

Identifying the Epistolary in Seneca's Tragedies  
 CAMWS 2022 - Winston-Salem – March 24th  
 Kate Melberg Ph.D. Candidate – University of Wisconsin-Madison

1. Altman's Polarities of the Letter

- a. Bridge/barrier
- b. Confiance/ non-confiance
- c. Writer/reader
- d. I/you, here/there, now/then
- e. Closure/overture; discontinuation/continuation of writing
- f. Unit/unity; continuity/discontinuity; coherence//fragmentation (Altman, 186-7)

2. *Epistulae Morales* 75

Minus tibi accuratas me epistulas mitti quereris. Quis enim accurate loquitur, nisi qui vult putide loqui? Qualis sermo meus esset, si una sederemus aut ambularem, inlaboratus et facilis, tales esse epistulas meas volo, quae nihil habent accersitum nec fictum.

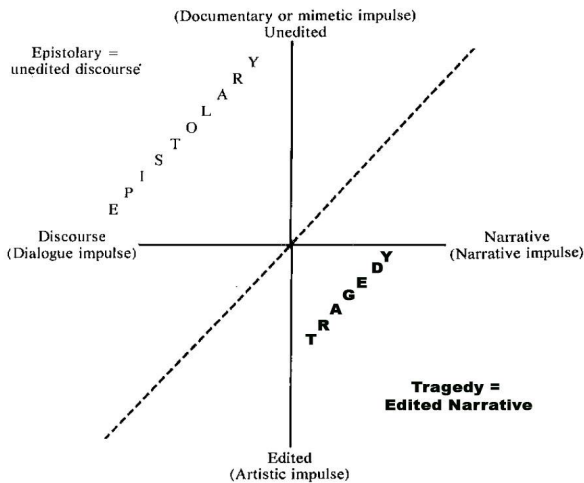
You have been complaining that my letters to you are rather carelessly written. Now who talks carefully unless he also desires to talk affectedly? I prefer that my letters should be just what my conversation would be if you and I were sitting in one another's company or taking walks together — spontaneous and easy; for my letters have nothing strained or artificial about them.<sup>1</sup>

3. Seneca. *Hercules Furens* 1-9

Soror Tonantis—hoc enim solum mihi nomen relictum est—semper alienum Iovem ac templa summi vidua deserui aetheris, locumque caelo pulsa paelicibus dedi; tellus colenda est, paelices caelum tenent. hinc Arctos alta parte glacialis poli sublime classes sidus Argolicas agit; hinc, qua recenti vere laxatur dies, Tyriae per undas vector Europae nitet;

Sister of the Thunder God: this is the only title left to me. Wife no more, I have abandoned ever-unfaithful Jove and the precincts of high heaven; driven from the skies, I have given up my place to his concubines. I must dwell on earth; concubines inhabit the skies. Over here is the Bear, that lofty constellation high in the frozen North, a lodestar for Greek fleets. Here, where the daylight waxes in early spring, shines the one that carried Tyrian Europa across the waves.

4. Edited version of Altman's chart (1982, p. 210)



<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own.

5. Seneca.*Hercules Furens*, 118-124

...hic prosit mihi  
Iove esse genitum, stabo at, ut certo exeant  
emissa nervo tela, librabo manu,  
regam furentis arma, pugnanti Herculi  
tandem favebo — scelere perfecto licet  
admittat illas genitor in caelum manus.  
Movenda iam sunt bella: clarescit dies  
ortuque Titan lucidus croceo subit.

Let it be of use to me that this one  
is the son of Jove, I will stand by, and so that these sent  
out arrows fly from a certain string I will balance them by  
hand, I will guide the weapons of the mad man, and  
Hercules fighting  
I'll at last protect – suitably for this perfect crime.  
Let the father admit those hands to the heavens.  
Now this war must be waged: the day grows clear  
and the shining Titan descends below the crocusey dawn.

### Works Cited

- Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Ohio State University Press, 1982.
- Fitch, John G. *Seneca*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Hijmans, B. L. "Drama in Seneca's Stoicism." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 97, 1966, pp. 237–251.
- Kohn, Thomas D. *The Dramaturgy of Senecan Tragedy*. University of Michigan Press, 2013.
- Rimell, Victoria. *Seeing Tongues, Hearing Scripts: Orality and Representation in the Ancient Novel*. Barkhuis & Groningen University, 2007.
- Segal, Charles. *Language and Desire in Seneca's Phaedra*. Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Trinacty, Christopher. "Seneca's Heroides: Elegy in Seneca's Medea." *The Classical Journal*, vol. 103, no. 1, 2007, pp. 63–78.