

Seneca's Book 6

The paper finds in book 6 of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* (letters 53-62; henceforth EM6) pervasive intertexts with *Aeneid* 6 (A6). Alongside the familiar intertexts between A6 and both the nekylia in Lucan 6 and Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*, this would mark a third large-scale act of reception of A6 in Neronian literature.

EM6 contains two pairs of citations to A6. In letter 53/6.1 S. mock-heroically narrates a sea voyage in bad weather from Naples to Puteoli, culminating in a nauseated S. jumping from the boat and swimming to shore. Two half-lines from the beginning and end of A.6 are cited (6.3 and 6.901). Letter 59/6.7 opens and closes with citations of A6 (278-79, 513-14). Since 60-62 are a connected series of extremely short letters, forming a pendant to EM6, these pairs of Virgilian citations effectively ring EM6, just as the former pair rings A6.

Besides these overt references, reference to A6 has long been seen (Motto and Clark, Henderson) in letter 55, in which S. has been carried by litter from Cumae (!) to the villa of Servilius Vatia, situated between the coast and the lacus Acherusius. Clearly, this location, hard by lacus Avernus, lends Virgilian coloring to S.'s depiction of Vatia's luxurious retirement as a kind of living death. The paper proposes in particular the following further passages as intertextual loci: S's banter with the gubernator in 53 recalls Aeneas' apostrophe to Palinurus at end of A5, with the man overboard inverted. In 54/6.2 S. reports a nearly fatal attack of his chronic asthma; the paper sees in *ipsa suffocatione* (54.3) a symbolic, naturalized catabasis. S. reports himself reflecting on death during the attack, which he calls *meditatio mortis*, recalling Aeneas' words to the Sibyl (6.103-05, themselves an epic appropriation of the philosophical therapeutic technique.)

In 57 S. returns from Baiae to Naples; his passage through the famous crypta Neapolitana, a literally subterranean iter, leads to reflection on the soul and its possible survival of bodily death. In the final letter, 62, S. recommends philosophical otium as against political engagement; even when occupied with civil duties, he thinks of “the best men of every time and place.” A single exemplary figure is named in preference to the Important Persons of the court: Demetrius the Cynic (exiled by Nero in 66 CE). The paper sees here a corrective reference to the Heldenschau at the end of A6: political greatness demoted in favor of the autarky and integrity of philosophy.

The paper extracts three interpretive consequences from Seneca’s engagement with A6: first, that throughout the book hedonistic leisure is thereby figured as a kind of living death; second, that the philosophical preparation for death is figured by travel to and from the underworld, that to overcome the fear of death *hoc opus, hic labor est*; third, that there is a stark political provocation inherent in the demotion of Roman and Julio-Claudian heroes on the part of a central figure in the late Julio-Claudian court.

Literature Cited

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