

Fortuna as Adversary in Seneca's Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales

Seneca's *Epistulae* feature a kind of militarized morality of resistance in their treatment of the concept of *fortuna*. Fortune wages war against the aspiring *sapiens* (*fortuna mecum bellum gerit*, *Ep.* 51.8) and the philosophically inclined can shore up their defenses by the cultivation of *virtus* (*sapiens quidem vincit virtute fortunam*, *Ep.* 71.30). By surrounding *fortuna* with metaphors for war and violence in his letters, Seneca makes the Stoic's struggle for equanimity in the face of misfortune something relatable to a reader familiar with the rhetoric of war.

I draw on research that focuses on *fortuna* in Stoic philosophy (Arnold, 1911; Gould, 1974; Bobzein, 1985), on *fortuna* in Roman poetry (Canter, 1922) and society (Patch, 1922; Robinson, 1946), as well as work done on Seneca's letters and wider prose corpus (Coleman, 1974; Lavery, 1980; Asmis, 2009; Bartsch, 2009).

In this paper, I argue that Seneca uses war imagery and metaphor to cast *fortuna* as an adversary to man, and especially to the wise man. I build my argument from specific declarations within the letters that situate *fortuna* as an opposing force in a conflict (as above, from *Ep.* 51.8 and 71.30), and also on the repeated and consistent use of language commonly associated with war in Roman literature, especially in the histories. Seneca effectively arms *fortuna* when he repeats the phrase *tela fortunae*, the weapons of fortune, in *Ep.* 8.26, 18.12, and 104.22. He also uses a military term more commonly found in the writings of historians to refer to the assaults of fortune, *fortunae incursionibus* (*Ep.* 67.14); *incursio* is rarely used in a philosophical context, appearing outside the letters in Seneca's own *Dialogi* and *De Beneficiis*, and in two Ciceronian philosophical treatises, *De Finibus* and *De Natura Deorum*. Moreover, Seneca demonstrates the dangers of *fortuna* in terms of fortification: while philosophy must act as an impenetrable defensive wall (*inexpugnabilis murus*, *Ep.* 82.5), whether or not *fortuna* is able to breach that

wall depends entirely on the internal fortifications of the individual. While *fortuna* can cause misfortunes to “breach” these “walls” (*nullus autem contra fortunam inexpugnabilis murus est, Ep. 74.19*), the internal defenses (*intus instruamur, Ep. 74.19*) of philosophy can protect the wise person, since *fortuna* cannot effectively pass these barriers (*philosophia circumdanda est, inexpugnabilis murus, quem fortuna multis machinis lacessitum non transit, Ep. 82.5*). I analyze these and similar examples of war imagery and metaphor in the *Epistulae* to explore how, by juxtaposing battle diction and Stoic morality, Seneca characterizes *fortuna* as a dangerous foe which the virtuous Roman must fight.

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