

The Materiality of the Voice in Stoic Thought and Seneca's Personae of Claudius

Seneca's portrayal of Claudius' inarticulate speech in the *Apocolocyntosis* requires explanation, because it differs from the presentation of the same emperor's eloquence in the dialogue *Ad Polybium de consolatione*. In this paper, I analyze Seneca's use of imperial prosopopoeia in three texts, specifically, *Ad Polybium de consolatione*, *Apocolocyntosis*, and *De clementia*, in order to clarify his shifting views with respect to Claudius and Nero. Drawing on Stoic linguistic theory, I demonstrate that Seneca employed different literary styles in order to illustrate varying states of animality, humanity, and divinity in the imperial persona he adopts in each passage.

My argument advances previous scholarship on Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* by linking his representation of Claudius' monstrous form (Braund and James, 1989) and his inhuman voice (Osgood, 2007) to Seneca's Stoicism. First, to develop a Stoic theory of the voice (cf. Frede, 1987), I refer to Diogenes Laertius' account of the Stoic system (7.38-160). In one passage, Diogenes invokes several Stoic authorities to confirm that, "according to the Stoics, the voice is a body" (καὶ σῶμα δ' ἐστὶν ἡ φωνὴ κατὰ τοὺς Στωϊκοὺς, 7.55); he distinguishes the human voice from animal voices insofar as the latter consist only of "air struck with an impulse" (ἀήρ ὑπὸ ὀρμῆς πεπληγμένος), while the former is "articulate and expressed from reasoning" (ἔναρθρος καὶ ἀπὸ διανοίας ἐκπεμπομένη). As the passive, material medium of speech, the human voice is governed by the active soul's "phonetic part" (τὸ φωνητικὸν μῶριον, 7.157), so that the material medium reveals the difference between animals generally and the rational animal in particular.

Comparison of Diogenes Laertius' summary of the Stoic system with relevant passages from three of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* (40, 100, and 114) reveals moreover a Senecan theory of the voice. Seneca suggests that writing can make that person present to another (40.1); that,

however imperfectly, the singular voice of that person manifests in writing, even in the spacing which Latin texts preserve to indicate pacing (40.11); that the voice inscribed in a text, just as an individual's habitual gait (40.14, 114.3), reveals the character of his soul (100.14). Especially in letter 114 Seneca criticizes the vicious, "effeminate" style which sometimes comes into prominence, introducing Maecenas as the negative exemplar of such a style in writing and speech, dress and gait, character and corrupted nature. Thus Seneca—just as Diogenes, for whom the characters of the alphabet just are the elements of vocal utterance (7.56-57)—held that texts could preserve the voice, so that writing and speaking alike demonstrate the nature of the soul acting upon these passive media.

Finally, I turn to specific passages in which Seneca employs imperial personae, focusing on the emperor Claudius and using Seneca's personae of Augustus and Nero only for comparison. Seneca's prosopopoeia in his *Ad Polybium de consolatione* assimilates the emperor Claudius' voice to a divine oracle (14.2-16.3; cf. also *De clementia* 1.2-5). One scholar has analyzed the style of this passage, examining whether an attempt was made to reflect Claudius' actual manner of writing (Hijmans, 1991); no attempt has been made to link Claudius' manner of writing to his speaking, his gait, and his existential comportment. I show that in the *Ad Polybium* Claudius' voice as divine, so that his commands become immediate realities, more real in their consequences than the sequence of historical events (e.g., 13.2-3). By contrast, Seneca casts Claudius' voice in the *Apocolocyntosis* (4.3, 7.4-5) as essentially subhuman (Eden, 1984; Freudenberg, 2015), revising his presentation of Claudius as a "Stoic god" in the *Ad Polybium* by emphasizing similarities between Claudius' inhuman physique and the circularity of that Stoic god in the *Apocolocyntosis* (8.1-3). Comparing Claudius' prosody, style, rhetorical figures, and diction with those same features employed in the speeches of Hermes (3.1-2), Apollo (4.1),

Hercules (5.2-4), Zeus and Dispatet (9.1-5), and Augustus (10.1-11.5), I conclude that Seneca uses Claudius' voice to imply its active, material resistance rendering the "phonetic part" of Claudius' soul viciously passive, thus differentiating superhuman virtue from subhuman vice.

Works Cited

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