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**Seneca on Poetic Images and Aesthetic
Experience**

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Generally speaking, Stoic aesthetics tells us very little about the nature of poetic images and aesthetic experience. The only available information is several isolated fragments from the variety of schools in the Hellenistic period that lack consistency. It can be said, however, that Seneca falls outside this generalization; although his writings do not contain any treatise on poetic images, the letter 56¹ contains self-referential poetic images and, also a poetic experience for building up his view on the aesthetics of poetry. In what follows, Seneca's view of the nature of poetic images, and aesthetic experience will be discussed. I argue that central to his own experience, Seneca refers to the poetic images of Ulysses and Aeneid to build up his self-image. I shall confine my discussion on Seneca's aesthetics of poetry to ethics, epistemology and therapeutical issues, within the wider issue of the personal-historical context.

Building Up the Problem

Stoics in general hold that the proper nature of poetry lies in its ethical-epistemological value that extends its claim for ethics. Poetry should be didactic, serving for the aim of knowledge and higher moral concerns². A particular example is from Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*³. In the *Hymn*, Cleanthes symbolically teaches the principle of the ever-permeating divine logos with the allegory of the gods of the Greek pantheon. The allegorical representation serves the teachings of the Stoic physics, followed by the universal claims about human nature, i.e law of conformity; the sufferers are those who do not live in accordance to their rational nature and nature in general. The head of the early Stoa, Cleanthes resorted to dramatic representations in tragedies. He was said to have written on art, on Homer, teaching the ethical principles of the Stoics. Likewise, Chrysippus, could not write any treatise without copying a word from a dramatist or Homer in order to expose the contrast between the state of wisdom and irrationality⁴. Images of such are like photographic shots, present for the mind of those who are concerned.

In short, allegorizing through poetic images is an alternative source to instruct readers not only on the perception of the truth or the images of the divine, but also human, what is morally wrong or ethically unacceptable and what is in accordance to reason or not. Allegory is also popular among the thinkers of Roman tradition. In the education of the soul, the Stoics of Roman tradition, especially Epictetus resorts dramatic representation of the well-known characters in tragedies. He continuously cites from Medea's emotions to discuss the fragility of human soul the tragic heroine is surrendered herself to⁵. From

there, Epictetus proceeds to create embodiment or self-identification from a distance, analogy of cases by examining the multiple emotional situations in human nature. Seneca is not an exception to the Stoic canon regarding such typical use of poetry in the education of the soul. Seneca speaks of the triviality of the liberal arts such as poetry, history math and sciences. For Seneca, liberal arts are useful and beneficial as long as they prepare the soul to virtue and that the soul is not to be engaged with them permanently. Poetry appeals to the senses, sensual pleasure, whereas philosophy is concerned with the teaching of wisdom. Like thinkers of the early Stoa, Seneca does not raise any objection as long as their subject matter resembles philosophy and therefore become indispensable tools for attaining wisdom. "See how unlike their subjects are; and yet their subjects would resemble each other if they taught the same thing"⁶. In his writings, he frequently cites from poems of Virgil and Ovid, and Homer to speak up some important principles of Stoics such as Chance, Poverty and Nature⁷. Here is a short quotation from Homer's *Ulysses* as a case study about human nature.

We ourselves encounter storms of spirit, which toss us daily and our depravity drives us into all the ills which troubled Ulysses. For there is never lacking the beauty to tempt the eyes or the enemy to assail us.....show me rather, by the example of Ulysses, how am I to love my country, my wife, my father and how, even after suffering shipwreck, I am to sail toward these ends, honorable as they are.⁸

As the quote suggest, Seneca treats Ulysses as an alternative self in whom the readers can raise the awareness of the frailty of human nature as well as the cases of wisdom. Ulysses' emotions of anger, and greed are the typical states of everyday life that each of us can encounter at any moment. Besides, Ulysses, Virgil's *Aeneid* is used as an alternative source of self, to whom a person attempts self-correction through self-interrogation as well as concrete examples of the virtuous⁹. Ulysses exemplifies the stormy nature of the soul as other regarding attitudes of love, besides the virtuous such as the love of country, family. For Seneca, such mythical figures do not lead to soul directly to virtue, 'but merely setting in that direction'.

Thinkers of the early Stoa are referred as the primary source for the proper nature of aesthetic experience¹⁰. Not only the poet, but also those who take delight in beauty should derive it from the perception of the things human and divine. The soul should form correct images. Neither is the criterion of beauty in the aesthetic experience is sought beyond the scopes of the ethical and epistemological concerns. The kind of delight one derives from the object of beauty should be the rational elevation of soul, which the Stoics call *chara*, further contrasting it with *hedone*¹¹. After all, then, rational state and the rational elevation of the soul in the process of image-making and the aesthetic experience are pre-requisites.

Although poetic or dramatic imagery is a beneficial tool for attaining moral truth in allegorizing, it does not have an independent place to attain philosophical wisdom. Philosophizing in allegory remains as the most prominent type of aesthetics of poetry, and that there is no other standard for judging the poetic experience and poetic images save that they should be produced out of the right state of soul, representing both the human and divine.

When we look at the letter 56, we see that it holds a distinctive place among the many in laying down a specific example of both poetic images, aesthetic experience as part of the education of the soul in correspondence. After a detailed discussion of his disruptive

perception of the neighborhood, the end of letter recounts an immediate shift from the prose style to poetic one, portraying Seneca's mental condition with the Virgilian hero, Aeneid. As he puts it;

"I, whom of yore no dart could cause to flee,
Nor Greeks, with crowded lines of infantry,
Now shake at every sound, and fear the air,
Both for my child and for the load I fear"¹².

The immediate shift from the prose style to the poetic discourse is suggestive to the switch of identity; likewise, the first person pronoun "I" suggests Seneca's self identification with the Virgilian hero, Aeneid. Later in the text, he immediately shifts from the first person persona "I" to the third person personae, "he" in the prose style. In his address to Lucilius, he asks him to opt for the model of self as recounted in the quotation above. "(S)elect anyone you please among your favorites of Fortune.... And you will behold a picture of Virgil's hero 'fearing both for his child and for the load he fears". What especially Seneca is trying to say about his own experience by the persona of the glorified Aeneid?

It can, thus, be argued that the word game in the shifting personae Seneca plays between two Virgilian heroes suggests the exposition of a double self in Virgilian poetry upon examining the text on lexical level. In Seneca's reference to the excerpt, the English translation of the Latin poem entails two clauses that denote two states of the "I" with the contrasting time references of the past and present. An attempt to read the lines on a more metaphorical level show us that the apparent flight of the Virgilian hero is caused by the passion of fear. The formerly fearless "I", is at present trembling with fear and is startled by every sound he hears. In the last line, Seneca further informs us about the origin of the fear in the first state. What puts Aeneid into flight the fear of the loss for the child and the burden he carries in the burning Troy. The first state of the "I" is called wisdom. The state of soul in the last two lines of the quotation exemplifies the perverted soul. In the closing paragraph of the letter, however, one can further be troubled by a contradictory confession about Seneca's state of the soul in poetic discourse, referring this time to Ulysses.

You may therefore be sure that you are at peace with yourself, when no noise reaches you; when no noise shakes you out of yourself, whether it be of flattery or of threat, or merely an empty sound buzzing about you with unmeaning din. "What, then?", you say, is it not sometimes a simpler matter just to avoid the uproar? " I admit this. Accordingly, I shall change from my present quarters. I merely wished to test myself and to give myself practice. Why need I be tormented any longer, when Ulysses found so simple a cure for his comrades, even against the songs of Sirens?"¹³

Seneca implies that the self-identification in poetic images is simply a test; a practice he willingly takes, which however, an easy road to take against self-torment; the image of the traveling Ulysses exemplifies another scene where the soul stumbles between the perverted soul in flight and wisdom. The self-referential image in Ulysses suggests us another witty , though ambiguous, game to explain his own situation; for Ulysses not only stops the ears of his comrades with wax but also bids them row past the sirens. A profitable flight against self-torment. Having evaluated his own experience both as a flight from the turbulence and a practice which he tests his own progress, Seneca creates

an ambiguity regarding both the nature of the self-referential poetic images as well as the aesthetic experience.

In the light of the former discussion on the nature of poetry it can be argued that the ambiguity in the self-assessment in the self-referential poetic images and aesthetic experience can be discussed with reference to three issues; the first is the epistemological-ethical assessment of the images and the process of image making as a supplement to the nature of poetic images and aesthetic experience in *letter 56*. The second is the Stoic therapeutic concerns in which Seneca as a *proficiens*, the progressing self, discusses some strategies as a means to self-control. Both issues are to be examined within the personal historical context in and out of the text. Why is there a need to shift from prose style, to poetry for self-identification? And finally, what do these contradictory claims tell us about the nature of poetic images and aesthetic experience?

Theoretical Considerations on Self: art of image-making as forming judgments

Seneca's ethical letters and essays contain a lot of discussion on passions as symptoms of the perverted love of self, literally translated as *amor-sui*. The composition of flight is typical examples of vicious self-identifications. Such false self-identifications are by products of perverted natural instinct of seeking praise and love.

New occupations take the place of old, hope leads to new hope ambition to new ambition. They do not seek an end to their wretchedness, but change the cause¹⁴.

The perverted self, likewise, exchanges one face with another, as the old pursuits are reconstructed themselves with new ones. If the self feels a threat or fails to be praiseworthy in his present role he/she hopes to attain it with some other sorts of pursuits. The self is left unsatisfied as his/her wishes remain unattained. In an endless chain of image-making, one could observe a profitable flight that guards the self from facing the insignificance of his existence, instead of a brave endurance of frustration. The flight of the self is instigated by either unattained desires, fear of a loss or excessive longing for something that initiates the fear of some sort. For Seneca, none but the sage could possess genuine, total ownership and consistency of self. "Believe me, it is a great role- to play the role of one man. But often nobody can be one person except the wise man. The rest of us often shift our masks¹⁵."

Behind the continuous shift of faces or personae as a sign of perverted love of self, there lies the cognitive process of forming false judgments, followed by an image making. Let us have a brief outlook to the theoretical account of image making as self-shaping(*fingerere*) as a preliminary to the discussion on judgment forming in perverted self.

Right from the beginning, Seneca argues that such a skill of self-shaping develops out of natural proclivity in human beings which starts even at the most primitive stage. The embryonic self consists of two concomitant acts of self-preservation and self-perception; as the organism gets to know first of all to its own bodily conditions, and develop behaviors to maintain its own constitution. By principle, in explaining the nature of the love of self in terms of two acts, Seneca's love of self is derived from the term *oikeionon*, the main Stoic notion of self, originally developed first by Chrysippus, the third head of Stoics. "The first impulse of all animals is self-preservation (*proton oikeionon*) and consciousness of this"¹⁶. For Seneca too, each animal/ young infant is instinctively driven to preserve and to protect, and at the same time gets to know about their constitution.

Specific examples are given from the animal kingdom as proofs for both for the behavior of self-preservation and self-perception such as the hen and the tortoises. The presentiment of harm and the advantageous suggest that the animals' preservation of their constitution simultaneously unfolds the process of self perception¹⁷.

The very structure of image-making as self-shaping at the most primitive stage is rather value laden and confined only to simple physical acts of self-preservation, which the human infant instinctively feels and obeys; the self happens to know the objects as an extension to his/her own being as they spontaneously bring the instinctive knowledge of pain and pleasure. For Seneca, the self, even at this stage is both like an artist and a logician. He uses the metaphor of the painter who paints his canvas with pictures; in the similar way, the living organisms develop multiple behaviors to protect themselves in accordance to their perception of themselves and of their environment¹⁸.

The higher forms of perception in later stages also presuppose more complex forms of self-shaping and an artistic skill to do so. Seneca draws the picture of the rational self-love with an emphasis on the concern for self-worth, marking its beginning with the conscious pursuit of what is advantageous, pleasurable and what is death-dealing both in human relations and in the goods they possess.

But each age has its own constitution, different in the case of a child, the boy and the old man. They all get familiar to the constitution wherein they find themselves. Thus, although each has at different times a different constitution, getting familiar to each constitution is the same....First of all, the living being gets familiar to itself, for there must be a pattern to which all other things may be referred. I strive for the pleasant. For whom? For myself. I seek safety from pain: on behalf of whom? Myself. I therefore care for my self. Since I gauge all my actions with reference to my own welfare, I love myself before all else¹⁹.

Regardless to age, each gets to know his/her own constitution in the non-changing pattern of love of self. Regarding the human relations, in the rational state, the "I" cannot love without loving the others onto whom it transforms itself as the beloved; it is primarily concerned with getting the worship and the praise of others by assessing to what extent he/she is praiseworthy in the eyes of the others²⁰. From that standpoint, the self displays an innate liking, followed by the felt pleasure or displeasure upon a threat. As a venture for praise, the self also discloses a need for self-guarding; to preserve the proper sources of self-worth by seeking safety from a threat and destruction. For Seneca, this is the main reason why "Nature produce us related to one another, since she created us for the same source and to the same end. She engendered us mutual affection, and made us prone to friendships. She establishes fairness and justice among us²¹." Again, it is by the natural instinct of self love which is mutually present, that the self considers "victory, good children, the welfare of one's country,²² and parental love as good²³.

As for the idea of self-knowing as self-shaping as the basis of image-making, it can be argued that each self provides the sources from another selves by shaping one another primarily by the principle of mutual attraction; they provide a standard value, instigating several pursuits, and deeds as good and condemning some others as evil. The selves provide and determine the norms for the roles that reinforce praiseworthy or socially unaccepted identities for one another²⁴. Driven by the natural inclination to be praised, each self moulds itself by the personae he/she admires and knows themselves as, which at the same time, meets the common approval of the public.

In the light of these theoretical discussion on the rational love of self, it is no wonder that the higher forms of perception and image-making is in fact embedded in a very subjective outlook, i.e self perception and forming judgments as self-shaping (*fingere*)²⁵, so is the case for *imagines*, the Latin translation of the Greek term, *Phantasia* which is the starting point of the cognitive process.

Right at the beginning, the self has the potential to be inclined to perversion, regarding the higher forms of self-perception as self shaping. The *images/notiones* can elevate the soul either in rational and the irrational way. The former, as the most Stoics argue, is a rare case and that the majority of men cannot fulfill their nature as rational beings. The irrational elevation of self is instigated and followed by a false pleasure or the expectation of pain; as the self gains awareness of its rational constitution and the principle of the love of self, it begins to perceive the other things and people by attaching value to them which reflects his/her own worth.

Every living thing, possessed of reason is inactive if it is not first stimulated by some external impression; then the impulse comes and finally assent confirms the impulse. Now what assent is, I shall explain. "It is appropriate that I walk: then I walk, whenever I said I said this to myself and approving the opinion of mine"²⁶.

One can read this three-staged mental act as a concrete example of what Seneca means by reasoning constitution. Here rational love of self is associated with a series of mental functions such as that assenting to impression, followed by opinion-making with action—guiding force. Eventually, not all forms of *imagines* leads to the accurate self-image making. Seneca claims that in the majority of the cases, human beings are caught in self-deception or excessive love of self in their attempt of realizing their own self. Many ventures of praise and recognition in victory and glory, justice have become self-flattery due to the excessive love of self; Passions of greed, mad love of glory, anger, mourning are all perverted forms of one's measuring their self-worth and with their possession of several good such as money and jewelry²⁷. So is the case of self-love in mad love of glory. In distorted forms of seeking praise and admiration, Seneca tells us of a complex ego-centric patterns of self-love such as pretending false personae, especially when the self feels anxious due to the rivalry for the objects of love. In his preface to *Natural Questions* (4, A3) Readers are informed of further troubles one might have in the flatterer's pretense of submission upon calculating a probable injury which is beyond their power to shun. One should not expose themselves to flatterers 'as they are clever craftsman in taking over their superiors'. Wavering among multiple personae and pursuits such representations of self-love prove to be false, and slippery²⁸.

In *De Ira*, Seneca's discussion on the passion of anger is a concrete example of a perverted judgment due to excessive love of self. Ever since the self holds the opinion of an official title as good, he/she wishes to be flattered by the others by holding the most influential official position in his possession. He gets envious for another's appointment of consulship since the appointed consul is regarded more praiseworthy than he actually judges himself as. Having felt short, he is driven to obtain higher position that the others to enhance their low esteem. Accordingly in Seneca's discussion of the passion of anger, we are given an account of the experience of low-esteem due to one's having high opinion of himself. Prior to erroneous reasoning, the self feels despised. As Seneca concedes, "prosperity fosters wrath when the crowd of flatterers gather around and whispers to the proud ear; what should that man answer you back?" Your estimate of yourself does not correspond with your importance; you demean yourself²⁹. Although

the passion of anger points to another person, for Seneca, it is primarily a false self-judgment which involves a perception of an injustice and injury to one's self-worth. For the person feels despised and inferior at facing the happenings contrary to his hopes and expectations. This is followed by the opinion that one ought not to be harmed, which later stimulates the desire to pay the exact penalty by inflicting injury. Perception of threat or experienced loss and unfulfilled desires can be a source of anger.

In short what follows from the discussion is that the pattern of reasoning in passions –of anger, fear, pleasure and the others underlie the natural desire for seeking praise and therefore pleasure which is blocked and already perverted, leading further desires to compensate the low esteem or pain in new forms. This lack of consistency in character is observed in the continual restlessness, dissatisfaction with oneself which is due to unattained desires, reconstructing themselves in new forms in the disguise of old ones. Let us, then, search for further self-referential textual evidence for passions in the composition of a double self in Seneca's writing.

Considerations of Personal History in Letter Writing as self-Experience

When we look at the background of the poetic images and self identification in the text, one can conclude that they have not been formed out of the right state of the soul. And thus, Seneca confesses his own mental disturbances and the wandering of soul in struggle; a lot of space is allowed to a detailed examination of the effects of the noises, coming from outside. He is disturbed by the sounds in his neighborhood. He is unable to concentrate on his studies because of the voices coming from the bathing establishment. He is even alert by the panting of the exercising man, the crack of the floor, the pickpocket or the royster's shouting. Seneca proceeds that not the voices but his emotional state makes him feel so; his leisure is not a state of tranquility but rather the state of the perverted soul as 'real tranquility is the state reached by an unperturbed mind when it is relaxed.'³⁰ The artificial retirement is a 'pretence of soundness.'³¹ In the following lines, however, Seneca tells us that the perversion that disrupts his struggle for intellectual work is his reviving ambition and greed, which has been left unsaid and unsatisfied; if he were not, his soul were not disturbed by the outward attractions. His ambition and greed "are not rooted out but 'develops afresh". As he puts it;

Men think that we are in retirement, and yet we are not. For if we have sincerely retired, and have sounded the signal of retreat, and have scorned outward attractions, then. No outward thing will distract us.³²

The French historian Paul Veyne³³ marked the date of Seneca's *letters to Lucilius* as the period following after Seneca's withdraw from the courts of Nero, at a time Seneca reluctantly took retirement from his active political life and its privileges out of the fear of being destroyed. This apparent fear of death had already suppressed the ambition and greed. The emotion of fear and the state of flight in the self-referential images in Virgilian poetry are typical examples of excessive love of self, a perverted soul. A similar attitude can be examined to his avoidance of making straightforward explanations of his own situation; instead, his soul lingers around some details that suggest that he is sensually alert, a typical example of the waning of the soul whose experience of shallow emotion deceptively glorified in the persona of a literary hero.

In another letter, one can observe a series of ups and downs in Seneca, who indirectly tells us about his restless wandering in the neighborhood amid the conflicting emotions of ambition, greed, fear and anger.

Fortune is fighting against me, and I shall not carry out her commands. I refuse to submit to the yoke; nay rather, I shake off the yoke that is upon me,- an act which demands greater courage. The soul is not to be pampered; surrendering to pleasure means also surrendering to pain, surrendering to toil, surrendering to poverty. Both ambition and anger will wish to have the same rights over me, as pleasure and I shall be torn asunder, or rather pulled to pieces. I have set freedom before my eyes; and I am striving for that reward³⁴.

The leisure Seneca has is in fact the exile through which he travels from one place to another. His chain of thought is exposed upon his lingering on certain places, i.e the mount Aetna, Vatia's villa, whose owners he comments upon much. Seneca chooses an indirect way to communicate his wandering and struggling soul. In this quotation, he speaks of his own inner struggle; he is torn apart by his wishes for soundness of mind; on the other hand, he is constantly perverted by the passion of ambition and anger, struggling for freedom from such tormenting passions.

One can examine Seneca's underlying ambition and fame in his own confessions he makes elsewhere that uncover the nature of his experience in writing. He classifies himself as *proficiens*; he does not reach the state of virtue but a developing one- a *proficiens*³⁵ and that his philosophical letters to Lucilius are a means for such an aim. The idea of writing as an exposition of self is not a novelty in Seneca's writing; in his moral letters, Seneca frequently evaluates his own writing as a self-revelatory activity³⁶ in which Lucilius and his souls are mutually (re)constructed, uncovered, and transformed into various states in their moral progress. Seneca and Lucilius not only exchange philosophical arguments but also they themselves mutually participate the attempt of attaining wisdom. The moral letters recounts the mutual progress between two correspondents. Lucilius mentions sometimes about his own experience³⁷, the lectures he has listened on certain philosophical issues, sometimes about his own friends to whom he asks for further advice and clarification of his own situation. This, is not however, a progress on one side; in many of his letters, Seneca speaks of his own state of the soul in his retirement, who is tormented by his conflicting passions of fame and ambition as he wanders from one place to another. He is sometimes unable to perceive or even confess his own situation; sometimes he is overwhelmed by his own fears, especially of death which he asks assistance from Lucilius to 'rid him of these shadowy terrors'. For far from being perfect, he evaluates his own condition as *proficiens*- progressing selves. From this perspective, letter writing as a self-revelatory activity expose the fragility of their soul in naivety in their struggle to attain wisdom by examining their own situation philosophically. In the light of the historical background, one can further argue that what makes his soul perverted, or to be more exact, what hinders his self-training is the sudden abort of his former passion that are left unsatisfied.

Besides developing oneself intellectually, perfecting his own self through self-scrutiny in literary persona, his letters uncover another striking, and yet contrasting motive of his own ambition as a writer, which is another source for the revelation of self; Seneca also longs for praise- everlasting fame and immortality in letter writing which he wants to share with Lucilius. Apart from being is a recurrent motif, the act of letter writing is the most popular form of philosophical discussion among the philosophers of the Hellenistic

tradition.³⁸ For Seneca, longing for praise, everlasting fame and love is a natural instinct, emerging from the human soul. As he puts it,

(T)hat which Epicurus promises his friend, this I promise to you. I shall find favor among later generations. I can take with me names that will endure as long as mine as Virgil promises eternal fame to the heroes... For in regard to the exceptional desires which may be postponed, which may be chastened, I have this one thought to share it with you. A pleasure of that sort, is according to our nature, but is not according to our needs³⁹.

The goal of training of the soul through philosophical correspondence apparently opposes to the goal of seeking everlasting praise and immortality. As long as we take the argument of writing as a self-revelatory activity, these two goals immediately brings us to the juxtaposition of two drives that contradict one another at the background of the poetic images and aesthetic experience in letter 56. While the former presupposes a stern experience that can hardly be classified as pleasure in ordinary sense, the latter suggests a type of an aesthetic experience that implies an irrational pleasure. The idea, however, that any kind of pleasure derived from outward thing is a vicious pleasure, or a wrong elevation of the soul since it is grounded on a false judgment.

Practical Methods of Therapy of the progressing selves in Seneca's Writing⁴⁰

Besides the written precepts for the purpose of enabling healthy relations between selves, Seneca is also concerned with giving advice for maintaining the natural disposition of the progressing selves. For those who have already learned and understood what to do and not to do cannot counted as wise until they internalize and apply what they have already learned. Especially, the weaker souls are very likely for perversion and error due to the probable state of dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction might block the vision of those to see their situation in sufficient clearness, which is an impediment to the state of virtue as well as being an unnatural state of the love of self. Seneca rejects giving consolations especially to weaker selves who already starts their moral educations, since it might cause self-pity, which is another passion they should avoid. Instead, he recommends a series of advices to sustain the natural disposition of self; these are short but effective precautions, serving as practices for strengthening the will.

A closer look at the precise examples of guidelines shows us that what Seneca means in the building up the strength of the will consists in a series of contrary movements altering between leisure and practice, withdrawal and active life in short intervals.

To consort with the crowd is harmful... Even Socrates and Cato and Laelius might have been shaken in their moral strength by a crowd that is unlike to them; so true is that none of us, no matter how much he cultivates his abilities, can resist the shock of the faults that approach, as it were a so great retinue. Much harm is done by a single case of indulgence and greed, The familiar friend, if he be luxurious, weakens and softens us imperceptibly⁴¹.

Under such cases, the best thing is to withdraw from the crowd, an effective method of exercising the self-control for the temptations of ambition, greed, wealth and money in the degenerated Roman society. In exposing themselves to the public people immediately forget their proper judging and show a blind trust to people. Even those who are claimed to be wise already, cannot help themselves being shaken.

Another important example is given from the practices of Serenus, a progressing self and correspondent of Seneca. His perversion is described as a momentary state of

forgetfulness of the principles of self-restraint to follow. In his usual practices of self-restraint, Serenus informs Seneca that he suddenly acts contrary to his will, being swept away by an outburst of lack of self-control in his practice of reading and writing at leisure. Although the act of reading and writing are intended as a practice of self-restraint, and a state of tranquility, Serenus cannot resist reshaping his own self in the illusionary model of noble and the brave figure, he comes upon in his reading⁴². Here the passion of grief and the state of dissatisfaction play an important role. Each presupposes the desire of a particular state which is left unfulfilled and shunned by Serenus. Unfulfilled desires and the state of dissatisfaction yield to the passion of ambition Serenus seeks in the literary figures, a similar experience, Seneca undergoes in letter 56.

Seneca's Aesthetic Experience and Poetic images ; the wise, the terrified soldier, or the philosopher seeking eternal fame?

In the light of these two drives in the personal history in letter writing, the therapeutical concerns in letter writing, one can then, reassess the epistemological value of the self-referential poetic images and the aesthetic experience as deeds of a perverted self and a composition of self-deception. These three underlying goals central to the cognitive process in aesthetic experience in poetry is the search for eternal fame. The other is the training practice of the *proficiens* as part of the education of the soul. One can observe a further division of motives in the latter; Seneca evaluates his self-referential poetic images as simply a flight from the present condition all of which persist in his aesthetic experience. It can be said that neither the poetic images nor the aesthetic experience fits to the category of the proper aesthetics of poetry as discussed above. The poetic images of two Virgilian hero are the faces Seneca, the philosopher in exile exchanges for compensating unfulfilled desires of ambition and recognition, who is now left with the fear of death and the anger for not realizing his own self. Another possible interpretation of these poetic images and aesthetic experience can be seen in momentary state of flight during which Seneca proves to be elusive, slippery, constantly reconstructing his own image with literary persona of Aeneid, a cultural symbol, whom everyone praises. Although the image is an object of praise, the state of the soul one can derive from the reading of experience in writing points to a perverted self who deceptively compensates his low self-worth by switching to the identity of Aeneid. Seneca either seeks pleasure in immortalizing his own experiences as a philosophical correspondent or naively struggles to exhort the passions in his soul to attain wisdom. Readers can further be confused by the state that his self-identification in poetic images is both a voluntary flight to avoid self-torment and a practice to test the strength of the will. For in the case of the latter, the real intention counts as important. In the light of the historical references, his desire to attain wisdom might be instigated by his failure in the active political life and that his aim for the intellectual work can be interpreted as the reconstruction of the earlier unattained desires. In this case, therefore, the poetic image of Aeneid remains as a mediator whom Seneca deceptively re-assure his own self, by the shifting faces.

An attempt to consider the state of the soul in the aesthetic experience shows us that following the switch of passions Seneca undergoes in self-transformation yields the same composition of the self⁴³ and the pleasure principle, wrong elevation of the soul, followed by the improper judgments and image-making. As I have formerly argued, the very beginning recounts Seneca's boredom, an anxiety that hinders his concentration for work that causes a fear of some sort. No matter how sublime the self-referential image is, this very image is produced out of a perverted state and that it is a product of a false judgment

which Seneca attempts to compensate in poetry⁴⁴. Briefly speaking, although the artistic skill is a natural proclivity in self in forming images, Seneca's poetization of his own self and his aesthetic experience cannot easily be fit to any motive discussed above. Although he is pinned as irrational, his poetic experience and image-making leave a series of ambiguities unresolved, regarding the motives.

Notes

¹Seneca, L.A. Epistles 1-65. trans by Richard Gummere. Loeb Classical series. England: Harvard University Press, 1996.

² See a more detailed discussion on poetry among Stoics in De Lacy, Philip. "Stoic views of Poetry". American Journal of Philology. Vol.69. No.3(1948): 259-60

³ Long, A.A and Sedley, D.N. The Hellenistic Philosophers Vol 1 Translations of the principal sources with philosophical commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1987.

⁴Laertius, Diogenes. Lives of Eminent Philosophers Vol II. trans by R.D.Hicks. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1991. 7.200.

⁵ See Epictetus. Discourses as Reported by Arrian Books 1-2. trans by W.A. Oldfather. Loeb Classical Library Series. England: Harvard University Press. (1998). 178

⁶Seneca, L.A. Epistles 66-92. tran by Richard Gummere. Loeb Classical Library Series. England: Harvard University Press, (1989). 88.1, 88.4

⁷Seneca, L.A. Epistles 1-65. (1996): 8.9, 9.21-22, 12.10, 17.12

⁸ Seneca, L.A. Epistles 66-92. (1989): 88.8

⁹ See Catharine Edwards' discussion of the self-transformation in judicial images in "Self-scrutiny and Self-transformation". While on the one hand such a slippery self proves to be a useful method for self-training through self-scrutiny, on the other hand such an inconsistency shows the lack of wisdom. Catharine Edwards further relates this problem to the popular theatricality of the time of Neronian court. Edwards, Catharine. "Self-scrutiny and Self-transformations in Seneca's Letters" Greece and Rome.44.1 (1997)

¹⁰ In his treatise on the reading of poetry, Zeno speaks of the proper nature of poetic/aesthetic experience on the part of the reader. Instead of being pleased by the senses with the words and the expression – as if we taste a wonderful cook, the poetical imagery should definitely serve for universal truths. For the Stoics, as Diogenes Laertius reported, is not merely perception, but tested by reason. Laertius, Diogenes. Lives of Eminent Philosophers Vol II. (1991): 7.22, 7.52, 7.54

¹¹ See Beardsley, Monroe, C. Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present, a short History. New York: the University of Alabama Press, (1975): 71. Also Seneca's distinction between *voluptas* and *gaudium* (irrational and rational pleasure) Seneca, L.A. Epistles 1-65. (1996): 59.1

¹² Ibid. 56.12

¹³ Ibid.56.15

¹⁴ Seneca, L.A. "On Shortness of Life" Moral Essays Vol II. trans by John.W. Basore. Loeb Classical Series Library. England: Harvard University Press, (1996): 17.5

¹⁵Seneca, L.A. Moral Letters Vol. VI. trans by Richard Gummere. Loeb Classical Series Library. England: Harvard University Press, (1989): 120.22

¹⁶ Laertius, Diogenes. Lives of Eminent Philosophers Vol II (1991) 7.84

¹⁷ Seneca, L.A. Moral Letters Vol. VI (1989):120.5-6. See also Hiorecles' discussion of animal behavior as concrete examples of *aesthesis* (*self-perception*) in "Hiorecles on Oikeiosis and self-perception" Stoic Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1996):263.

¹⁸ Seneca, L.A. Moral Letters Vol. VI (1989): 102.18-19, 121.6,18

¹⁹ *ibid.* 121.16-18

²⁰ *ibid.* 102.18-19

²¹ *ibid.* 95.51

²² Seneca, L.A. Epistles 66-92. (1989): 66.36-37

²³ Seneca L.A. "On Benefits". Moral Essays III. trans by John.W.Basore. Loeb Classical Series Library. England: Harvard University Press, (1989): 3.35.1 . See also Hierocles' discussion of the other-regarding attitude of *oikeiosis*- the Greek origin of the Latin *amor-sui*) with encompassing circles is suggestive of the relation between self-shaping in mutual attraction. The self is located at the center , encompassed by many circles which encloses the former. The closest circle represents the closest people the self is attached to; the family, the offspring, the spouse, and the relatives, whereas the larger circles stand for the distant relative, friends, the local residents fellow men, humanity and gods

²⁴ Self-shaping in self-love is a recurrent theme in both Seneca' s writing as well as in other Roman Stoics such as Marcus Aurelius. Serenus, Seneca' s correspondence friend is one of the many; Serenus' reading of some examples of nobility and bravery in his literary curriculum is suggestive of self-knowing as self-shaping. Serenus is tempted to rush to the forum to speak or help someone. The process of building up image of oneself with the personae he admires as Serenus engages in writing. Seneca.L.A. "Tranquility of Soul" Moral Essays Vol.II,trans by John.W.Basore. Loeb Classical Library Series. England: Harvard University Press, (1996):1.12

²⁵ Seneca frequently used this term in discussing the nature of the cognitive acts. Oxford Latin dictionary gives the figurative meaning of the verb as "forming the character of someone by shaping". *Fingere* is also used in the context of forming a mental representation, usually associated with the meaning of artistic creation and sometimes deceit.

²⁶ Seneca, L.A. Moral Letters Vol. VI (1989): 123.11

²⁷ Seneca L.A. "On Benefits". Moral Essays III. (1989).7.26.3-4

²⁸ "Tranquility of Soul" Moral Essays Vol.II. (1996): 2.7

²⁹ Seneca.L.A. "On Anger". Moral Essays Vol I. trans by John.W.Basore. Loeb Classical Library Series. England: Harvard University Press, (1998): 2.21.7

³⁰ Epistles 1-65. (1996): 56.7

³¹ *Ibid.* 56.11

³² *Ibid.* 56.10

³³ VEYNE, Paul. The Life of A Stoic. New York and London: Routledge,(1997):162

³⁴ Epistles 1-65. (1996): 51.8-9

³⁵ *Ibid.* 52.3, 57.3

³⁶ *Ibid.*40.1

³⁷ *Ibid.*34,35,36,37,39

³⁸ See also an extensive discussion of fame and glory in Roman society in Habinek, Thomas. "Seneca's Renown: Gloria, Claritudo, and the Republicanism of the Roman Elite", Classical Antiquity, Vol.19, No:2, (2000)287-290.

³⁹ Epistles 1-65. (1996): 21.5,11

⁴⁰ See a more detailed discussion in my unpublished thesis, " Self-Love and Self-Deception in Seneca, the Stoic", Middle East Technical University, March 2005.

⁴¹ Epistles 1-65. (1996): 16.6-7

⁴² "Tranquility of Soul" Moral Essays Vol.II. (1996): 1.12

⁴³ Foucault. M. Technologies of Self; a seminar with M. Foucault ,ed by Martin, Gutman and Hutton. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988. "the care of the self" (Foucault) for the purpose of transforming, purifying and finding salvation during which one takes oneself as an object of knowledge. Such idea of self-scrutiny and self-reflection in invented dramatic personae always aims at purification and self-exhortation. (Misch, A.A.Long, Edwards, 1997) The self is an invented literary persona, a useful strategy making self-detachment to give way for self-perfection.

⁴⁴ See also Seneca's comment on the creation of literary text in Stock, Brian. "The self and Literary Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages." New Literary History Vol 24. No. 4 (1994): 839-840. Brian Stock speaks of Seneca's comment on writing literary works. Seneca's "belief in their utility was an example of self-deception. Far from conferring immortality (as Seneca believes), the creation of texts takes

his attention away from his internal life. Even great literature is less instructive than one's inner voice. The ancient tragedies and comedies are just imitations."