Visualization, Emotions, and Understanding in Senecan *Exempla*

The use of *exempla*, or models for contemplation, is a frequent trope in Roman literature. As Mayer (2008) and others have noted, we find "an all-pervasive tendency among the Romans to seek out what was best in any department and turn it into a pattern for imitation, and if possible emulation" (300). Yet in the letters of Seneca what is striking is not merely the frequency of his use of *exempla* but the variety of their form: not all are positive role models, and he exhorts his reader that even those that initially seem positive must be carefully scrutinized (e.g., *Ep*. 120.8-9). While particular kinds of Senecan *exempla* have been addressed by scholars (e.g., Star 2012, Graver 2007), most of these accounts have focused on positive *exempla*, and these analyses are difficult to extend across the full range of Seneca's use. In my paper, I create a typology of Senecan *exempla*, and then examine the pedagogical function of those types in order to elucidate the complex relationship for Seneca between visualization, emotions, and understanding.

Ep. 120, in which Horatius' bravery at the Pons Sublicius (*Ep*. 120.7-8) holds before us a "picture of virtue" (*imaginem ... virtutis*), provides an excellent illustration of Seneca's use of positive historical figures as *exempla.* In the letter Seneca does not make explicit how this visualization is useful for us, but given that Seneca goes on to note that the minds of men are prone to wandering and changing (*Ep*. 120.22) it appears that such pictures aid us "in focusing our attention and helping to distinguish those features which constitute goodness" (Inwood 2005, 300). However, this explanation does not easily apply to a second distinct kind of *exemplum*, the kind in which Seneca suggests that we should imagine that morally exemplary man watching *us* as we live our lives – in effect, making the watched into watchers, and vice versa, in a virtuous cycle (e.g., *Ep*. 11.8, 25.5). Furthermore, it is not merely positive *exempla* that we are meant to

keep before our minds' eye. A third kind of visualization, which I argue should be considered alongside the positive *exempla*, is provided by the numerous negative figures (e.g., *Ep*. 56.7, *Ep*. 94.66-69, *Ep*. 99.13) whom Seneca exhorts Lucilius to behold (*aspice*) and judge. Finally, I consider Seneca's presentation of the self (e.g., *Ep.* 83.2) as an entity to be observed and critiqued by itself (cf. Edwards 1997, Bartsch 2006), perhaps with the goal of eventually becoming a positive *exemplum* for others (cf. *Ep*. 98.13: *nos quoque aliquid et ipsi faciamus animose; simus inter exempla*).

Scholars have explained some of these acts of visualization as reinforcing our *constantia* (cf. Star 2012), and the act of imagining being watched ourselves as engaging a remorse and shame that are useful for our "ethical therapy" (Graver 2007, 192; 208-211), yet few accounts of the affective or therapeutic function of *exempla* account for their manifold nature. After outlining the variety of *exempla* and organizing them based on their principal features (as positive or negative, and according to the degrees of embedded visualization), I can address my core question: how can we explain Seneca's use of *exempla* in a fashion that is consistent with Stoic principles? Consider, for example, the criticism of Plutarch, that Stoics call forth emotional responses as a part of their pedagogical method in violation of their commitment to *apatheia* (Plutarch, *On Moral Virtue* 452c-d). Building on the work of Graver (2007) and DeLacy (1948), I argue that Plutarch is right to say that emotional responses are a part of the Stoic pedagogical system, at least as seen in Senecan *exempla*, but that such emotions can be construed as analogues in the non-wise to *eupatheiai* – the properly affected responses of the wise. Furthermore, the frequent intersection in Seneca's letters between acts of viewing and the emotions suggests that these *eupatheiai* analogues are not merely present, but are critical to the function of Seneca's Stoic pedagogy. Thus, when the varied uses of *exempla* are considered

together rather than separated out, the intersection between Seneca's interests in emotions, perceptions, and knowledge becomes apparent.

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