, although certainly connected to concepts of cruel and inhumane treatment, has its roots in the ancient distinction between familiar and foreign.[86] Considering this, the notion of barbarity becomes of primary concern. The connotations of barbarity bridge a divide between cruelty and the inability to communicate effectively. A barbarian was originally one who could not interact efficiently with Greek speakers because he lacked the linguistic capability; therefore, he could not express himself in any substantial manner, and, without this ability, he possesses no efficacy in his life given the present scenario. With the loss of the freedom of expression, the barbarian becomes a well-known paradigm against which prospective adherents to the precepts of Seneca may measure themselves. He is unable to affect any change in his own life or in his environment because he is unable to express any of the experiences he may have already acquired. By merit of

[84] I will discuss *sapor, sapio,* and other related terms more thoroughly in Chapter III.
[85] Motto 56
[86] Oxford Latin Dictionary, *inhumanus* s.v. 1.b and 2: Examining the accepted denotations of this word helps open our view of the noun *inhumanitas*, seeing as how it is the result of the actions of one to whom the adjective may be applied.

this inability, he then becomes constrained by his own limitations rather than exploring the vast expanses of time and potential that are open to the *sapiens*.

Now, to this point, readers may be wondering why I have been discussing the qualities of those individuals who reject the advances of the *ocupati* instead of reviewing the shortcomings that they themselves possess. The fact of the matter is that I find these people who restrict the movements of the *ocupati* to be externalized representations of the intrinsic problems of their character. The evils of *somnus, luxuria,* and *inhumanitas* are what blind them, resulting in an utter loss of purpose because their sense of this is so inextricably tied to the various vices of public life. Being thus preoccupied, they are unable to achieve the goal for which they set out. Their constant meddling becomes nothing more than an exercise in futility, and, for this very reason, the *ocupati* cannot ever possibly ascend to the heights available to the *sapiens*. While they may be endeavoring to offer assistance to the *res publica*, the preoccupied masses are unable to make any changes, for they are too focused on the means rather than on the eventual end, so they would be likewise unable to discern when their efforts are misspent. For Seneca, this is the height of inefficiency and thus the demise of the agenda of the *sapiens*. He explicitly states that *si res publica corruptior est quam adiuuari possit, si occupata est malis, non nitetur sapiens in superuacuum*… ("If the Republic is more corrupt than can be helped, if she is occupied by evils, the *sapiens* will not strive on in superfluity…")[87] In this statement, Seneca makes it perfectly clear that the *sapiens*, despite a desire to be of service to his community, will not press on in mechanical redundancy to affect change where none is to be had. Ultimately, the *sapiens* must be observant and perceptive, able to read and to interpret the signals he receives from the situation in order to judge properly whether or not the task before him is truly worthy of his time and effort. If he can do this correctly, the *sapiens* is then capable of doing the most good where

[87] *De ot.* III.iii

the *ocupati* fall short due to their innate inability to properly judge their surroundings. In order to obtain this ability possessed by the *sapiens*, they must first relieve themselves of their expectations and the myriad means by which they attempt to attain them. As Conte puts it, "Once it is necessary for him to give up all expectations in the field of politics, the Stoic sage sets the achievement of inner freedom as his ultimate objective..."[88]

At the outset of this chapter, I said that there was seemingly a disconnect between traditional Roman values and the Senecan mindset. Such a disparate viewpoint would render this work moot, of course, along with its goal of demonstrating Seneca's attention to the Roman mind as he writes. Therefore, it is necessary that we determine precisely how disjointed the two actually are. If this chapter has proven anything, it should be that Seneca least of all advocates a slovenly and unmotivated lifestyle. Quite the contrary, really. Although we find that he takes the occasion to attack the harried schedules of many whom he has observed, it is clear to us that Seneca would advise no one to be mere flotsam with no known goal in mind. The problem arises when Roman citizens, men who have been endowed with more freedoms than almost anyone at that particular point in time and space, fail to exercise them properly. As I closed the last chapter, I attested that an unfettered life would be one of the most precious commodities for these people. Accordingly, it becomes paradoxical if all the liberty that the industry of their forefathers gained for them is besmirched by the bonds of a civil servitude that actually provides little to no benefit for the society. It is for this reason, then, that we come to understand that Seneca does not contest the value of one's due diligence. He would simply rather to direct that diligence to those areas of life that more thoroughly require our attention.

[88] Conte 418

CHAPTER III: THE VICIOUS CYCLE COMES FULL CIRCLE—CONTENDING WITH "INEXPERIENCE" AND "NUMBNESS"

Longum iter es per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla.

"Long is the path through lessons, short and efficient by examples."
—Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales* VI.v

Though we have talked about a few words and concepts that Seneca would find particularly repulsive, it would seem as though we have forgotten to get at the heart of his Stoic agenda. Who is the *sapiens*? What constitutes the fundamental element of his character? To answer these questions, we must now turn to yet one more notion that proves to be problematic for Seneca. By exploring the pitfalls inherent in a state of inexperience, we will begin to probe at one of the most basic problems of the human condition and how it figures into Seneca's reckoning. If I am correct, and the ineptitudes that spring from a lack of experience are truly inextricably imbedded in our natures as human beings, then we may begin to see Seneca's stance on the matter revealed in his assessment of the Stoic goal. While discussing the abilities of the *sapiens* in regards to his ability to access all the wisdom of the ages, Seneca, as he concomitantly reveals his knowledge of Stoic teachings and distances himself from the school by means of third-person reference, alleges that those who would find themselves followers of said teachings would also find it possible *hominis naturam eum Stoicis vincere*.[89] Throughout the course of this final chapter, we will explore the dangers of "inexperience" and "numbness," examining the philological as well as ideological issues that arise when we consider the origins of the terms used by Seneca to designate the Stoic sage. As we dissect and analyze these terms, we will see

[89] *De breu.* XIV.ii

that the qualities and attitudes of the *inexperti* are stark antitheses to those held by the *sapiens* and directly oppose the process of ascension to this level of mastery over human nature. Initially, however, we will present an argument that the cultivation of experience is indeed of pivotal importance to Seneca. Once that position has been made, we will then look more closely at the *sapiens* in order to uncover the origins of the vocabulary and the being to whom it is applied.

At the closing of *De otio*, Seneca seeks to make it abundantly clear that, in order to achieve the coveted state of *otium* and to number oneself among the *sapientes*, that person must be engaged in the practice of life. This is to say that those who truly seek the liberation of the *sapiens* need not simply wake every day to discover that they are inundated with the various trappings of a highly sociopolitcally charged lifestyle, for this would result in nothing more than the preoccupied state we discussed in the previous chapter. Instead, what Seneca desires for his readers is an attentiveness to the situations surrounding them that would lead to their enrichment as citizens of the cosmopolis. Nevertheless, even if one has cultivated such powers of observation, if they are not properly exercised, they are to no avail. So that he may express this concept to his audience with optimal clarity, Seneca crafts the final clauses of *De otio* into a conditional metaphor:

> Si quis dicit optimum esse navigare, deinde negat navigandum in eo mari, in quo naufragia fieri soleant et frequenter subitae tempestates sint, quae rectorem in contrarium rapiant, puto hic me vetat navem solvere, quamquam laudet navigationem. [90]
>
> "If someone claims that it is best to sail while defaming sailing on that sea where shipwrecks may be accustomed to occur and where sudden tempests might frequently arise which toss the rower to and fro, I believe he would forbid me to set sail, even though he would praise the practice of sailing."

When we examine this passage, we find several clear indicators as to the importance Seneca places on the value of experience. The rhetorical devices he employs lend the coda of this work a

[90] *De ot.* VIII.iv

poetic cadence, seeing as how those devices—namely, anaphora and alliteration—utilize repetitive verbal and vocal patterns. We notice that the verb *navigare* serves a dual purpose in this passage, providing the basis for both the anaphoric (*navigare...navigandum...navigationem*), as well as the alliterative (*navigare...negat navigandum...naufragia...navem...navigationem*) aspects of his allegory. Of course, any time such devices are used, obvious attention is drawn to those phrases and clauses in which they appear. Therefore, it is justifiable that we pay particularly close attention to this passage, especially given the fact that the manifestations of anaphora and alliteration are here so tightly intertwined.[91]

When we analyze more closely, we discover that those words that appear in the anaphoric/alliterative phrase here are imperative to understanding Seneca's message not only by merit of their usage in the rhetorical devices themselves, but also due to their connections to important Senecan concepts. For instance, I would like to begin discussion on this issue with the appearance of the term *naufragia*. Although we see numerous instances in which the two thinkers diverge, it would seem as though, on the subject of the state of the State in their respective eras, Cicero and Seneca find a point of intersection. Residing in the tumultuous years leading up to the decline and dissolution of the Roman Republic, Cicero wishes to express his assessment of the condition in which he has found her in the course of his speech *Pro Sestio*: *Sed necesse est...me totum superioris anni rei publicae* ***naufragium*** *exponere...* ("But it is necessary…that I expound upon the total shipwreck of the Republic in the last year.").[92] It is not surprising that two men so concerned with the preservation of their societies would make use of

[91] While it is indeed true that any example of anaphora will inherently also display signs of alliteration or assonance, the case in question exhibits extension of complimentary repetition of initial vocalizations beyond the bounds of the anaphoric elements, and, for that reason, I have attested here that this instance is one of particular interest.
[92] *Pro P. Sestio Oratio* XV.ii

this term in relation to public matters seeing as how the image of the "Ship of State"[93] is such a pervasive one. However, with this message in conjunction with the notion of a shipwreck comes a strong element of foreboding. If we view the opening and closing sequences of *De otio* as an example of ring composition, though, we come to see that Seneca has explicated rather transparently what exactly constitutes the character of such a destructive national crisis. In the genesis of the dialogue, Seneca is careful to insert the verbs *mutamus* and *fluctuamur* in order to illustrate the root of the issue. At first glance, these verbs may appear to have little to no connection to the idea of a *naufragium*, yet, when we consider the imagery of tempestuous waters (*fluctuamur*), as well as the metamorphic elemental quality attributed to water itself (*mutamus*) intrinsic in the notion of a shipwreck, the issue of connection here is no longer so farfetched. With said connection established, we can begin to comprehend more fully Seneca's findings on the roots of the problems that plague his society. The manner in which he chooses to utilize *mutamus* indicates that the citizens have affected detrimental change in their sociopolitical environment (*nam inter cetera mala illud pessimum est, quod vitia ipsa mutamus*. "Among all the other evils, that is the worst—that we mutate the very vices themselves.")[94] of their own volition. Conversely, the passive quality of *fluctuamur* does allude to helplessness and lack of voice in the matter; however, it does not exclude its subject from accountability in Seneca's mind. The reason for his lack of sympathy or, for that matter, of tact in this particular scenario is due to his claim that this predicament is the result of the fact that *iudicia nostra non tantum prava sed etiam levia sunt*... ("Our judgments are not only depraved, but also insubstantial."),[95] which reveals that conscious decisions (*iudicia*) on their parts have led their current state and uncovers

[93] c.f. *navem* here: This metaphor of a nation symbolized by a sailing vessel is one that is prominent in the Mediterranean, originating in extant literature in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*.
[94] *De ot.* I.i
[95] *Op. cit.* 1.ii

their underlying agency in the matter. Even with this consideration, however, the question yet remains concerning the origins of the dilemma the Roman people now face, for the use of the first-person plural and *nostra* surely indicate an expansive inclusiveness.[96] Returning to the notion of ring composition, we may discover that the answer lies, as might be expected, in the fruition of the dialogue.

We can see that, although their actions are albeit perverse (*prava*) and fool-hearty (*levia*), there is certainly no absence of motivation. The problem is evident, however, when we realize that these actions are thence misguided-a product of a deficiency in experience rather than in action. The anaphoric repetition of *navig-* in the ultimate clauses of *De otio* brings to light the imperative nature of experience in Seneca's mind. He argues that those who praise the practice of sailing or navigation-metaphorically reminiscent of governance-and yet will have no hand in it or

[96] The breadth of this inclusion may actually be a bit exaggerated here. Although some of the fundamentals of Stoic thought teach that all are citizens of the universal *polis*, we must be mindful of the fact that Seneca is a member of the upper echelons of Roman society, as likely would be a good deal of his readership. For this reason, we are left with the question of in whom Seneca sees the potential for true change-solely the Roman elite, or all those who would read his dialogue. If we compare Lucan's usage of *populumque potentem* at *Phars*. I.ii, though, we may be able to arrive at some reasonable conclusion: *Bella per Emathios plus quam ciuilia campos / iusque datum sceleri canimus,* ***populumque potentem*** */ in sua uictrici conuersum uiscera dextra / cognatasque acies, et rupto foedere regni / certatum totis concussi uiribus orbis / in commune nefas, infestisque obuia signis / signa, pares aquilas et pila minantia pilis* (*Phars.* I.i-vii). ("Of wars [less] than civil throughout the Emathian plains and of justice granted I sing, as well as of a powerful people and familiar faces [who] have turned their arms against their own viscera for the sake of conquest, and, with the alliance of the realm undone by communal atrocity at the hands of all the forces of a world bent on destruction, [I will also sing of] standards matched against hostile standards, of eagles well-met and spears crashing on spears."). Although, the blood spilled *per Emathios…campos* is mostly that of working-class citizen soldiers, those in command during the civil war that Lucan is describing are both responsible for the fratricidal bedlam that has ensued. Also, not coincidentally, these men are also prominent members of Rome's senatorial class. The fact that Pompey Magnus owes his origins to comparable breeding as those men dying in the field only heightens the loss of connection between the *potentes*—the Senate, those at Rome who have the power to affect change—and the plebs. This lack of solidarity between fellow citizens is of course to be expected in a time of *civil* war; however, Lucan's image here demonstrates to what gruesome degree those in power are willing to forget obligations to the State at large. Pompey's role as not so much an antagonist or even protagonist as much as an antihero is mirrored in the governance of Nero who spurned the name of *Ahenobarbus* and who would have almost certainly felt little remorse at the less-than-fortunate circumstances that would face those of likewise lineage. And almost equally as certain is the notion that Lucan would not have overlooked this shared characteristic. With all these factors in mind, and if indeed Seneca and his nephew subscribed to analogous analyses, we may then be able to assemble a picture of Senecan citizenship. It would appear as though, despite the fact that Seneca would view the entirety of his Roman audience as citizens to whom his ethical teachings would apply, he also recognizes the oligarchical structure of his nation's government. Therefore, those present in the imperial court and senatorial chambers do appear fundamentally culpable, yet this does not exonerate the remainder of Rome's masses.

will attempt to dissuade others from doing so under less than ideal conditions have overlooked the value of the exercise. To demonstrate to us what that point is, Seneca has placed it as the concluding word of his dialogue: *navigationem*. Here we see that the practice itself is the most important aspect we glean from our endeavors, thus Seneca's incessant insistence that those endeavors be of a sort which possess the ability to enrich ourselves via the experience derived from them. This recognition draws into perspective all the ideas-philosophy, preoccupation, and numbness-that we have previously discussed as they all ultimately represent an obstacle to the attainment of experience. Because Seneca finds philosophy to be inefficient in proffering enduring lessons pragmatically applicable to real-life scenarios, it is clear why worthwhile experience is not something he would expect to find in its pursuit. The familiarity that one acquires in a state of preoccupation is naught but an empty and habitual thrusting of oneself into the rigmarole of daily sociopolitical trappings with no greater dividends than frustration and fatigue. And lastly, numbness, implicit in its very nature, cannot ever provide anything of practically educational value because it leaves its willing victims alienated from the remainder of the world around them. So it is that we finally discover the ultimate evil for Seneca resides in the absence of engagement and interaction, for, without these endeavors, no one may taste the menagerie of flavors that constitute the lives they lead and that give the *sapiens*—a true connoisseur of life's bittersweetness—his identity.

The conceptions of the term "Stoic" in our own language presently often conjure images of stony, expressionless faces that reveal little to no interaction with the world around them. While it is true that emotions are a constant source of contention for Stoics, by merit of this strained relationship, it is evident that they are in no way disconnected from these emotional stimuli and the situations that produce them. As Shelton summarizes, "…the Stoic was

advised...to avoid emotional responses to situations. Emotions, however, were powerful, and the aspiring Stoic had to wage constant battle to keep emotions from the borders of her or his soul lest they enter, drive out Reason, take control, and thus make him a slave to his passions."[97] If it is so that Stoics are encouraged to "wage constant battle," it should follow that this is not a passive dismissal of the stimuli that would evoke an emotional reaction. Rather, it is an active, involved rejection of external influence in the form. If one is able to combat these inclinations effectively, he or she is then able to arrive at a state that is unfettered, reminiscent of the realm of *otium*: "...detachment from the world and from the passions that stir it runs parallel with the attraction to a withdrawn life and with the elevation of *otium* to a supreme value..."[98] We can see rather clearly that emotional detachment is an imperative for the *sapiens*; however, it is also evident that this goal is only attainable with a considerable amount of effort. This effort must be directed in engagement with the sage's surroundings inasmuch as he must recognize those situations that would bring him to emit an emotional response—quotidian obligations, interpersonal interactions, joys, despairs, even his own mortality—in order that he may equipped to deal with the onslaught that would cloud his mind and impair his ability to react reasonably and rationally. Considering this, numbness, the result of a disengaged avoidance behavior that prevents assessment and subsequent determination of action, is a serious danger to the sensibilities of the *sapiens*. In order to demonstrate Seneca's acknowledgment of this important issue, I will examine a passage of *De breuitate uitae* in which he calls to mind the barbaric excesses of the executions put on by Pompey Magnus. Here, we will find that Seneca has discovered the primary fault to be the lack of perception wrought by the numbness of the Roman general and his audience.

[97] Shelton 427
[98] Conte 415

Earlier in the thirteenth chapter of *De breuitate uitae*, Seneca has concerned himself with the criticism of useless knowledge; however, as he begins to discuss awareness of Pompey's place of primacy in instituting the practice of pitting men against beasts in the Circus, there appears to be a cognitive shift. He decides to segue into a brief rant of sorts, maligning the decision to host such spectacles as distinctly inhumane (*rei minime humanae*.)[99] He says in reference to Pompey, *princeps civitatis et inter antiquos principes, ut fama tradidit, bonitatis eximiae memorabile putauit spectaculi genus novo more perdere homines. 'depugnant?' parum est. 'lancinantur?' parum est: ingenti mole animalium exterantur* ("Chief among the citizenry and amongst the chiefs of old, when he has surrendered to renown, (a man) of remarkable integrity has contrived a memorable brand of spectacle: to kill men in a new way. 'Do they fight each other?' That is not enough. 'Are they mangled?' Not enough—they are crushed beneath the enormous burden of animals.").[100] The reiteration of *princeps* here cannot, I believe, be overlooked as a possible veiled expression of Seneca's own displeasure with the principate; however, it also hearkens to the idea of one who is in a position of some ostensible utility to the public. For this reason, we should be reminded of the duty of the *sapiens* to be of service to the state, yet Pompey as he is herein represented does not fit the parameters Seneca would prescribe in this instance, so this contrast is particularly important to the reader's understanding of the correct way to examine this situation. If we consider the quoted material that Seneca has included as genuine prosopopoeia,[101] then we find an interesting scenario. The verbs *depugnant*, *lancinantur*, and *exterantur* are not technically part of a *tricolon crescens*, yet the obvious escalation of the savagery of the display in conjunction with the anaphoric *parum est* brings into stark focus the point Seneca is attempting to illustrate. In order to slake the lust of the audience

[99] *De breu.* XIII.vii
[100] *Op. cit.* XIII.vi
[101] See Williams *De breuitate uitae* XIII.vi*n*

for violence and gore, Pompey must decide how far to push the progression of events, eventually concluding that each preceding option is just simply not enough (*parum est*) to captivate them.

What has resulted in this insatiable appetite for death? If we look just a few lines before this passage, we discover that the answer is an ongoing exposure to the utmost limits of human mortality. Roman audiences in this scenario are not only comfortable with such scenes, they are numb to them. These displays enable them to witness the bounds of life and death without examination or admission of their own so that they are indeed detached from the concept, however, in a manner that is deceptive and misleading. An appropriate analogy for such overstimulation is the incessant *negotium* of the *ocupati*. As we discussed in the last chapter, the *ocupati* are prevented from meaningful and efficient interaction by their own inability to view and to comprehend the situations that occur on a daily basis and to which they continually subject themselves. Likewise, those who would revel in the opportunity to watch the scenes Seneca has painted for us have lost touch with what it is they are actually facing. They are so bombarded with stimuli that they have forgotten how to react even when presented with imagery of an instinctively abhorrent nature and thus cannot reconcile themselves to the Stoic ideal of detachment from worldly passions because they have already permitted themselves to be detached, only by passive acceptance and eventual ignorance of their state rather than by engaged and thoughtful rejection of the sway that such things would hold over them.

In effect, what has come about is the absence of reflection, the true essence of numbness. Although he is superficially discussing the immense physical size of the creatures crushing their victims, Seneca's choice of the word *mole* carries a different force here, as well. The notion of men being laden with the "burden of huge beasts" (*ingenti mole animalium*) creates an image similar to that of work animals laboring beneath the weight of the *iugum*. Taking this idea further,

if Pompey's final decision is that men are to be placed beneath this yoke, what he is determining is that it is necessary for humanity to be subdued, their rational faculties anesthetized. However, Seneca has a clear solution for this problem than can only be accessed when one has vacated to *otium*; in essence, when one has rightfully taken on the title of *sapiens*. While immersed in the calm of the *vita otiosa*, there is then time for reflection, the true remedy for all those who suffer from overstimulation of any sort, whether it be political, spectacular, or otherwise. However, it cannot simply stop here. Once contemplation has aided in freeing the mind of the fog[102] in which it was mired, it is then time to bring about effective actions in favor of or against the scenes witnessed on a daily basis. Then, and only then, can the dual nature of contemplation be completed, *quoniam ne contemplatio quidem sine actione est* ("…because contemplation is certainly not without action.").[103]

In the title of this chapter, I referenced a "vicious cycle" and how the notions of "inexperience" and "numbness" complete it. If we take the time now to reconsider each of the topics in conjunction with one another, we should have little trouble in perceiving where this cycle leads. "Philosophy" itself can almost be considered synonymous with "preoccupation"; however, it may be more accurately comparable to one of the Platonic forms. All other entanglements set aside, at its core, "philosophy" for Seneca is nothing more than just that—another distraction with which people are ironically free to occupy themselves. However, of course, it yet retains the connections to its Greek past, as well as to all of its permutations seen even in the age of Seneca, causing it all the more to become a stimulus for fruitless engagement. And it is this issue, this evolution into nothingness, that the author finds to be problematic with "preoccupation," particularly when it is cast upon one's shoulders of his own accord. While thus

[102] c.f. *caliginis mentibus*, *De breu.* XIII.vii
[103] *De ot.* V.viii

preoccupied, those hurrying about in a frantic attempt to satiate their schedules and other appetites appear to lack any real connection with the situations or people they encounter, so, coincidentally, they lack any of the experience that could be gleaned. Finally, once their minds have been subjected to such a lack of stimulation, these people find themselves numb, void of any true connection to the world around them. Wishing to fill this void, many will turn to more of the same, searching instead to fill their coffers and their bellies and a myriad other orifices, real or metaphorical. Some, though, will look to "philosophy" as a means of coping with the absence of meaning, and the cycle continues as the holes in the fabric of their lives widen and fray.

For Seneca, these are those whom he desires most to aid, to enliven. These are his Romans whom he sees on a daily basis failing to achieve their full potential. Sadly, however, empire is a bed of complacency. With much of the world already conquered and residing beneath the control of the Roman standard, what more did the citizens of this glorious city have to devote themselves to? Roman citizens, especially those of the aristocracy, would have led comfortable lives devoid of serious controversy provided they steered clear of any political intrigue. But, at this point in history, a political career meant fealty and relatively close proximity to a maddening emperor with no signs of immediate reprieve save for the occasional whispered conspiracy. Rather than attempting to alter the situation at Rome, though, most seemed perfectly content to go about their lives uninterrupted and undeterred.

Seneca would not give up so easily, though. For a Stoic in Neronian Rome, the city herself could have been a perfect illustration of the all-encompassing cosmopolis. Discounting even the bounds of her empire, Rome played home to an unimaginable plethora of people and ideas, many of which may have owed their presence there to the indomitable ambitions of her

citizenry. Accordingly, it should follow good reason that, if the determination of these people could build this microcosm of the Universal City, then it should also possess the ability to set it aright once more.

Before the foundations of a properly "literary" tradition are laid at Rome, what existed there was a permeable "music" culture that relied heavily on outside influence; however, "[b]y importing outsiders, the aristocrats who fostered the development of Musaic culture effectively guaranteed that it would be their unique possession."[104] Even though the possessive adjective "their" used by Habinek here most likely refers to members of the aristocracy, the fact of the matter is that what eventually transpired—the birth of Latin literature—belonged to all Roman citizens. They and all who would come after them would be joint heirs to a tradition that had been tempered by perhaps not as many centuries as their Greek counterparts, but certainly by more cultural input than they could ever make a claim to. For Rome had engulfed the world body and soul, and its soul, comprised of all the collective knowledge and artistry of all nations, provided the fuel for Roman literary innovation.

I sought to make it clear in the Introduction that, without the appropriate voice, there would be no receptive audience. And throughout the course of this thesis I have tried to demonstrate how exactly Seneca does appropriate such a voice as to be perfectly understandable to the Romans of his day. It is now, when we have reached the end of this analysis, that we see that Seneca is actually involved in the same kind of imperialist actions as those who originated Latin literature. In the beginning, it is well known that Umbrian, Oscan, Etruscan, and certainly the Greeks all contributed to the development of the Latin language and its forms of expression, yet such an estimation leaves the Romans of that era too passive in their pursuit of a cultural identity. What they did, in fact, was harvest from their conquests all the choice fruits of their

[104] Habinek 38

linguistic labors, creating a mode of speaking—a language—that fit the needs of this imperious and industrious people. However, during the lifetime of Seneca the Younger, the Romans had distanced themselves to some extent from that past. As said before, in lieu of revolutionary action on their part, the majority of Roman citizens seemed happy to go about their lives uncontested. What these people become, then, are strangers to their own land—not just the city herself, but to the entire institution that was and had been Rome. Nonetheless, this was not a deterrent for Seneca. For those disenfranchised in self-imposed exile from their fatherland, Seneca made the same plan as his forebears: to assimilate them. Like the fathers of Latin literature, Seneca annexes the language of these outsiders, these Romans who have strayed, using it to his own devices in a manner that they can comprehend. Thus, with the full versatility of the Latin language at his command, Seneca seeks to call these wayfarers back to a Rome of peace, prosperity, and public involvement, hoping such a familiar voice may help lead them home.

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