

## On the Use of Images as Paedagogical Tools in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*

Although Seneca's teaching methods in the *Epistulae Morales* have been widely written on (Griffin 2007, Inwood 2007, Schafer 2011), his use of the book as a distinct compositional unit and its effect on his pedagogy has been neglected.

In this paper, using the narratological concepts of immersion, defamiliarization, epitome, and ekphrasis, I will address the usage of 'guiding images' in the composition of the first book of Seneca's letters. Although epitome and ekphrasis are well established concepts in classical scholarship, I believe my usage of defamiliarization, which I derive from Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists, and immersion, which I derive from Allan and Ryan, will add a modern approach to the study of Seneca's epistolography.

I will argue that Seneca through the first book of the *Epistulae* engages stock imagery from the Roman consciousness, but uses distinct and vivid tableaux as 'guiding images' intended to stick in the reader's mind as helpful and memorable encapsulations of the main points of the book. Furthermore, I will argue that Seneca arranged the letters in such a way that the 'guiding images' fall at relatively equal intervals, creating a rising and falling action which culminates in Letter 12, the final letter of the first book. Through this organization, Seneca holds the attention of his reader and through the distinctness of the 'guiding images' creates *aides memoire* for his reader.

I will focus on Letters 4, 7, and 12 at length. I will argue that Letter 4 offers the first 'height' and 'guiding image', as it is preceded by three letters which do not feature any imagery distinct from stock Roman usage. I will discuss the descriptions of reversals of social position from section 6 to 9, as well the description of a ship-wreck, utilizing the concept of defamiliarization.

Letter 7 follows two letters similarly without ‘guiding images’. With this letter, I will discuss the gladiatorial scene, vividly and shockingly described by Seneca, utilizing the concepts of immersion and defamiliarization.

Finally, I will argue Letter 12 encapsulates the book as a whole and features the most distinct and immersive imagery present in the entire book. In this letter, Seneca describes visiting a villa that he built in his youth and the feelings he has upon seeing it, in his old age, crumbling and in decline. Using the concept of immersion, I will argue that Letter 12, the only letter in the book featuring a first person narrative, functions as a strong capstone to the book as a whole, summarizing the arguments of the book and epitomizing them in a single memorable scene.

### Bibliography

- R.J. Allan, ‘Narrative immersion. Some linguistic and narratological aspects’, *Experience, Narrative, and Criticism in Ancient Greece: Under the Spell of Stories*, eds. Grethlein, Huitink, and Tagliabue. Oxford, 2020.
- Cermatori, Linda. “The Philosopher as Craftsman: A Topos Between Moral Teaching and Literary Production”, *Seneca Philosophus*, eds. Wildberger and Colish. De Gruyter, 2014.
- Gibson, Roy. “On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections”, *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 102, 2012.
- Griffin, Miriam. *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*. Oxford, 1976.
- Griffin, Miriam. “Seneca’s Pedagogic Strategy: *Letters* and *De Beneficiis*”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, no. 94, 2007.

Inwood, Brad. "The Importance of Form in Seneca's Philosophical Letters", *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography*, eds. Morello and Morrison. Oxford, 2007.

Leeman, A.D. "Seneca's Plans for a Work 'Moralis Philosophia' and their Influence on his Later Epistles", *Mnemosyne* vol. 6, 1953.

Ryan, M-L. *Narrative as Virtual Reality. Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Johns Hopkins, 2001.

Schafer, John. "Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* as Dramatized Education", *Classical Philology*, vol. 106, no.1, 2011.

Shklovsky, Victor. *A Reader*, ed and translated Berlin. Bloomsbury, 2016.

Wildberger, Jula. "The Epicurus Trope and the Construction of a "Letter Writer" in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*", *Seneca Philosophus*, eds. Wildberger and Colish. De Gruyter, 2014.