

READING THE WATERS: SENECA ON THE NILE IN *NATURAL QUESTIONS*, BOOK 4A*

What causes the Nile to flood in summer, that remarkable phenomenon that so challenged ancient investigators?¹ Seneca devotes a book of his *Natural Questions* to the topic, but his preferred theory – if he had one – remains elusive; for only the earlier part, perhaps a half or less, of Book 4a survives. John the Lydian offers some limited guidance in his *De Mensibus* as to the sources on which Seneca apparently drew in the lost portion of the book, but there is no supporting evidence for the shape and nature of the missing section.² A moralising epilogue may have concluded 4a after the pattern of the other books of the *Natural Questions*. But even if we can only imagine how such an epilogue might have complemented the surviving preface, that preface stands as a complex mini-drama in itself, and one that introduces Seneca's main subject in the book from a surprising angle.

Seneca embarks here on a supplement of sorts to the *Epistulae Morales*,³ with Lucilius his addressee in both works, which overlap in date (C. E. 62–4).⁴ The main topic of his letter-like preface to 4a is flattery: Seneca expounds at length on the dangers to which a man of Lucilius' station, now that he is *procurator* of Sicily (cf. 4a.pref. 1; 21–2; *Ep.* 31.9),⁵ is exposed because of false praise, that 'unnatural' deceiver in the Senecan/Stoic sense that it diverts us from candid self-appraisal.⁶ How is this

* The text followed is that of H.M. Hine's Teubner edition (Stuttgart, 1996). I am most grateful to James Zetzel for his advice at an early stage, and to Miriam Griffin and an anonymous referee for later guidance.

¹ For the tradition surveyed, B. Postl, *Die Bedeutung des Nil in der römischen Literatur* (Diss. Wien, 1970), 36–89; concisely on the variety of conjecture, I.G. Kidd (ed.), *Posidonius, Volume II: the Commentary*. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 14B (Cambridge, 1988), 796–9 on fr. 222 (= Strab. 17.1.5).

² *De Mensibus* 4.107 (pp. 146.3–147.6 Wünsch); discussion in N. Gross, *Senecas Naturales Quaestiones. Komposition, naturphilosophische Aussagen und ihre Quellen* (Stuttgart, 1989), 174–8.

³ C. Codoñer, 'La physique de Sénèque: ordonnance et structure des *Naturales Quaestiones*', *ANRW* II.36.3 (Berlin and New York, 1989), 1812, noting (*inter alia*) the epistolary character of *quemadmodum scribis*, 4a.pref. 1.

⁴ Relative dating: M.T. Griffin, *Seneca: a Philosopher in Politics* (Oxford, 1976; repr. 1992), 396, 399–400, nn. H, I, but cf. 350, n. 3 'Unfortunately, the dates of neither work can be fixed so precisely as to make the temporal relation clear...'. More stringent attempts to gauge the rate of composition of the *Natural Questions* generally after Seneca's withdrawal from the Neronian court in 62 are complicated by the year in which the 'recent' Campanian earthquake (cf. 6.1.1–3) is located, 62 or 63. A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Seneca and the Pompeian earthquake', in A. De Vivo and E.L. Cascio (edd.), *Seneca uomo politico e l'età di Claudio e di Nerone. Atti del Convegno internazionale (Capri 25–27 marzo 1999)* (Bari, 2003), 177–91 inclines to the latter ('An earthquake in February 63 allows a far more comfortable chronology for composition over a matter of months in 62–3, with the news arriving in mid-composition', 190); but see now H.M. Hine, 'Rome, the cosmos, and the emperor in Seneca's *Natural Questions*', *JRS* 96 (2006), 68–72 for a judicious re-evaluation of the whole question, with a cautious preference for 62. On Lucilius Junior, Griffin, 91 with L. Herrmann, *Le second Lucilius. Collection Latomus* 34 (Brussels, 1958), 53–5.

⁵ '[P]robably about 62' (Griffin [n. 4], 91).

⁶ On flattery, which of course commanded its own subfield of ancient analysis (now J. Diggle (ed.), *Theophrastus: Characters*. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 43 [Cambridge, 2004], 181), cf. *Dial.* 4.21.7–8, 28.5, 9.1.16, *Ben.* 5.7.4, 6.30.3–6, *Ep.* 45.7, 59.11, 13, 123.9 with D. Vottero (ed.), *Questioni Naturali di Lucio Anneo Seneca* (Turin, 1989), 466, n. 13 on 4a.pref. 3.

unlikely theme of flattery to be reconciled with Seneca's broader study of the physical world in the *Natural Questions*? A primary aim of this paper is to try to identify this elusive 'missing link',⁷ but as part of a larger undertaking: to suggest how key features of Seneca's philosophical project in the Nile book and in the *Natural Questions* more generally are crucially conditioned, in ways yet to be fully explored in modern scholarship, by Seneca's treatment of terrestrial waters in Book 3. And it is important to stress at the outset that Book 3 is here accepted beyond doubt as the first in the original ordering of the books of the *Natural Questions*.⁸

Beyond flattery, the preface has another recurring emphasis that will detain us below: Lucilius' procuratorship threatens to divert him from what Seneca portrays as his true vocation in life. The philosophical and literary connotations of *otium* are to the fore when Seneca reports his satisfaction that Lucilius apparently finds delight in 'Sicily and [his] office of governor with its leisure time' (*officium procurationis otiosae*, pref. 1).⁹ For a man so devoted to literary leisure (*scio quam sis ambitioni alienus, quam familiaris otio et litteris*, 1), the pleasures of Sicily will only remain so, Seneca affirms, if he continues to keep the claims of his official life within bounds (1).¹⁰ The detachment enjoined in §1 is reinforced by Seneca's broader technique in the preface of figuratively distancing Lucilius from Sicily. Ever present as Lucilius' spiritual adviser in the *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca overcomes spatial distance to be 'there' by special delivery to consort with Lucilius at 4a.pref. 20: *hoc* [sc. escape into self/self-escape] *tibi, etsi diuidimur mari, praestare temptabo, ut subinde te iniecta manu ad meliora perducam...erimus una qua parte optimi sumus*. A new journey begins in Seneca's company, the opening of new channels of thought effecting Lucilius' displacement from Sicily: *longe te ab ista prouincia abducam* (21; cf. *Itaque, ut totum inde te abducam, ...omnes interim prouinciae tuae quaestiones praeteribo, et in diuersum cogitationes tuas abstraham*, 4a.1.1). And so to Egypt: just as the wonders of Sicily (*multa...mirabilia*, 4a.1.1) cannot compete with the matchless marvel of the Nile as described in 4a.2.1–16, so the dimensions of Lucilius' official importance and burden of duty are suitably qualified as soon as we move away from Sicily and begin to take the broader view.¹¹

As part of our effort to contextualise 4a within the *Natural Questions* as a whole, we shall see that this shift of perspective which is urged on Lucilius in the preface to

⁷ So B.M. Gauly, *Senecas Naturales Quaestiones: Naturphilosophie für die römische Kaiserzeit* (Munich, 2004), 211, moving towards a political answer ('Unter den Bedingungen des neronischen Prinzipats bilden Absage an die Politik, Rückzug ins philosophische *otium* und damit Kontemplation der eigenen Existenz und der Natur eine Einheit', 214). For the core problem sharply defined, T.G. Rosenmeyer, 'Seneca and nature', *Arethusa* 33 (2000), 106: 'The extended harangue to Lucilius...has nothing to do with the subject that follows... Why he inserts it at this point is unclear; the avowed explanation...is too flimsy to persuade'.

⁸ 3, 4a, 4b, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2: so C. Codoñer Merino (ed.), *L. Annaei Senecae Naturales Quaestiones*. 2 vols (Madrid, 1979), I.xii–xxi, and (n. 3), 1792–4; H.M. Hine, *An Edition with Commentary of Seneca's Natural Questions, Book Two* (New York, 1981), 4–23 and (ed.), *L. Annaeus Seneca: Naturalium Quaestionum Libri* (Stuttgart, 1996), xxii–v; Gauly (n. 7), 53–67.

⁹ See now Hine (n. 4), 47, n. 20 on the 'striking phrase', *procuratio otiosa*.

¹⁰ Lucilius' *procuratiumcula* (cf. *Ep.* 31.9) is in fact 'not a very important post' (Griffin [n. 4], 350, n. 2).

¹¹ Cf. J. Scott, 'The ethics of the physics in Seneca's *Natural Questions*', *CB* 75 (1999), 63, speculating that in the lost portion of 4a 'Seneca went on to say that Lucilius' powerful position...is feeble and insignificant when compared to the awesome power and mystery of the Nile' – a useful approach to reconciling the preface with the rest of 4a (Seneca 'wants Lucilius to adopt a sense of self-perspective by learning certain natural phenomena'), but developed differently in my own argument below.

4a is directly related to the work towards ‘vision-change’ in a universalising direction that was undertaken in Book 3. We begin in section I below with an exploratory reading of Seneca’s disquisition on flattery in the preface to 4a. The implications of that reading lead us back to Book 3 in section II, and then forward to the main body of 4a in section III. Seneca’s depiction of the great (Stoic) cataclysm at 3.27–30 takes centre stage in II, but is then balanced by our focus on the Nile in III. If insincerity prevails in the flatteries condemned in the preface to 4a, the guileless beneficence first of the Nile, then of nature more generally, predominates in section IV. Our efforts fully to contextualise the preface to 4a end by embracing the rest of what remains of 4a: in section V we briefly review Seneca’s critique of earlier theories of why the Nile floods in summer.

I

The self-consciousness that the preface to 4a promotes in Lucilius (and us) not only works to detach him from Sicily; it is also literary, in that irony and tonal shift gently complicate the superficial certainties of Seneca’s protection against flattery. If one defence against the flatterer is blunt dismissal of the sort sampled in 4a.pref. 13, *cum quis ad te adulator accesserit, dicito: ‘uis tu ista uerba...ferre ad aliquem qui, paria facturus, uult quidquid dixeris audire?’*,¹² a more ‘interior’ approach is offered through the mode of self-praise (*ipse te lauda*) rehearsed in §§14–17. At first sight the words that Seneca speaks in Lucilius’ voice (*dic: ‘liberalibus me studiis tradidi...’*, 14) would seem to offer a solid, unpretentious account of a life devoted to literature and philosophy, of an impressive rise from relatively humble beginnings (15), of personal loyalty outweighing the risks of dangerous associations in dark times under Gaius and Claudius (15–16),¹³ and of admirable resolve in refusing to seek refuge in suicide amid the threat of torture and execution under Gaius (17). When Seneca reverts to his own voice in §18, he corroborates Lucilius’ self-appraisal in §§14–17 by bearing further witness to his friend’s good character (*adice nunc inuictum muneribus animum...*). But then a surprise (18–19):

post haec ipse te consule uerane an falsa memoraueris: si uera sunt, coram magno teste laudatus es, si falsa, sine teste derisus es.

Possum et ipse nunc uideri te aut captare aut experiri. utrumlibet crede et omnes timere a me incipe.

With this afterword Seneca wittily complicates the tone of his and Lucilius’ (self-)praises in §§14–18. In retrospect, does Seneca write in §§14–17 in the manner of the true friend who puts into Lucilius’ mouth apparently candid (self-)praise without embellishment? Or can we detect a hint of flattery (*captare*; cf. *artifices sunt* [sc. *adulatores*] *ad captandos superiores*, 3)¹⁴ in the way that he indirectly praises Lucilius in the latter’s assumed voice in §§14–17 and then offers his own, seemingly

¹² Cf. for this direct approach *Ep.* 59.13.

¹³ For details on associations (*in amicitia Gaetulici*, 15) and machinations (Messallina, Narcissus, 15) see Vottero (n. 6), 474, nn. 44–7 with L. Delatte, ‘Lucilius, l’ami de Sénèque’, *LEC* 4 (1935), 371, and cf. Griffin (n. 4), 52, 61 (Seneca includes himself in describing Lucilius’ loyalty to enemies of Messallina and Narcissus?); now Hine (n. 4), 47 (Seneca’s advice to Lucilius to distance himself from flatterers in Sicily offers a suggestive parallel to Seneca’s own gradual distancing of himself from the Neronian court).

¹⁴ Albeit not Seneca’s way at *Clem.* 2.2.2 (to Nero), *maluerim ueris offendere quam placere adulando*.

independent corroboration in §18? Of course, the word ‘flattery’ is itself problematic: if we follow a standard definition of the term,¹⁵ we might reasonably absolve Seneca of delivering blatantly false praises in §§14–18. After all, his afterword in §§18–19 (quoted above) would then lose all of its witty elusiveness and become transparently insulting, at least in the eyes of those insiders among Seneca’s contemporary readership (Lucilius himself of course chief among them) who would all too clearly recognise the glaring distortions in his flatteries. But if flattery is more leniently interpreted as exaggerated rather than straightforwardly insincere praise, we might suspect that Seneca flatters through hyperbole in §§14–18, where his tone appears no more excessive than in the many other passages which deliver high praise to his loved ones elsewhere in his oeuvre.¹⁶ Not that Seneca was incapable of what certain interpreters have indeed viewed as grotesque flattery: a notorious case in point is his high praise of Polybius, the powerful freedman of Claudius, in his *Consolatio ad Polybium* (= *Dial.* 11), written in (probably) 43 B.C.E. ostensibly to comfort his addressee upon his brother’s death. It might be argued that Seneca’s flattering tone there does nothing more than reflect his attunement to the idiom of his times; and yet his portrayal of Claudius in that same *Consolatio*, and especially the problematic tone of the invented speech that Claudius delivers at 14.2–16.3,¹⁷ also offer a compelling example of Seneca’s interest in the potential multivalence of (literary) flattery well before he experiments with the phenomenon in the preface to *Natural Questions* 4a.

For present purposes, however, it is not so much the degree of exaggeration or untruth that is of interest in the preface, but rather the way in which Seneca problematises his tone – ‘flattering’ or not, true or false? – through his manipulation of different narrative voices. Does Seneca test (*experiri*) Lucilius by challenging him, and us, to be wary of the doublespeak in play in §§14–18 – the delivery of indirect Senecan flattery in the guise of self-praise? Is Seneca’s high praise made to appear more convincing to us, and less flattering, because it is expressed in Lucilius’ ‘own’ voice in §§14–17, not Seneca’s? By provoking such questions, the text itself suggestively promotes wariness (cf. *omnes timere a me incipe...*) through the tonal ambivalences of Seneca’s voice-control; and further difficulties are perhaps felt when Lucilius’ (self-)portrayal in §§14–17 is compared with his characterisation in the *Epistulae Morales*. As Griffin remarks, in *Natural Questions* 4a.pref. 1 ‘Lucilius is *ambitioni alienus*, but in *Ep.* 19–22 he has to be cured of ambition’.¹⁸ In 4a.pref. 14 Lucilius is said to have eschewed profitable career options to turn instead to ‘unremunerative’ literature and philosophy,¹⁹ but in the *Epistulae* he appears more driven by gain and less ready to make sacrifices for the philosophical life: *nondum habeo quantum sat est; si ad illam summam peruenero, tunc me totum philosophiae dabo* (*Ep.* 17.5). Of course, Lucilius’ shifting characterisation in *Natural Questions* 4a and in the *Epistulae Morales* respectively might at least partly be explained by differences of agenda in the two works. After all, Lucilius ‘is given a spiritual development of

¹⁵ *OED* s.v. 1 ‘false or insincere praise’.

¹⁶ So, e.g., *Dial.* 6.24.1–4 (Metilius), 12.16.2–7 (Helvia).

¹⁷ See Griffin (n. 4), 415–16, and now (repr. 1992), 518–19.

¹⁸ Griffin (n. 4), 350, n. 3 after A. Gercke, *Seneca-Studien* (Leipzig, 1895), 326–7; cf. also 1.pref. 6 for Lucilius credited with a lack of *ambitio*.

¹⁹ On the punctuation here (*ad gratuita deflexi: ad carmina me et ad salutare philosophiae contuli studium*), H.M. Hine, *Studies in the Text of Seneca’s Naturales Quaestiones* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1996), 70–1.

incredible rapidity'²⁰ in the *Epistulae*, a feature absent in the *Natural Questions*, and one which contributes to the 'synthetic quality' that Griffin identifies more broadly in his characterisation in the *Epistulae*.²¹ But if we do grant Seneca licence to create and exploit tensions between the two works, is the portrait in *Natural Questions* 4a consciously enhanced, even 'un peu flatté'?²² Does he signal this exaggeration in his invitation to Lucilius to consider 'whether the things you said about yourself are true or false' (18)?²³ And a further possibility: does Seneca gently underscore his earlier message to Lucilius to keep his official duties in perspective (4a.pref. 1) by saying little in praise of his performance in Sicily? 'In the tribute to Lucilius' virtues' at 4a.pref. 18, '...those he would exercise as procurator come last and receive least elaboration: freedom from greed, frugality...'.²⁴ If we are troubled by the possible shades of flattery which may tinge Seneca's praises in §§13–18, the relative absence of high praise on a Sicilian front makes its own point in §18.

Another troubling aspect of the preface concerns Seneca's characterisation of his brother, L. Junius Gallio Annaeanus, adopted by L. Junius Gallio, the distinguished declaimer and senator, in his will.²⁵ In §§10–12 Seneca draws on Gallio as an exemplary model for Lucilius to follow as one impervious to flattery; and given the Greek reputation for flattery,²⁶ Gallio's experience as proconsul of Achaëa in C. E. 51–227 perhaps gives him a special relevance as a model for Lucilius under siege in Sicily. Gallio is introduced as follows:

solebam tibi dicere Gallionem, fratrem meum, quem nemo non parum amat, etiam qui amare plus non potest, alia uitia non nosse, hoc unum odisse. ab omni illum parte temptasti: ingenium suspicere coepisti omnium maximum et dignissimum, quod consecrari malles quam conteri – pedes abstulit...(10)

In an interesting note on *ab omni...temptasti*, T.H. Corcoran, the Loeb editor, remarks that '[t]hroughout the rest of Sections 10, 11, 12 Seneca treats Lucilius' attempts to flatter Gallio, and the results, as past facts. In English it sounds better when treated as hypothetical'.²⁸ If we adopt this (questionable) hypothetical reading, Lucilius is only potentially a flatterer. But if we stand by the straight perfect that delivers 'past facts', we confront the embarrassment that Corcoran surely sought to avoid by his deft but desperate measure: Lucilius is an exponent of the very evil against which Seneca is striving to protect him (cf. *a turba te...separa, ne adulatoribus latus praebeas*, 3).²⁹ Seneca's and, indirectly, Lucilius' stress in §11 on Gallio's

²⁰ Griffin (n. 4), 351.

²¹ Griffin (n. 4), 350.

²² Delatte (n. 13), 372, explaining this flattery on the grounds that 'Sénèque présente pour le première fois Lucilius à ses lecteurs', whereas '[d]ans les *Lettres*, une partie très grave est engagée: Sénèque est obligé d'éclairer son ami sur ses défauts et ses faiblesses, parce qu'il y va de son salut. Voilà qui contribue, je pense, à expliquer les variations du portrait'.

²³ Cf. Delatte (n. 13), 372, noting 'une façon assez malicieuse'.

²⁴ Griffin (n. 4), 239.

²⁵ Further Griffin (n. 4), 48 and n. 2 (the adoption 'attested by 52').

²⁶ See, e.g., Juv. 3.86, *adulandi gens prudentissima* with S. Morton Braund (ed.), *Juvenal: Satires, Book 1*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge, 1996), 189 on 3.86–91.

²⁷ Date: Griffin (n. 4), 83 and n. 5.

²⁸ *Seneca: Naturales Quaestiones*. 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1971–2), II.9, n. 3. Cf. in criticism M. Winterbottom, *CR* (1976), 47.

²⁹ This despite Lucilius' characterisation at 1.pref. 6, *non est tibi frons ficta, nec in alienam uoluntatem sermo compositus*. Or could it be that the 'you' in play in most of 4a.pref. 10 is not necessarily Lucilius himself but another version of the fictional interlocutor who appears so

unaffected charm (*comitatem et incompositam suauitatem*) merely draws attention by implicit contrast to the contrived nature of Lucilius' *blanditiae*. Lucilius might claim that he was simply speaking the truth to this good man (cf. *quamuis blanda diceret, ... uera dicebas*, 12) – a defence that Seneca rejects (*sed eo magis intellexit obstandum*) while nevertheless letting Lucilius off the hook in a playful ending to this mini-episode. Seneca's tone in §12 is again finely balanced. It was not so much that Lucilius was a bad actor, he remarks, but rather that Gallio offered a hard target (*non deprehendit te sed reppulit*): does Seneca politely camouflage Lucilius' transparency as a flatterer, or does he ironically commend his abilities in the very art against which he is warned?

Gallio himself is made loosely to resemble the Stoic *sapiens* in his steady affability and honesty (11), his wisdom and obduracy (*eius prudentiam et in euitando ineuitabili malo pertinaciam*, 12), his imperviousness to flattery (*inexpugnabilem*, 11).³⁰ Confronted with this daunting model, Lucilius is again (in)directly cut down to size, his ego placed within bounds (cf. *intra fines*, 1). But in reporting Lucilius' flatteries, Seneca himself also elaborates on Gallio's virtues with an expansiveness that is surely redundant to his main point, that his brother was steadfast in his resistance:

coepisti mirari comitatem et incompositam suauitatem, quae illos quoque quos transit abducit, gratuitum etiam in obuios meritum (nemo enim mortalium uni tam dulcis est quam hic omnibus, cum interim – tanta naturalis boni uis est, ubi artem simulationemque non redolet – nemo non imputari sibi bonitatem publicam patitur) – hoc quoque loco blanditiis tuis restitit... (11).

If the whole section in *quae... patitur* is taken to render Lucilius' alleged flatteries, Seneca offers a seemingly full and impressively 'candid' record of events. And yet, from another perspective, why this potentially embarrassing attention to detail, this public listing of his friend's itemised *blanditiae*? Of course, one response is that the greater the elaboration, the more impressive Gallio's resistance to any and all efforts to flatter him. But a further possibility, not necessarily incompatible with the first, is that these elaborations are Seneca's own: in reporting Lucilius' attempts on Gallio (*ingenium suspicere coepisti...*, 10), Seneca himself goes on to embroider his own flattering picture of his brother – in which case Seneca succeeds where Lucilius fails, in that Gallio is powerless to cut short (cf. *prima statim uerba praecidit*, 10) the flow at least of *Seneca's* flattering words here, or to trip him up (cf. *pedes abstulit*, 10) so as to close the contest.

When we look back upon the preface as a whole, the tonal subtleties and the indirectness that complicate Seneca's possible flattery of Gallio in §§10–12 and of Lucilius himself in §§14–18 stand in contrast to the more direct approach that prevails early in the preface: *alius adulatione clam utetur, parce, alius ex aperto, palam, rusticitate simulata, quasi simplicitas illa, non ars sit* (5). The 'open' approach

often in Senecan prose generally? If so, a partial difficulty is arguably removed in 4a.pref. 10, *solebam tibi dicere Gallionem...*: are we to infer (as one referee suggests) that Lucilius does not know Gallio personally but only from hearing Seneca speak of him? Not necessarily: the fact that Seneca habitually told Lucilius that Gallio hated flattery may equally indicate that, despite the imposing challenge, Lucilius still rose to the task of trying to flatter so redoubtable a target. Moreover, if the 'you' in 4a.pref. 10 suddenly switches from Lucilius to some other anonymous party, that shift might seem uncommonly harsh in a preface whose epistolary appearance has developed a very definite sense of 'you' from the outset (cf. *Delectat te, ... Lucili uirorum optime*, 4a.pref. 1).

³⁰ Cf. Vottero (n. 6), 472, n. 35 'L'inespugnabilità è caratteristica del sapiente', citing *inter alia* Cic. *Tusc.* 5.41, *uolumus... eum qui beatus sit tutum esse, inexpugnabilem, saeptum atque munitum*.

described here is exemplified by the (ironic) frankness of the notorious L. Munatius Plancus, cos. 42 B.C.E. (*'perit' inquit 'procari si latet',* 6),³¹ and by the witty if depressing picture that Seneca projects in the reported words of Demetrius the Cynic of the astonishing untruths or scarcely concealed insults that people are ready to misinterpret as high praise (7–8). Of special interest for now, however, is the less obtrusive approach (cf. *clam, parce* in 5) that cannot compete with the brazenness which Seneca casts as the current fashion in §9. As the preface progresses, the unobtrusive approach perhaps begins to make its own subtle impact in Seneca's (arguably) flattering treatment of Gallio as well as of Lucilius; and also in something more. In contrast to the crude directness of Plancus' brand of flattery earlier in the preface, the tonal elusiveness of the passages we have considered above, §§10–12 and §§14–18, belongs to a different literary register which finds its keynote in ambivalence. If Seneca's overt message is to be wary of flattery, the text itself enjoins caution as we strive to tell apart and choose between the ambivalences, the flatteries and possibly also the ironic teasings of his written voice(s). The challenge to Lucilius lies partly in his reading of people, partly in how to read Seneca.

In §§13–17 Lucilius' 'own' voice delivers praises which, at one level, Seneca seemingly endorses (cf. *ipse te lauda. dic...*, 14) despite the tonal difficulties we have experienced above. But Lucilius' next appearance in §§21–2 is perhaps less flattering:

longe te ab ista prouincia abducam, ne forte magnam esse historiis fidem credas et placere tibi incipias quotiens cogitaueris: 'hanc ego habeo sub meo iure prouinciam quae maximarum urbium exercitus et sustinuit et fregit, cum inter Carthaginem et Romam ingentis belli praemium iacuit; quae quattuor Romanorum principum, id est totius imperi, uires contractas in unum locum uidit aluitque; <quae> Pompeii fortunam erexit, Caesaris fatigauit, Lepidi transtulit, omnium cepit [‘had room for’];³² quae illi ingenti spectaculo interfuit ex quo liquere mortalibus posset quam uelox foret ad imum lapsus e summo, quamque diuersa uia magnam potentiam fortuna destrueret. uno enim tempore uidit Pompeium Lepidumque ex maximo fastigio aliter ad extrema deiectos, cum Pompeius alienum exercitum fugeret, Lepidus suum.'

In contrast to Seneca's early injunction to Lucilius to keep his duties within bounds (*continere id* [sc. *officium procurationis*] *intra fines suos...*, *nec efficere imperium quod est procuratio*, 1), Lucilius' imagined words here show an opposite tendency: the world (cf. *totius imperi*) comes to Sicily (*uires...aluitque*), which is cast as a key battleground in the greatest Roman struggles from the first Punic War down to the thirties B.C.E.,³³ when Sextus Pompey's grip on the island (cf. *Pompeii fortunam erexit* [sc. Sicily]) was broken by the taxing (cf. *fatigauit*) but ultimately successful efforts of

³¹ For this identification, Vottero (n. 6), 467, n. 17 *pace* P. Oltramare (ed.), *Sénèque, Questions Naturelles*. 2 vols (Paris, 1929), II.173, n. 2: Oltramare favours the son of our Plancus, cos. C.E. 13, presumably to find a nearer contemporary for Seneca (cf. P. Parroni (ed.), *Seneca, Ricerche sulla natura* [Milan, 2002], 548). Velleius in particular is harsh in his characterisation of our Plancus, *humillimus adsentator reginae* [sc. *Cleopatrae*] *et infra seruos cliens* (2.83.1 with A.J. Woodman [ed.], *Velleius Paterculus: the Caesarian and Augustan Narrative* (2.41–93). Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 25 [Cambridge, 1983], 216). For his words as possibly drawn from a comic poet, and perhaps even 'un frammento di senario', A. Grilli, 'Miscellanea Latina', *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo, Classe di Lettere e Scienze Morali e Storiche* 97 (1963), 102–3.

³² *OLD capio* 26a. This against *cepit* 'decided' in W.H. Alexander, *Seneca's Naturales Quaestiones: the Text Emended and Explained*. University of California Publications in Classical Philology 13 (1948), 298, where he also accounts for the absence of one of *quattuor...principum* here ('no need to work in a mention of Antony').

³³ Convenient elucidation in Vottero (n. 6), 480, nn. 72, 73.

Octavian and Lepidus. Sicily now takes centre stage as the place that has made or broken the fortunes of Rome's leading players, and which oversaw Sextus' demise and Lepidus' ultimate exclusion from triumviral power. In effect, the Lucilius imagined here (in)directly aggrandises his stature as procurator by offering so grand a picture of Sicily's historical importance. We are returned by a form of ring-composition to the beginning of the preface: Lucilius does indeed make an *imperium* of sorts of his *procuratio* by writing himself (*hanc...prouinciam*, 21) into his own formidable script both for the island's history and, we infer, for the large responsibility of its procurator in charge. Hence the need for the recalibration of perspective that Seneca announces in *longe te ab ista prouincia abducam* (21).

But a further question beckons: just how self-conscious is the Lucilius pictured in §§21–2? How alert is he to the possible relevance that his remarks on the vagaries of fortune might have for himself in his powerful position in Sicily? From the first in the *Natural Questions*, the study of nature and of philosophy in general is presented as a form of escape from, or protection against, the flux and provisionality of the everyday world. So in the preface to Book 3 the refrain of *quid est praecipuum?* in §§10–16 is answered by a series of mantra-like variations on a single theme: the need for detachment from the *sordida* (cf. 18) of the world. Detachment from the claims of fortune figures prominently in §§11 and 15: *quid est praecipuum? erigere animum supra minas et promissa fortunae; quid est praecipuum? altos supra fortuita spiritus tollere*. The Lucilius found in (imagined) reflection at 4a.pref. 21–2 proudly surveys Sicily's historical importance; for Seneca in the preface to Book 3, however, philosophy takes precedence over historical reportage and the recording of *acta regum externorum* (5): *Quanto satius est quid faciendum sit quam quid factum quaerere, ac docere eos qui sua permisere fortunae nihil stabile esse ab illa datum, munus eius omne aura fluere mobilius!* (7). The enthusiastic procurator portrayed at the end of the preface to 4a discourses on the fickle fortunes of Sextus Pompey and Lepidus; but in the *Natural Questions* more generally what matters is the *internalisation* of the lesson that such examples of fortune's fickleness offer; what matters is to apply the external illustration to the process of one's own self-development towards indifference to fortune. In this respect the Lucilius drawn in 4a.pref. 21–2 lacks the self-conscious detachment which Seneca also portrays as a necessary defence against flattery: *Fugiendum...et in se recedendum est, immo etiam a se recedendum* (20). Will the 'real' Lucilius addressed in Book 4a be alert to the reflexive significance of his alter ego's words on fortune in §§21–2? On this approach the challenge set before him in §§21–2 is indeed *a se recedere*, 'to escape the self' characterised there; and to escape by internalising the lesson that his alter ego leaves external.

II

What, then, of the 'missing link' that might connect this idiosyncratic preface to 4a with the larger context of the *Natural Questions*? How to reconcile Seneca's disquisition on the dangers of flattery with his broader inquiry into the natural world? Certainly, within 4a itself the preface is neatly related to the rest of the book by Seneca's method of transporting Lucilius to the Nile as a way of diverting him from Sicily and his official preoccupations there. But what of any larger-scale integration within the work as a whole?

For present purposes, two factors draw important connections with the foundational Book 3, on terrestrial waters. First, if we accept that a network of ambivalence

complicates the characterisation of Lucilius in ways subtle and wittily ironic in the preface to 4a, the preface to 3 offers a study in contrast. There, the repetition of that urgent question, *quid est praecipuum?* (10–16), contributes to the air of conviction through philosophical devotion – Seneca’s calling to the steady and distinctly unambivalent ‘view from above’³⁴ – that permeates this introduction to the *Natural Questions* as a whole. On offer there is a vision of enlightened detachment that is predicated on ‘seeing the all’ (cf. *animo omne uidisse*, 10): from that ‘whole’ vantage-point, the ambivalences and vicissitudes of our everyday existence are interferences that obscure our primary cosmic vision. Hence the call to rise above ‘the threats and promises of fortune’ (11), the contaminating effects of luxury and other vices (13–14), our susceptibility to ‘chance occurrences’ (*fortuita*, 15), and the allurements of all the other things ‘that mortals judge precious’ (*magno aestimata mortalibus*, 14). The obscuring effect of these *sordida* (18) is couched in §11 in terms that have important implications for the preface to 4a: *qui a diuinorum conuersatione quotiens ad humana recideris, non aliter caligabis quam quorum oculi in densam umbram ex claro sole redierunt*.³⁵ The new journey in the preface to 4a is not just to Sicily; it also constitutes a return (or a relapse after the preface to 3) *a diuinorum conuersatione ad humana*. The dangers of flattery, the practical burdens of being procurator of Sicily, the tonal difficulties that cast now Lucilius, now Seneca, as deft flatterers in their own right, the shades of ambivalence that we monitored in section I above: from the enlightened, god-like vision glimpsed in the preface to 3, our gaze is redirected to half-darkness in the new preface, where the challenge of teasing apart the ambiguities of Seneca’s treatment itself re-enacts, and wraps us up in, all the shadiness and provisionality that he associates with *conuersatio hominum* in the *Natural Questions* more generally.

Secondly, in contrast to all the fine distinctions that we sampled in the preface to 4a in I above, the cosmic viewpoint that Seneca promotes in the preface to 3 is by definition total and complete, a form of integrity that leaves behind the petty distinctions of this world.³⁶ Part gives way to whole: what is important is ‘not to have fixed a flag on the shore of the Red Sea’ (3.pref. 10), not to have travelled to this mere speck or that on the global map (cf. *punctum est istud in quo nauigatis*, 1.pref. 11),³⁷ or even to have served as procurator of Sicily, but *animo omne uidisse* (3.pref. 10). From this cosmic perspective boundaries cease to matter (*O quam ridiculi sunt mortalium termini!*, 1.pref. 9), and the early allusion to the Red Sea in the preface to 3 is itself taken up in Seneca’s climactic account (3.27–30) of the deluge that overwhelms the

³⁴ On this ‘perennial motif in ancient philosophic writing’, R.B. Rutherford, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius: a Study* (Oxford, 1989), 155–61.

³⁵ Cf. 1.pref. 2 *altera* (sc. theology, as opposed to ethics; Gross [n. 2], 13) *multum supra hanc in qua uolutamur caliginem excedit, et e tenebris ereptos perducit illo unde lucet*, with Vottero [n. 6], 210, n. 7 for further Senecan examples of this human ‘darkness’ (add *Ep.* 122.4, and cf. *OLD caligo* 7, *caligo* 3).

³⁶ Cf. for the cosmic aspect of this integrity the *sapiens* of *Ep.* 59 who, rising above flattery (cf. 13) and all other enticements, knows always complete joy (*plenus est gaudio, hilaris et placidus, inconcussus; cum dis ex pari uiuit*, 14), his mind reflecting the calm of the upper firmament: *hoc ergo cogita, hunc esse sapientiae effectum, gaudii aequalitatem* [‘consistency’]. *talis est sapientis animus qualis mundus super lunam: semper illic serenum est* (16).

³⁷ Cf. Hine (n. 4), 43–7 on Roman *imperium* itself potentially reduced to a mere *punctum* (in a section entitled [p. 43] ‘Marginalising Rome’). On the commonplace of the earth as but a cosmic speck, J.E.G. Zetzel (ed.), *Cicero, De Re Publica: Selections*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge, 1995), 235 on 6.16.4 with *OLD punctum* 4a.

world and effaces all conventional distinctions as part of the process that leads to a new cosmic beginning:³⁸ *peribunt tot nomina, Caspium et Rubrum mare, Ambracii et Cretici sinus, Propontis et Pontus, cum <dilu>uies illa omnibus rebus unum aequor induxerit; peribit omne discrimen* (3.29.8).³⁹ Again, the fragmented, ambivalent tone of so much of the preface to 4a reasserts the partial, provisional human dimension in contrast to this larger Senecan emphasis in the *Natural Questions* on *undivided* oneness, the unity of the all. But the lack of candour on display in the preface to 4a also stands in contrast to nature's guilelessness as she steadily goes through her motions in 3.27–29. We shall consider in section IV how this guilelessness relates to a moralising interpretation of nature's periodic destruction of humankind; but important for now is the effect that Seneca's depiction of man's powerlessness in the face of the deluge has on his portrayal of Lucilius' (self-)importance, and the impression of importance that flattery projects, in the preface to 4a.

For Brad Inwood, '[i]n the flood passage as a whole the anthropocentric nature of the deluge is prominent':⁴⁰ the sea assaults *us* (*nos*, 3.27.1), rivers and waters conspire *ad exitium humani generis* (3.27.1), agriculture fails us (*corruptis quae seruntur manu*, 3.27.4), houses totter (3.27.6) until smaller dwellings are demolished by the torrent, then larger dwellings, and finally whole cities and peoples are swept away (3.27.7). For the few survivors who fled to the mountain-tops, all 'communication and exchange' (3.27.11) are cut off; man's regression in 3.27 from a state of settled community and 'civilisation' to scattered desolation is complete. But while from one angle this passage (3.27) is evidently anthropocentric, from another angle the flood passage as a whole (3.27–29) reveals the opposite tendency, sweeping away humankind and all the trappings of 'advanced' society with a simple, brief flexing of cosmic muscle (cf. 3.27.2). Already in the preface to 3 humankind is cut down to size: *magna ista* [sc. human affairs] *quia parui sumus credimus: multis rebus non ex natura sua sed ex humilitate nostra magnitudo est* (10). What from a cosmic perspective appears tiny takes on a disproportionate scale and significance when viewed from the narrow perspective (cf. *angustias*, 1.pref. 13) of the localised mindset – a tendency that Seneca again assails at the end of 3, where the dynasties that rise and fall as *exempla* of shifting fortunes in the preface (9) recur in 'the kingdoms of great nations' that are destroyed in a mere cosmic moment at 3.29.9 (*unus humanum genus dies condet*). If the preface moves us towards a revised perspective on our place in the universal whole, the violence of Seneca's deluge does the same work much more directly through shock-effect, wiping away all misconceptions about our (self-)importance by simply wiping us off the map.

All the dramatic verve that G.O. Hutchinson well describes in the 'successive waves'⁴¹ of Seneca's passage thus reduces humankind to a stupefied spectator (cf. 3.27.12) of the cosmic process that will soon engulf all. But another kind of spectator, serene and detached, also looks upon the events as if they are unfolding before

³⁸ Further on the relation of this cataclysm to Stoic *conflagratio* *ἐκπύρωσις*, p. 235 and n. 86 below.

³⁹ On this disintegration of boundaries in the cataclysm, heralding a return to primeval *unitas* (cf. 3.30.1), T. Murphy, *Pliny the Elder's Natural History: the Empire in the Encyclopedia* (Oxford, 2004), 184–8.

⁴⁰ B. Inwood, 'God and human knowledge in Seneca's *Natural Questions*', in D. Frede and A. Laks (edd.), *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath* (Leiden, 2002), 130; on the 'overwhelming power' of the passage generally, G.O. Hutchinson, *Latin Literature from Seneca to Juvenal: a Critical Study* (Oxford, 1993), 128–31.

⁴¹ Hutchinson (n. 40), 130.

his(our) eyes. In depicting the deluge Seneca faces an obvious challenge: as Inwood puts it, he ‘has to work against the implausibility of such an event, which is inevitably beyond the experience of human observers’.⁴² Inwood’s response is to point to Seneca’s own emphasis on ‘the unimaginable power of nature’: Seneca attempts ‘to make such a unique event plausible’ by stressing that ‘nothing is hard for nature’ (cf. 3.27.2, 30.1).⁴³ And yet the implausibility of the details of the scene is arguably beside the point; what matters is Seneca’s imaginative construction of a cosmic mindset here, a form of consciousness that ranges unfettered over all ages and territories in the manner of the liberated *animus* portrayed at e.g. *Dial.* 12.11.7, *cogitatio eius* [sc. *animi*] *circa omne caelum it, in omne praeteritum futurumque tempus immittitur*, and also at 12.20.2:

tum [sc. after the first stages of its ascent] peragratis humilioribus ad summa perrumpit et pulcherrimo diuinorum spectaculo fruitur, aeternitatis suae memor in omne quod fuit futurumque est uadit omnibus saeculis.⁴⁴

Like Inwood, T.H. Corcoran is troubled by the implausibility of the Senecan deluge, and he explains Seneca’s marked use of the present tense as more than a device that lends vivid and ‘real’ effect: ‘Seneca’s treatment of the universal catastrophe as if occurring in his time may be caused by the idea that it recurs; and thus can be thought of as a permanent feature of the universe. Hence his present tenses.’⁴⁵ But Corcoran’s special pleading here makes no allowance for the fact that the cosmic consciousness through which Seneca focalises our gaze in 3.27–30 can *only* see in the (timeless) present, or in a permanent condition of full ownership of all times past, present and future. His choice of tense is no mere stylistic affectation but contributes to the portrayal of a mindset that attains the goal of ‘seeing the all’ – a revelatory departure from the smallness of everyday perception and experience, and attunement instead to the rhythms of cosmic decay and rebirth.⁴⁶

Important attention has recently been drawn to the significance in the *Epistulae Morales* of where author and addressee are physically located at different points in their correspondence.⁴⁷ When in *Ep.* 51, for example, we find Seneca on the move, writing from Campania (cf. 49.1) to Lucilius in Sicily, that sudden change of scene shifts the terms of their epistolary (and philosophical) engagement; ‘[a]s precedent’,

⁴² Inwood (n. 40), 130.

⁴³ Inwood (n. 40), 130.

⁴⁴ On this ‘onniscienza storica’, G. Viansino (ed.), *L. Anneo Seneca, I Dialoghi*. 2 vols (Milan, 1988–90), II.856, comparing *Dial.* 6.26.4–5, 10.14.1, 15.5.

⁴⁵ Corcoran (n. 28), I 271, n. 2.

⁴⁶ Seneca reverts briefly to the past tense in his account of survivors clinging to mountain-tops at 3.27.12 (*editissimis quibusque adhaerebant reliquiae generis humani...; hoc unum solacio fuit...; non uacabat timere mirantibus...*). Down to 3.27.15 we witness only the first phase of the deluge, or what Seneca himself portrays as a prelude at 3.28.3 (*cum per ista prolusum est*). As he rouses the waters to still more awesome heights in his second narrational wave (3.28.3–7), the mountain-tops are engulfed, and the few human survivors – presumably those who clung to the peaks at 3.27.12 – are finally destroyed: *deinde in miram altitudinem erigitur* [sc. *fretum*] *et illis tutis hominum receptaculis superest* (3.28.4). Why, then, does Seneca use the past tense at 3.27.12, if he writes there in anticipation of the disaster that strikes at 3.28.4? His confusion of narrative time may create its own pertinent effect in this ‘timeless’ universal vision. But there is perhaps another, more poignant possibility: the tenses that describe the survivors’ plight at 3.27.12 already spell disaster by effectively relegating them to the past (‘they did cling on, but to no avail...’) even before the waters finally engulf them at 3.28.4.

⁴⁷ Now J. Henderson, *Morals and Villas in Seneca’s Letters: Places to Dwell* (Cambridge, 2004), 32–9, esp. 32–3.

Ep. 51 ‘establishes the constant possibility that epistolary relations between writer and addressee (the axiom of mutual “present absence” that motivates correspondence) may be plotted in terms of their *loci* in the Roman empire’.⁴⁸ So too perhaps in the *Natural Questions*: as the preface to 4a opens, we find Lucilius in Sicily, exposed on all sides to the insidious flatteries that confirm the pejorative Senecan connotations elsewhere of *conuersatio hominum*.⁴⁹ Where is Seneca (or the Senecan persona) at this narrative-point? If we follow the conventional dating of the *Natural Questions* to C.E. 62–64,⁵⁰ we find him in a period of increasing estrangement from Nero’s court and Rome after 62.⁵¹ At the opening of the *Natural Questions* we find him in a new turning to ‘surveying the universe’ (*mundum circumire*, 3.pref. 1) and away from the ordinary business of life (cf. *occupationes reciduntur, patrimonii longe a domino iacentis cura soluitur, sibi totus animus uacet*, 3.pref. 2). Later in the preface to 3 the idealised place to which Seneca aspires is that elevated plane above the ordinary *sordida* of life where we ‘consort with god’ (11; cf. 1.pref. 6 *consortium <cum> deo*). It is from a similar vantage-point or place of detachment, I suggest, that we are to imagine Seneca surveying the flood at 3.27–30. True liberation and contempt for earthly luxury, he asserts at 1.pref. 8, are only possible when the mind ‘courses round the entire universe (cf. *totum circumit mundum*) and when, looking down from above upon the world that is narrow and mostly covered by sea, it says to itself “Is this that mere pinpoint which is divided among so many nations by the sword and fire?”’. The narrative-eye that witnesses nature’s vast operations unfolding in ‘real’ time in the deluge occupies a similar viewing-position as Seneca’s persona timelessly ‘courses round the universe’ (cf. again *mundum circumire*, 3.pref. 1) in full philosophical freedom.

On this approach, the transition to Lucilius in Sicily at the opening of 4a indeed brings us down to earth as we return from the sublime to the mundane. Book-closure and opening are here used to highly creative effect in the juxtaposition of two such different philosophical locales in 3 and 4a,⁵² even if the return to *conuersatio hominum* in the preface to 4a is perhaps softened by the ‘unexalted gloom’⁵³ that already descends in the last words of 3. There, after the anticipated rebirth of a new age of innocence, Seneca is resigned to the eventual return of vice (*cito nequitia subrepat; ...etiam sine magistro uitia discuntur*, 3.30.8): a convenient point of transition into the corruptions of flattery as we read on into 4a.

III

The wonders of Sicily (*mirabilia*, 4a.1.1) are trumped by those of Egypt (cf. *miracula*, 4a.2.6) in Seneca’s treatment of the Nile, *nobilissimum amnium* (4a.2.1); and Lucilius’ interest in the wondrous legend of the river Alpheus in Elis and the Sicilian spring of

⁴⁸ Henderson (n. 47), 33.

⁴⁹ As opposed to *diuinorum conuersatio* at 3.pref. 11; for the pejorative aspect see esp. *Epp.* 7, 103, 123 (so, e.g., *inimica est multorum conuersatio*, 7.1; *ab homine homini cotidianum periculum*, 103.1).

⁵⁰ p. 218 and n. 4.

⁵¹ So, of 62, Tac. *Ann.* 14.56.3 *rarus per urbem*; further alienation in 64, when (15.45.3) *ferebatur Seneca...longinqui ruris secessum orauisse, et postquam non concedebatur, ficta ualetudine, quasi aeger nervis, cubiculum non egressus*.

⁵² Even if an original ordering of 3, 4a, 4b, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2 is contested (cf. p. 219 and n. 8), 4a demonstrably follows directly after 3 (Hine [n. 8, 1981], 8–9).

⁵³ Hutchinson (n. 40), 131.

Arethusa⁵⁴ is trumped by the wonders of the Nile. Before Seneca turns to his formal critique of theories of why the Nile floods in summer (4a.2.17), he touches briefly on the fabled mystery of its source (4a.2.3), but without offering a theory of his own; rather, he joins the river at an embryonic stage of its development before what we shall see to be its dynamic growth towards maturity in Seneca's narrative. His ensuing account down to 4a.2.16 takes us on an entertaining tour of the Nile, tracing its course and, with a hint of Herodotean colour and Herodotus' taste for *θώματα*,⁵⁵ introducing us *en route* to the peoples, places and animal life that exist by the river. Seneca himself visited Egypt in or before C.E. 31,⁵⁶ he composed a work *De situ et sacris Aegyptiorum*,⁵⁷ he may have been a driving force behind an expedition sent by Nero to investigate the source of the Nile,⁵⁸ and he himself acquired extensive estates in Egypt, probably by Nero's gift;⁵⁹ hence the possibility that a special interest in the alluvial richness of the Nile Valley, and even first-hand observation of the region, inform *Natural Questions* 4a.⁶⁰ But Seneca also writes in the tradition of Greek rationalism that sought purely physical explanations for such wonders as the Nile's summer flooding presented: if 'for the Egyptians the Nile was above all providential and divine...the Greek philosophers were bringing to the phenomena of the river's flooding very much their own style of explanation'.⁶¹ So at 4a.2.7 Seneca describes a ritual in which priests and prefects cast gifts of gold into the river near the so-called Veins of the Nile: for J.-M. André, 'le *solemne sacrum* des *Nili uenae*...est seulement évoqué comme un spectacle' – an example of how the summer flood, that jewel in the crown of Egyptian *mirabilia*, 'se trouve totalement désacralisé' in Seneca's account.⁶²

Of special relevance for now, however, is the harmonious relationship that Seneca portrays in 4a.2.1–16 between man and nature, the Egyptians and the Nile. In contrast to the lack of candour – the epidemic of flattery – that characterises social relations in the preface to 4a, a seemingly pristine and 'natural' candour prevails in

⁵⁴ Cf. 3.1.1.1, 26.6. The line of verse quoted at 3.1.1.1, *Eleus Siculis de fontibus exilit amnis* (= fr. 4 E. Courtney (ed.), *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* [Oxford, 1993], 348–9), presumably originates from the Lucilian poem on Sicily to which Seneca refers in *Ep.* 79; further, Delatte (n. 13), 553, Herrmann (n. 4), 16 and L. Duret, 'Lucilius Junior, poète scientifique?', in S. Boldrini et al. (edd.), *Filologia e forme letterarie: studi offerti a F. Della Corte* III (Urbino, 1987), 377, and see also Courtney, 349 ('attempts to link this [sc. poem] with the *Aetna* in the Appendix Vergiliana fail').

⁵⁵ On which A.B. Lloyd, *Herodotus, Book II: Introduction* (Leiden, 1975), 141–7.

⁵⁶ At *Dial.* 12.19.2 Seneca writes that he was nursed through illness *per longum tempus* by his aunt, wife of C. Galerius, prefect of Egypt from C.E. 16 to 31; hence the *terminus ante quem* of 31 for his Egyptian visit, the duration of which remains unclear (further, Griffin [n. 4], 43, D. Vottero (ed.), *L. Anneo Seneca: I frammenti* [Bologna, 1998], 20).

⁵⁷ Fr. VII (12) Haase = T19 Vottero (n. 56), 130–1, with 19–21, 233–6; of uncertain date (Griffin [n. 4], 47, n. 2), but for C.E. 17–19, Vottero 20.

⁵⁸ On which now Hine (n. 4), 63 and n. 88 for bibliography.

⁵⁹ See Griffin (n. 4), 287 and n. 6, and now J.-M. André, 'Sénèque et l'Égypte: esquisse d'un bilan', *REL* 81 (2003), 174–6.

⁶⁰ See R. French, *Ancient Natural History: Histories of Nature* (London and New York, 1994), 177 and André (n. 59), 176, but Griffin (n. 4), 43 remains more sceptical (his Nile-excursus in 4a 'need not embody much personal observation').

⁶¹ French (n. 60), 112.

⁶² André (n. 59), 181. On this rationalist approach Seneca reacts against the multi-layered associations of the Nile and its flood with myth, magic and ritual, on which see D. Bonneau, *La crue du Nil: ses descriptions, ses explications, son culte* (Paris, 1964), 243–74 ('La crue dans le mythe osirien'), 275–314 ('La magie et la crue du Nil'), 315–60 ('Le Nil, dieu gréco-romain de la crue'), 361–420 ('Les fêtes de la crue du Nil'); also S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York, 1995), 252–63.

the sympathetic interactions between man and river in the main body of the book. The Nile gives Egypt life, and the river is itself suggestively brought to life in Seneca's personifying description of it – an account that finds significant parallels in other authors to support the case for Senecan personification. In the tenth book of his *Bellum Civile* Lucan portrays Julius Caesar, triumphant over Pompey, succumbing to the seductive charms of Cleopatra at Alexandria. After a luxurious dinner Caesar enters into conversation with the enigmatic Egyptian priest, Acoreus, from whom he seeks to know (*inter alia*) 'the causes, hidden through such long ages, that account for the Nile, and the secret of its origin. Give me sure hope of setting my eyes on the head-waters of the Nile, and I shall abandon civil war' (190–2). As if the truer master of the situation, Acoreus responds with a suitably serpentine⁶³ account in three main sections, the first (199–218) describing astral and planetary influences on the Nile; the second (219–67) refutes various theories of the Nile's flood; and, after a (none too) subtly pointed digression on reckless leaders who sought to uncover the Nile's secrets before Caesar (268–85), the third (285–331) describes the Nile's course and traces its flow 'through both hemispheres' (301) to its obscure source in the southern hemisphere (*hic quaeritur ortus*, 301). In its way Acoreus' entire speech is as elusive as the river that it describes, and with a cultivated air of mystery: his 'much-heralded "secret" [sc. about the source] amounts to little more than a rehash of the Eudoxan theory, but with high rhetorical color added...to lend mystique to its otherwise predictable contents'.⁶⁴ That mysterious quality helps to disguise the subtext that may lurk in Acoreus' speech, which arguably challenges Caesar's invincibility by gently exposing the limits of his knowledge and dominion: the Nile remains unconquered (cf. *arcanum natura caput non prodidit ulli*, 295), not least by Caesar himself.⁶⁵ For present purposes, however, an important feature of the high rhetorical colour of Acoreus' speech is his personifying, second-person address to the river (so *tua flumina prodam*, /...Nile, 285–6; cf. 296, 317, 328), with the possible implication that Acoreus, as an Egyptian, can claim a special affinity to the Nile that the foreign Caesar cannot. The river's human-like character is fleshed out further in its daring (*ausus*, 288), its anger (*iras*, 316) and its indignation and violence (*indignaris*, *laccensis*, 320).⁶⁶

So too in Pliny's *Natural History* the Nile takes on certain human characteristics and, in accordance with Pliny's teleological nature and providential deity, it colludes with human interests,⁶⁷ even 'playing the part of a farmer' through its periodic flooding at 18.167 (*Nilus ibi coloni uice fungens euagari incipit*). More generally in Pliny, observes T. Murphy,

[w]ith rivers, geographical description approaches biography.... From a practical point of view, of course, the progress of a river is the *Natural History's* primary means of surveying a country's

⁶³ Cf. Schama (n. 62), 262 ('Acoreus is as serpentine as Caesar is direct').

⁶⁴ J.S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton, 1992), 154; for Eudoxus, 150. Cf. Schama (n. 62), 262 on Acoreus' 'vexing mixture of commonplaces and esoteric casuistry'.

⁶⁵ With possible implications for Nero: E. Berti (ed.), *M. Annaei Lucani Bellum Civile Liber X* (Florence, 2000), 213.

⁶⁶ Further, Berti (n. 65), 239–40 on 316, 241 on 320, 248 on 329 *moribus...receptis*.

⁶⁷ So, e.g., 5.52 *ex hoc lacu profusus indignatur fluere per harenosa et squalentia, conditque se aliquot dierum itinere, mox alio lacu maiore...erumpit et hominum coetus ueluti circumspicit* ('searches for'), with M. Beagon, 'Nature and views of her landscapes in Pliny the Elder', in G. Shipley and J. Salmon (edd.), *Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity: Environment and Culture* (London and New York, 1996), 290.

interior and listing the places it passes and the frontiers it defines. But rivers also deserve to have their life-stories told – they possess individual characters, they acquire property, and they exchange things with humanity.⁶⁸

Pliny offers a loose but illuminating parallel for the interactive relationship between man and nature/the Nile that we shall soon consider in Seneca's case. But given that Lucan was directly acquainted with Seneca's Nile-book,⁶⁹ the personifying features of Lucan's Nile arguably build on what was already a key Senecan emphasis. At 4a.2.3 the language of listless spread – *peruagatus, diffusus, sparsus* – characterises the river in its pre-state, as it were, as if a kind of primary matter (cf. the primordial *informis unitas* of 3.30.1), before it is gathered into shape in the words *circa Philas primum ex uago et errante colligitur*. Then an error of fact (4a.2.3):

Philae insula est aspera et undique praeupta. duobus in unum coituris amnis cingitur, qui Nilo mutantur et eius nomen ferunt. urbem tota complectitur.

Seneca here confuses Philae with Ethiopian Meroe.⁷⁰ Perhaps an innocent slip; but whether accidental or not, Seneca's error has the convenient effect of collecting the Nile at the acknowledged 'gate of the Egyptian kingdom' (*regni claustra Philae*, Luc. 10.313), which here serves as a symbolic threshold of Egyptian civilisation.⁷¹ The possible etymological significance of Philae-Amicae as a place of 'reconciliation'⁷² may also bode well, at this entry-point into Egypt, for Seneca's subsequent emphasis on the Egyptians' oneness with their natural environment. Surrounding the city with its two streams at this inception-point (*duobus...cingitur* above), Seneca's Nile symbolically cradles civilisation – a detail that anticipates the constructive interactions of man and river further downstream in Seneca's narrative.

In its growth towards maturity, the Nile meets its first real test when it encounters the great Cataracts (*excipiunt eum Cataractae*, 4a.2.4).⁷³ There, *dissimilis sibi* (4a.2.5)

⁶⁸ Murphy (n. 39), 142–4.

⁶⁹ For 4a as Lucan's main, but not his only, source, N.P. Holmes, *A Commentary on the Tenth Book of Lucan* (D. Phil. Oxford, 1989), 337 – part of an important reassessment (321–38) of the arguments of H. Diels, 'Seneca und Lucan', *Abhandlungen der kgl. Pr. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin 1885. Phil. hist. Kl. III* (Berlin, 1886), 3–32 = W. Burkert (ed.), *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte der antiken Philosophie* (Hildesheim, 1969), 379–408, for Lucan's close dependence on Seneca (Holmes also supplies a useful critique of arguments against Diels' position).

⁷⁰ Long recognised; see on previous scholarship G. Pfligersdorffer, 'Lucan als Dichter des geistigen Widerstandes', *Hermes* 87 (1959), 374, and cf. Vit. 8.2.6, Mela 1.50, Plin. *HN* 5.53 and esp. Luc. 10.302–3, *late tibi* [sc. the Nile] *gurgite rupto l'ambitur...Meroe* with Holmes (n. 69), 222 on 307–13.

⁷¹ For Philae, properly speaking two small islands (hence the plural name) south of Syene (modern Aswan) and upstream of the first cataract, R.B. Jackson, *At Empire's Edge: Exploring Rome's Egyptian Frontier* (New Haven and London, 2002), 118–23 with Holmes (n. 69), 224 on Luc. 10.313–22.

⁷² So Servius ad *Aen.* 6.154 on Seneca's *De situ et sacris Aegyptiorum* (fr. VII [12] Haase = T19 Vottero [n. 56], 130–1): Philae so named because 'there Isis was placated by the Egyptians', who had incurred her wrath when she could not yet find for proper burial the limbs of her husband, Osiris, killed by his brother, Typhon. But Vottero 234, n. 3 also refers to a scholion on Luc. 10.313 (= J. Endt [ed.], *Adnotationes super Lucanum* [Leipzig, 1909], 407.19–22) which explains the name by allusion to the cessation of long hostilities between the Ethiopians and Egyptians, whence Philae from the peace concluded there (*ἀπὸ τῆς φιλίας*).

⁷³ Presumably, after Philae (4a.2.3), only the first Cataract, as at Luc. 10.313–22 (with Holmes [n. 69], 224), where Lucan follows Seneca in using plural for singular. The plural adds dramatic effect; or could it be that Seneca's confusion of Philae and Meroe (the latter between the fifth and sixth cataracts; Jackson [n. 71], 108 map 3) explains his use of the plural *Cataractae*?

or transformed from its muddy, heavy self thus far, it is roughed up by the jagged rocks and narrows, tossed, thrown and distilled, as it were, into the stream that flows from this transition-point. Experience colours the waters (*illi non ex natura sua sed ex iniuria loci color est*, 4a.2.5) and adds character; the Nile comes of age when it takes its last plunge (*eluctatus obstantia, in uastam altitudinem subito destitutus cadit*) towards final form. Man too here gains from experience when it is his turn to shoot the rapids in the diverting, and apparently unique,⁷⁴ anecdote that Seneca reports at 4a.2.6. The locals take to their *paruula nauigia* in pairs, their boats so small in comparison with the river's immense torrent (cf. *inter rapidam insaniam Nili*). To the horror of onlookers, they are catapulted (*tormenti modo*) downstream by the force of the rapids, death an apparent certainty. But these daredevils know the river, its mood and its personality. As one man controls direction and the other bails (*alter nauem regit, alter exhaurit*), they work together to work the rapids until the wave they ride delivers them to smooth waters. Their adventure is no mere digression here, pleasant⁷⁵ but irrelevant to Seneca's main purpose; for his portrayal of the daredevils' harmonious interaction with nature discreetly foreshadows the way in which man marshals the waters to more constructive effect when, near Seneca's Memphis just above the Delta (cf. 4a.2.12), the Nile finally begins to flood the surrounding lands (4a.2.8). At 4a.2.6 our daredevil joyriders find 'the narrowest channels' (*tenuissimos canales*) through which to negotiate the rapids. The right channels are again exploited at 4a.2.8, albeit now in the sense that the Nile's waters are carefully distributed so as to spread their benefit far and wide: *manu...canalibus factis, ut sit modus in deriuantium potestate, per totam discurrit* [sc. *Nilus*] *Aegyptum*. At first distributed in pockets which gradually coalesce (cf. *continuat aquas*, 4a.2.8), the flood-waters settle down to form a single expanse *in faciem lati ac turbidi maris*, as if an ironic counter-reflection of the formless waters that we witnessed before the Nile took initial shape in 4a.2.3.⁷⁶

All of the power (cf. *nouarum uirium*, 4a.2.8) that the Nile has built up in Seneca's staged description of its growth is now channelled into its beneficence to Egypt. Its waters irrigate the land, its alluvial deposits make it fertile by binding the sandy soil (4a.2.10): the Nile flows and pulses with, even *as*, the country's life-blood. But Seneca's description of the Nile's animal-life adds another important dimension to the integrated relationship of man, river and natural environment that is drawn in 4a. He relies on an eminent source, Claudius Balbillus, prefect of Egypt from C.E. 55 to 59,⁷⁷ for his account at 4a.2.13–14 of a battle that Balbillus apparently witnessed in the Nile Delta between dolphins from the sea and crocodiles from the Nile. The elder Pliny offers a similar report (*HN* 8.91),⁷⁸ but what distinguishes the Senecan account is its greater emphasis on the human-like properties of the battle and its protagonists, especially the dolphins. The language of ordinary battle-description – *occurrere, agmen, proelium, acies* – is here transposed to the animals; and, true to their

⁷⁴ Parroni (n. 31), 552.

⁷⁵ Cf. André (n. 59), 183, n. 93: '*narratio très étoffée, conforme à la règle du delectare*'.

⁷⁶ The process of the pockets of water coming together may itself symbolise the unifying/harmonising function that Seneca's Nile serves/signifies for Egypt itself.

⁷⁷ For whom Vottero (n. 6), 490, n. 38 with Hine (n. 4), 61 (our Balbillus to be identified with the Julio-Claudian astrologer Ti. Claudius Balbillus?).

⁷⁸ Cf. also Ammian. 22.15.20, possibly in imitation of Seneca (Parroni [n. 31], xxxvi–vii). Given that Pliny, like Seneca (4a.2.15), immediately goes on to recount how the natives of Tentyra are exceptional in their brave hostility to crocodiles (*HN* 8.92; cf. 28.31), it is possible that Pliny and Seneca share the same source. But for differences of emphasis in their respective treatments, A. Ernout (ed.), *Pline l'Ancien, Histoire Naturelle livre VIII* (Paris, 1952), 132, n. 2 on §§91–2.

reputation for being closely related to man,⁷⁹ the dolphins approach the human in their intelligent cunning (*astu*, Plin. *HN* 8.91). Swimming under the crocodiles, they use their fins to cut them in their soft underbellies before dividing the enemy through a frontal assault. In turn, the natives of Tentyra resemble the dolphins, that *animal audacissimum* (cf. 4a.2.14), in their own plucky, even reckless, contempt for the crocodiles (*contemptu et temeritate*, 4a.2.15) and in the sheer nerve (*praesens animus*; cf. *praesentia animi*, Plin. *HN* 8.92) that makes for survival against so dangerous an enemy. In instinct and character the natives and the dolphins are truly related in Seneca's narrative.⁸⁰

For all the diverting colour of this Senecan staging of battle between the dolphins and the crocodiles, the humanising component contributes importantly to the overall emphasis in 4a.2.3–16 on Egypt as a fully interactive ecosystem of sorts, a balanced unity in which the true wonder is perhaps not the Nile *per se*, but the 'whole' vision of life that Seneca constructs around that main artery. In this uplifting form of *conuersatio naturae* (as it were), we have travelled far from the engrossments of *conuersatio hominum* in the preface to 4a – albeit with a crowning irony if Seneca is seen to flatter Egypt in his idealised Nile-portrait.

IV

Many contrasts are easily drawn between Seneca's portrayal of the Nile on the one hand, the deluge at 3.27–30 on the other. Whereas the latter washes away crops, pasturage, houses and all the other trappings of civilisation (3.27.4–7), the Nile brings not just fertility to Egypt but even the land itself (*debet...illi Aegyptus non tantum fertilitatem terrarum sed ipsas*, 4a.2.10). Whereas the rivers that burst their banks at 3.27.8 (the Rhine, Rhone and Danube) run to the anarchic timetable of nature in disarray, the Nile floods reliably from one year to the next, freeing farmers from excessive anxiety about each coming season (*nemo aratorum respicit caelum*, 4a.2.2;⁸¹ cf. 4a.2.9). As in the case of the deluge, the Nile-flood separates communities from each other (*oppida insularum modo extant, nullum mediterraneis nisi per nauigia commercium est*, 4a.2.11; cf. *direptum inter miseros commercium ac transitus*, 3.27.11); but whereas for the Egyptians the flood is a beautiful sight⁸² and a

⁷⁹ So, e.g., Plin. *HN* 9.23, 24, 33, Ael. *NA* 1.18, 5.6, 8.3, 10.8, Opp. *Hal.* 1.649–53, 5.425–47 (βασιλεῦσιν, 'kings of the seas', 441) with J.M.C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (London, 1973), 206–7. Crocodiles too show human traits, albeit for Aelian at *NA* 5.23 'innate wickedness and villainy' (κακίας...καὶ πανουργίας κροκοδύλων συμφυοῦς).

⁸⁰ As Beagon (n. 67), 298 observes (cf. also her *Roman Nature: the Thought of Pliny the Elder* [Oxford, 1992], 151–2), Pliny often depicts nature as 'deliberately staging *spectacula* in the form of duels between one kind of animal and another' – duels which 'serve to uphold the balance of nature: thus the crocodile has more than one natural enemy because it is so great a pest (8.91)'. A similar 'balance of nature' is upheld in the crocodiles' struggles now against the dolphins, now man at 4a.2.13–15; and it also realistically accommodates strife within Seneca's 'whole' picture of environmental integrity at the Nile.

⁸¹ Possibly drawn from a lost work of *poeta* Lucilius, *non* dropped before *nemo* to supply the joke announced at 4a.2.2 *quare non cum poeta meo iocor...?* For the issues, Vottero (n. 6), 482, n. 3 with Parroni (n. 31), 551 and Hine (n. 8, 1996), 175 in app.

⁸² Well corroborated by Bonneau (n. 62), 88–9. The Senecan picture may profitably be viewed in the light of contemporary artistic developments: see André (n. 59), 183 on 'la popularité du "thème" nilotique dans cette Campanie que Sénèque affectionne, et qu'il a visité deux fois, en 63 et en 64', and now the catalogue of 131 scenes in the *Corpus figurarum Niloticarum* assembled by

source of joy (4a.2.11), the deluge brings fear and helplessness to those who survive its initial onslaught (cf. *miseros*, 3.27.11, *transierat in stuporem metus*, 12).

These and other points of contrast are conveniently collected by F. Waiblinger,⁸³ who summarises the different faces of nature in Books 3 and 4a as follows: 'Hier [sc. 4a.2.1] begegnet uns eine ganz andere Seite der Natur als in III: die gütige Natur, die den Menschen durch das Wasser Segen spendet. In III erschien das Wasser als Werkzeug einer auf die Vernichtung der Menschheit abzielenden Natur.'⁸⁴ But while nature is in one sense obviously more benign ('gütige') in 4a, in a broader sense she is *always* benign. So A.A. Long on the Stoic conflagration (*ἐκπύρωσις*) that returns the world, at the end of its periodic cycle, to its original fiery state out of which the cosmogonic process will begin again:

...the conflagration explains why the present world, as observation and physical theory suggest, will not endure for ever. But it is not, for that reason, an event to be feared. Given the physical constitution of things, the conflagration is the necessary counter-phase to the condensed state which originally produced the present world. These physical processes, moreover, are not laws of an undesigning, uncaring, or lifeless nature. On the contrary, they are quite literally acts of god, who works with a rational and beneficent plan for the good of the whole. The world at present is the object of that plan. But any such world can be of only finite duration. Therefore, to ensure the continuity of cosmic goodness, the present world is everlastingly recreated.⁸⁵

On this approach the Senecan deluge, which is arguably cast at 3.27–30 as an agent of destruction 'parallel and analogous' to the conflagration,⁸⁶ is no less part of nature's beneficent plan than is the annual flooding of the Nile. True, in the dark mood that prevails at the end of 3 no effort is made to find cold or contrived comfort in this

M.J. Versluys, *Aegyptiaca Romana. Nilotic Scenes and the Roman Views of Egypt* (Leiden and Boston, 2002), 39–236 (51 examples from Campania; cf. p. 242 for 'the great popularity of the genre' in the first century C.E.).

⁸³ *Senecae Naturales Quaestiones. Griechische Wissenschaft und römische Form* (Munich, 1977), 55–8.

⁸⁴ Waiblinger (n. 83), 56; similarly, O. and E. Schönberger, *L. Annaeus Seneca: naturwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen in acht Büchern* (Würzburg, 1990), 212.

⁸⁵ A.A. Long, 'The Stoics on world-conflagration and everlasting recurrence', *SJPh* 23 Suppl. (1985), 25.

⁸⁶ G. Mader, 'Some observations on the Senecan Götterdämmerung', *AC* 26 (1983), 64, citing the equation of fire and water at 3.pref. 5, 28.7, 29.2 and 30.6, and also the Babylonian astrologer Berosos' claim (3.29.1) that the conflagration occurs when all the planets meet in the sign of Cancer, the deluge when they meet in Capricorn. But while in these cases 'the two forms of destruction are related and parallel phenomena' (64), elsewhere Seneca *does* apparently distinguish them. So at *Dial.* 6.26.6, *et cum tempus aduenerit quo se mundus renouaturus extinguat, ...sidera sideribus incurrent et omni flagrante materia uno igni quicquid nunc ex disposito lucet ardebit*, the stellar chaos signals that 'the *ἐκπύρωσις* is envisaged as a phenomenon of cosmic, and not simply global dimensions (cf. *QNat.* 6.32.4)' (Mader 63), and the *inundationibus...et ignibus uastis* to which Seneca alludes earlier in *Dial.* 6.26.6 then refer to partial catastrophes as opposed to the final *ἐκπύρωσις* (Mader 63). If we accept that at, e.g., 3.28.7 and 29.1 Seneca grants the deluge the significance of *ἐκπύρωσις*, allowance has to be made for rhetorical elaboration. So, rightly, C. Favez (ed.), *L. Annaei Senecae Dialogorum liber VI Ad Marciam de consolatione* (Paris, 1928), xlviii, n. 2: 'l'emphase déclamatoire est probablement cause d'une exagération, où il ne faut pas voir, à mon avis, une confusion entre deux événements que Sénèque distingue fort bien ailleurs'. Hence Long (n. 85), 33, n. 35 rightly asserts, albeit from a technical rather than a dramatic/rhetorical viewpoint, that '[w]hat Seneca describes in *Nat. quaest.* 3.27–8 is the "fated day" of a deluge that will overwhelm most of the earth; i.e. *it occurs within a world-period*' (my emphasis). Further on the whole question, Gauly (n. 7), 237–45; and for further Senecan allusions to *ἐκπύρωσις*, R. Ferri (ed.), *Octavia: a Play Attributed to Seneca*. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 41 (Cambridge, 2003), 235 on 391–3.

beneficence. In contrast to the warm benevolence of 4a, in 3 the actions of god/nature just *are* (and are inevitably just), as if part of the genetic coding of a given world-cycle (3.30.1):

Sunt omnia, ut dixi [3.27.2], facilia naturae, utique <quae> a primo facere constituit, ad quae non subito sed ex denuntiatio uenit. iam autem a primo die mundi, cum in hunc habitum ex informi unitate discederet, quando mergerentur terrena decretum est.⁸⁷

But as soon as we recognise god's greater plan, the Nile itself is put in its place as but one part of nature's scheme, its good works but a distant memory when it too presumably joins the Rhone, Rhine and Danube (cf. 3.27.8–9) in that single vast confluence when the day of the deluge dawns; like the Caspian and the Red Seas, its name too will pass away into irrelevance (cf. *peribunt tot nomina*, 3.29.8). In this respect Book 4a can itself now be folded into Book 3: the annual flood-cycle of the Nile represents a microcosmic function of seasonal time within the cosmic time-cycle that coordinates the deluge at 3.27–30. Earlier in 3 Seneca relates the fixed time-cycles of springs that now flow fully and now dry up to the bodily time-cycles of gout, quartan fever and menstruation (3.16.2): like the body, water has its own cycles (*interualla*), but 'some cycles are short and thus noticeable, others longer and no less fixed'. By analogy, the Nile has a relatively brief and noticeable annual flood-cycle, while the deluge is equally part of a fixed but much vaster cycle; both cycles simultaneously operate within, and are complementary components of, a unified world-plan, and also a tightly coordinated literary plan in Books 3 and 4a.

For the early Stoics, observes G. Mader, the conflagration was regarded 'primarily as a physical process, and only secondarily in moral terms as a catharsis. There is no evidence that the *ἐκπύρωσις* was thought of as a divinely inflicted *punishment* for man's moral degeneracy'.⁸⁸ In the Senecan deluge, however, the moral dimension that is implicit from the outset in nature's exertions *ad exitium humani generis* (3.27.1) is finally made explicit at 3.29.5:

Ergo quandoque erit terminus rebus humanis, cum partes eius [sc. terrae] interire debuerint abolerique funditus totae, ut de integro rudes <homines> innoxique⁸⁹ generentur nec supersit in deteriora praeceptor, plus umoris quam semper fuit fiet.⁹⁰

The moralising emphasis here is no novelty in Book 3 as a whole. Already in 3.17–18 Seneca suddenly interrupts his scientific investigations to launch a blistering attack on luxury.⁹¹ The very intrusiveness of this outburst is underscored by Seneca's

⁸⁷ For nature's / god's plan cf. *fatalis diluuii dies*, 3.27.1; *illa necessitas temporis and fata*, 27.3; *mutari...humanum genus placuit*, 28.2; *utrumque* [sc. conflagration and deluge] *fit cum deo uisum est ordiri meliora, uetera finire*, 28.7; *origo mundi non minus solem et lunam...quam quibus mutarentur terrena continuit*, 29.3; *naturae constituta*, 29.4.

⁸⁸ Mader (n. 86), 62 (his emphasis).

⁸⁹ For *-iique* with the Z branch of MSS, Hine (n. 19), 66.

⁹⁰ Cf. for this moral aspect [Sen.] *Oct.* 391–5, esp. 392–4 *tunc adest mundo dies / supremus ille, qui premat genus impium / caeli ruina*. Note also Seneca's uncorroborated report (4a.2.16) that, in Cleopatra's reign, the river did not flood for two consecutive years (42–1 B.C.E.), thus presaging both her and Antony's ultimate loss of power: is the Nile here implicitly given a moralising/punitive dimension parallel to that of the waters in 3.27–30?

⁹¹ With the climax that diners feed their eyes (*oculis quoque gulosi sunt*, 3.18.7) on the sight of the dying surmullet, beautiful in its changes of colour as it struggles for breath as a spectacle at the dinner-table. The *luxuria* condemned here with shades of satire (cf. A.L. Motto on 'Seneca's culinary satire', in *Further Essays on Seneca* [Frankfurt am Main, 2001], 178–9) extends beyond

disconcerting digression at 3.18.1, *Permitte mihi paulum quaestione seposita castigare luxuriam*, and then by his sudden return to his main theme at 3.19.1, *Sed ut ad propositum reuertar...*. In this, the first book of the *Natural Questions* in its original ordering,⁹² the outburst may partly be programmatic in function, in that it starkly confronts the reader with a (even *the*) main challenge of the work as a whole: how to reconcile Seneca's extended outbursts of moral outrage with his main scientific agenda?⁹³ Given that to the Stoic imagination the three familiar parts of Hellenistic philosophy, logic, physics and ethics, are mutually involving, and given that 'the perfect exercise of any one of these disciplines implies that of all the others',⁹⁴ the *Natural Questions* would in a way be incomplete *without* its moralising emphasis; the study of the physics of the world inevitably implicates ethics, not least because the physical world of the *Natural Questions* supplies a vision of natural process and normative/rational behaviour that is overturned in the moral excesses and irrationality that Seneca condemns at the human level.⁹⁵ On this approach the outburst at 3.17–18 acclimatises us to the special Senecan concoction of physico-moral science on offer in the *Natural Questions* as a whole – a mode which easily accommodates, and even causes us to expect, a moralising dimension within the Senecan deluge.

But two factors importantly complicate this moral emphasis in the cataclysm, the first of them connected to Seneca's (Stoic) conception of the world as a living organism. So at 3.15.1 he favours a theory of 'veins' of subterranean water:

placet natura regi terram, et quidem ad nostrorum corporum exemplar, in quibus et uenae sunt et arteriae, illae sanguinis hae spiritus receptacula. in terra quoque sunt alia itinera per quae aqua, alia per quae spiritus currit; adeoque ad similitudinem illa humanorum corporum natura formauit ut maiores quoque nostri aquarum appellauerint uenas.

The body-analogy set in place here recurs later in Book 3 and often throughout the *Natural Questions*,⁹⁶ where it contributes significantly to Seneca's wider use of analogy as a mechanism that connects and correlates different world-parts within a 'whole' vision of cosmic oneness.⁹⁷ In Book 3, however, the plain body-analogy is accompanied by the implication that the natural world is human-like in certain behavioural aspects. So at 3.26.5 Seneca claims that certain springs cleanse themselves of impurities at fixed intervals of time. The Arethusa in Sicily is invoked as a case in point,⁹⁸ and also a spring in the Rhodian Chersonese (3.26.6), and then

gourmet appetite to embrace the decadence of death as play or theatre: see C.A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: the Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton, 1992), 56, and now Gauly (n. 7), 96–104.

⁹² See p. 219 and n. 8.

⁹³ On the history of the problem, Codoñer (n. 3), 1803–8 with Scott (n. 11), esp. 55–7, and Rosenmeyer (n. 7), 105–6.

⁹⁴ P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Trans. M. Chase (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1998), 78 (much more of relevance on pp. 78–82 on 'The Stoics on the parts of philosophy').

⁹⁵ Cf. Rosenmeyer (n. 7), 105: 'If physics is the science of how the world behaves, then ethics must be its mandatory junior or perhaps even senior partner'.

⁹⁶ Cf. 3.16.2, 29.2–3, 30.4, 5.4.2, 6.3.1, 10.2, 14.2, 18.6, 24.2–4 with Hine (n. 8, 1981), 141–2 on 2.1.4. See also L. Taub, *Ancient Meteorology* (London, 2003), 143–4, 147, 151–2 and, on the earlier philosophical tradition, G.E.R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge, 1966), 232–72.

⁹⁷ For the approach, G. Williams, 'Interactions: physics, morality, and narrative in Seneca *Natural Questions* 1', *CPh* 100 (2005), 152, 157–60.

⁹⁸ And it is itself suitably personified at 3.26.6 by Seneca's quotation of Virg. *Ecl.* 10.4–5 (...a Vergilio, qui adloquitur Arethusam: 'sic tibi...').

the sea (3.26.7); for 'all standing and enclosed water purges itself by nature. For in waters that have a current, impurities (*uitia*) cannot settle... Water which does not eject whatever settles in it boils up (*aestuans*) to a greater or lesser extent. As for the sea, it draws up from its depths dead bodies, equipment and other such debris of shipwrecks and...it is cleansed of them (*purgatur*)' (3.26.8).⁹⁹ If the body-analogy is invoked at this point, this vision of natural self-cleansing in 3.26 offers a suggestive reflection of human bodily function;¹⁰⁰ so that when Seneca immediately proceeds to the deluge in 3.27 ('But this subject reminds me to ask...'), that catastrophe can itself be envisaged as a form of bodily self-cleansing before renewal. The body-analogy is explicit at 3.30.4: *quemadmodum corpora nostra [a] deiectum¹⁰¹ uenter exhaurit, quemadmodum in sudorem eunt uires, ita tellus liquefiet et, aliis causis quiescentibus, intra se quo mergatur inueniet*. Nature orchestrates the destruction (*omnia adiuvabunt naturam ut naturae constituta peragantur*, 3.29.4; cf. 3.27.2, 30.1, 3), but nature is cast as an ordaining moral, and not just physical, principle when the end beckons for mankind at 3.29.5 (quoted above). It is *this* portrait of nature as an all-powerful, guileless and beneficent agent of physical/moral change that collides with the version of human nature – self-interested, partial and potentially guileful – on display in the preface to 4a.

Secondly, Ovid: as so often in the *Natural Questions*, Seneca intersperses his account of the deluge with verse-quotations, all of them on this occasion from the *Metamorphoses*. The first describes the peaks that overtop the flood-waters: *ergo insularum modo eminent 'montes et sparsas Cycladas augent', ut ait ille poetarum ingeniosissimus egregie* (3.27.13; cf. *Met.* 2.264). In their original context in the Phaethon-episode, the Ovidian words in fact refer to the effects when the sea is dried up after Phaethon crashes his father's solar chariot upon the earth. Given Seneca's diluvial theme, the Ovidian presence here appears incongruous at first sight, and arguably a lapse of memory on Seneca's part¹⁰² – unless he invokes the Ovidian conflagration-scene partly with irony, partly as a subtle means of signalling that the deluge and conflagration are parallel agents of destruction.¹⁰³ Then a series of lines drawn from Ovid's portrayal in *Metamorphoses* 1 of the flood with which Jupiter punishes human wickedness before the waters recede and Deucalion and Pyrrha begin the renewal:

illud pro magnitudine rei dixit, 'omnia pontus erat, deerant quoque litora ponto' [*Met.* 1.292], ni tantum impetum ingenii et materiae ad pueriles ineptias reduxisset: 'nat lupus inter oues, fuluos uehit unda leones' [*Met.* 1.304], non est res satis sobria lasciuire deuorato orbe terrarum. dixit ingentia et tantae confusionis imaginem cepit cum dixit:

⁹⁹ For other ancient allusions to the sea's self-cleansing, Vottero (n. 6), 440, n. 20.

¹⁰⁰ And a ready analogy for *moral* conditioning if the human/moral connotations of *uitia*, *aestuo* (*OLD* 5) and *purgo* (*OLD* 7a, 8a) are activated. Or could we infer from analogy between the earth and human body that there is rather (in the words of one referee) 'a problematic collusion between the (im)morality of nature and of humans'? An interesting proposal; yet would the contrast then posited between man and nature undermine the work undertaken more generally in the *Natural Questions* towards a sympathetic correlation between the two, and towards nurturing a deeper human understanding of nature's mysteries/wonders?

¹⁰¹ Hine (n. 19), 67–8 ('by diarrhoea'; the *a* omitted as 'dittography from *nostra*').

¹⁰² A. Setaioli, 'Seneca e lo stile', *ANRW* II.32.2 (Berlin and New York, 1985), 828, n. 292 = *Facundus Seneca. Aspetti della lingua e dell'ideologia senecana* (Bologna, 2000), 178, n. 318.

¹⁰³ Cf. on this point R. Degl'Innocenti Pierini, 'Seneca emulo di Ovidio nella rappresentazione del diluvio universale (*Nat. Quaest.* 3, 27, 13 sgg.)', *Atene e Roma* 29 (1984), 144; but see also n. 86 above.

exspatiata ruunt per apertos flumina campos,
 cumque satis arbusta simul pecudesque uirosque
 tectaque cumque suis rapiunt penetralia templis.
 si qua domus mansit, culmen tamen altior huius
 unda tegit, pressaeque labant sub gurgite turres.¹⁰⁴

[*Met.* 1.285–288 *mansit*, 289 *culmen* –290]

magnifice haec, si non curauerit quid oues et lupi faciant. natari autem in diluuiio et in illa rapina potest? aut non eodem impetu pecus omne quo raptum erat mersum est? concepisti imaginem quantam debebas obrutis omnibus terris, caelo ipso in terram ruente. perfer: scies quid deceat, si cogitaueris orbem terrarum natare. (3.27.13–15)

Well before the moral connotations of the deluge are finally made explicit at 3.29.5, the evocations in 3.27 of the Ovidian flood and, by extension, Jupiter's punishment of mankind already tinge the Senecan proceedings with an understated moralising colour.¹⁰⁵ The delicacy of this manoeuvre allows Seneca gently to impute to nature the role of moral arbiter without compromising his primary emphasis in the *Natural Questions* on nature's purely physical workings. But why the seemingly intrusive critique of Ovid's 'silliness' in portraying the wolf swimming among the sheep, the lion carried by the waters?

An initial answer is supplied by G.O. Hutchinson's observation that Seneca is here 'using criticism of Ovid to bring out his own seriousness, and the greatness of his subject and his conception of it; this ending [3.27.14–15] boldly sets the lightness of Ovid's wit against the weightiness and, in his prose, the purposefulness of Seneca's'.¹⁰⁶ But A. Setaioli digs deeper in exploring the tension between the 'modern' and 'classical' sympathies within Seneca himself: Seneca admires, as did his father (cf. *Contr.* 2.2.9, 12), the brilliance of thought and expression that both associate with *ingenium/ingeniosus*, but this sympathy for modern tendencies is tempered by the classical influence that weighs on Seneca *fiis*. In particular, the classical doctrines of τὸ πρέπον and *conuenientia* (cf. *scies*¹⁰⁷ *quid deceat*, 3.27.15) are transgressed in Ovid's unlikely portrayal of *any* animal surviving long enough to swim amid the deluge.¹⁰⁸ There remain intriguing, and not necessarily incompatible, alternatives to Setaioli's interpretation;¹⁰⁹ but of interest for now is Ovid's broader reputation in antiquity for a lack of restraint: *adparet summi ingenii uiro non iudicium defuisse ad compescendam licentiam carminum suorum sed animum* (Sen. *Contr.* 2.2.12; cf. *Ouidius nescit quod bene cessit relinquere*, 9.5.17). The *lasciua* that Seneca chastises also draws comment

¹⁰⁴ The longer form of the Ovidian quotation is found in the Z branch of the MSS; the C branch contains only 285 and 290 *pressaeque...turres*, but Hine (n. 19), 65 rightly asks: 'Could Seneca have said *magnifice haec* about C's truncated version?'

¹⁰⁵ On this point, already Gaully (n. 7), 248, 251; and cf. also 3.28.2 for *Met.* 1.272–3 quoted to similar effect. Of course, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is also a sympathetic presence here because of Seneca's explicit emphasis on change (*mutatio*, 3.27.3; *mutari...humanum genus placuit*, 28.3; *mutarentur terrena*, 29.3).

¹⁰⁶ Hutchinson (n. 40), 129.

¹⁰⁷ For Degl'Innocenti Pierini (n. 103), 145, addressed in apostrophe to Ovid himself.

¹⁰⁸ Setaioli (n. 102), 828–9 = (2000), 177–9.

¹⁰⁹ So G. Mazzoli, *Seneca e la poesia* (Milan, 1970), 245–7 (Senecan protest against 'la poetica edonistica' and Ovid's excessive *lasciua*). Degl'Innocenti Pierini (n. 103), 143–52 interestingly associates *lasciuire* (3.27.14) with the lighter lyric and erotic poetic modes: despite praise of Ovid on other fronts, Seneca takes him to task in *lasciuire* not just for an excessive exuberance that lacks *sobrietas*, but also for infecting his *Metamorphoses* with 'un registro stilistico più consono alla poesia lirica' (149–50).

in Quintilian's characterisation of Ovid as *lascivius quidem in herois quoque...et nimium amator ingenii sui* (*Inst.* 10.1.88; cf. *Ovidius utroque* [sc. Tibullus and Propertius] *lascivior*, 93, 98).¹¹⁰ It is indeed ironic¹¹¹ that Quintilian faults Seneca himself at *Inst.* 10.1.130 for a lack of restraint similar to Ovid's:

uelles eum suo ingenio dixisse, alieno iudicio: nam si aliqua contempsisset, si †parum† non concupisset, si non omnia sua amasset, ...consensu potius eruditorum quam puerorum amore comprobaretur.

But if Seneca poses a dangerous influence because of his *uitia* (cf. *sed in eloquendo corrupta pleraque, atque eo perniciosissima quod abundant dulcibus uitiiis*, Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.129), what of Ovid at *Natural Questions* 3.27.14? If his *lascivia* is there interpreted as a degenerate stylistic feature, a decadent abandonment of 'classical' restraint, Seneca's rebuke takes on another suggestive dimension: even as evocations of the flood in *Metamorphoses* 1 lend significant dramatic and moralising colour to the Senecan deluge, could it be that Seneca here shows a playfulness of his own in loosely combining literary and moral criticism? Could it be that Ovid symbolises a form of literary corruption that runs parallel to the moral corruption (cf. *uitia*, 3.30.8) cleansed in the cataclysm? On this approach part can again profitably be viewed in relation to whole: as Seneca rounds on Ovidian licence, so the deluge punishes human *licentia* more generally.

V

We finally return to the challenge posed at the beginning of this study, to identify the possible 'missing link' that connects the preface to 4a to its larger context within the book, and also within the *Natural Questions* as a whole. *O quam contempta res est homo nisi supra humana surrexerit!* (1.pref. 5): we have seen that Seneca's disquisition on flattery in the preface re-enacts in its ambiguities and tonal enticements the entanglements of *conuersatio hominum*. In the tumultuous climax of Book 3 and during our tour of the Nile in the main body of Book 4a, however, we rise above these *sordida* (cf. *Sursum ingentia spatia sunt, in quorum possessionem animus admittitur, <s>ed ita, si secum minimum ex corpore tulit, si...sordidum omne deterst,* 1.pref. 11). We leave behind the narrowness that Seneca associates with our mundane, unenlightened existence at e.g. 1.pref. 13: *Tunc* [sc. when the liberated mind achieves its cosmic homecoming] *contemnit domicilii prioris angustias*. On this approach the preface to 4a offers a highly creative counterfoil, or a re-visiting of *angustiae*, that powerfully offsets the enlargement process towards cosmic vision that encompasses the deluge at 3.27–30 and then the Nile-excursus in 4a. In the latter, so rich a picture is offered of candid and 'natural' interaction between man and his environment – truly a vision distant from Sicily and Lucilius' procuratorship there, and from the distinctly *uncandid* flow of flattery in the preface.

In the remaining portion of what survives of Book 4a Seneca reviews four theories of why the Nile floods in the summer.¹¹² We can only speculate, with John the Lydian's

¹¹⁰ Further, W. Peterson (ed.), *M. Fabi Quintiliani Institutionis Oratoriae Liber Decimus* (Oxford, 1891), 84 on 10.1.88 *lascivius*.

¹¹¹ Cf. Mazzoli (n. 109), 247.

¹¹² In general on Seneca's sources, A. Setaioli, *Seneca e i Greci. Citazioni e traduzioni nelle opere filosofiche* (Bologna, 1988), 375–85, casting a doxographical net that extends beyond Posidonius, the traditional favourite (376 and n. 1752).

assistance,¹¹³ on the course taken by the book thereafter, and any attempt to identify a guiding strategy or pattern of argument in Seneca's presentation of the different theories faces obvious difficulties because of the limited state of the evidence. But the process that we have witnessed at work thus far in Books 3 and 4a, releasing us from the narrowness of everyday vision, is also related to important aspects of Seneca's critical procedure in reviewing the different theories at 4a.2.17–30. There, his method naturally reflects the rationalist tendency of so many treatments of the Nile-problem in the Greek and then Roman tradition.¹¹⁴ Herodotus' markedly scientific approach to the problem¹¹⁵ is instructive in this respect. At 2.19–27 he reviews four theories (20–23) before stating (24), and then elaborating upon (25–7), his preferred explanation. The third theory he reports attributes the flood to the melting in the summer of snow accumulated in winter in the high mountains of Ethiopia (2.22). This theory, derived from Anaxagoras,¹¹⁶ is also the first reported by Seneca, at 4a.2.17. The fact that Herodotus reserves for this theory his most extensive refutation may be a measure of its popularity in the fifth century B.C.E., especially at Athens (cf. *hoc Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides tradunt*, 4a.2.17).¹¹⁷ Seneca too treats the theory at length (4a.2.17–21), dismissing it because (4a.2.18) (i) the Ethiopians' dark colour is but one of several indications of the extreme heat of the place; (ii) the south wind that blows from that region is 'the hottest of winds'; and (iii) snow never falls even as (relatively) far north as Alexandria, and not even rain further south. How, in sum, could snow sufficient to feed the Nile originate from a place as hot and rainless as Ethiopia? In any case, Seneca adds, if the flood originated from melting snow, it would be fullest in early summer when the volume of snow is highest – whereas in the four months of its flood the Nile's waters remain constant (4a.2.21).

Herodotus adduces the first three of these arguments (2.22), specious though they in fact are because 'they are based on a false premise viz. the conviction of contemporary geography that Ethiopia had a hot climate because it lay on the edge of the world and, therefore, received the full blast of the sun's rays as it rose and set'.¹¹⁸ What matters for present purposes, however, is the enlarged perspective in which Seneca, like Herodotus, grounds his objections to the snow-theory: when we take the broader view and, in addition to the three initial objections reviewed above, we compare the effect of melting snow on the Rhine, say, or the Rhone, the Danube or the Hebrus in Thrace, none of which nevertheless floods in summer (4a.2.20), the snow-theory itself soon melts away. So to Thales, who held that the Etesian (summer north-westerly) winds check the flow of the Nile towards the sea, thus causing the river to run back on itself and accumulate before flooding (4a.2.22).¹¹⁹ But the theory falls as soon as it is

¹¹³ P. 218 and n. 2.

¹¹⁴ For the treatments usefully compiled, Postl (n. 1), 74–86.

¹¹⁵ On this point, Lloyd (n. 55), 160, 161 on 2.22; id., *Herodotus, Book II: Commentary 1–98* (Leiden, 1976), 93.

¹¹⁶ DK 59 A 42 (5); further, Bonneau (n. 62), 161–9.

¹¹⁷ Lloyd (n. 115), 101–2 with Bonneau (n. 62), 163, 168.

¹¹⁸ Lloyd (n. 115), 103.

¹¹⁹ DK 11 A 16, incl. Hdt. 2.20, on which Lloyd (n. 115), 98–9; further, Bonneau (n. 62), 151–9 and J.J. Hall, 'Seneca as a source for earlier thought (especially meteorology)', *CQ* 27 (1977), 435–6. For the Etesians cf. 5.10–11. At 4a.2.22 Seneca adds dramatic colour by having the sixth-century explorer Euthymenes of Massilia (*RE* 6.1.1509–11) give testimony, in his quoted voice, that the Nile flows from the Atlantic coast of Africa, and that the Etesians blow waves into this river, causing it to flood further downstream (see Bonneau [n. 62], 145–6 with Lloyd [n. 115], 99). By appeal to counter-testimony at 4a.2.24, however, and by dismissal of falsehood (*tunc erat mendacio locus*), Seneca takes advantage of Euthymenes' presence here not least to establish his own (superior) scientific credentials.

tested against the fuller picture drawn at 4a.2.23; how (for one thing) can the flood be caused by the Etesians if it begins before them and lasts after them? Oenopides of Chios, Anaxagoras' younger contemporary, explained the paradox of summer flooding by portraying the Nile as fundamentally no different from other rivers:¹²⁰ in winter, the earth's internal heat dries up subterranean veins of water (4a.2.26), but for rivers in parts other than Egypt, winter rain compensates for this loss. In summer, when the earth's interior is colder and there is no loss of water through heat, the Nile reverts to its normal volume; no longer swollen by rain, the waters of other rivers are meanwhile reduced in the summer (4a.2.26). Again, in response, a fuller perspective: if Oenopides were right, 'in summer all rivers would grow, and all wells would have abundant water in summer' (4a.2.27).¹²¹ Diogenes of Apollonia, also a younger contemporary of Anaxagoras, apparently held a theory based on evaporation, which he associated especially with the southern regions where the sun is harshest. All lands are perforated with communicating passages that allow dry parts of the earth to draw from the moist parts; the Nile-flood is derived from the flow of water from north to south to compensate for the evaporation-effect in Egypt (4a.2.28–9).¹²² But why then, objects Seneca (4a.2.30), is any part of the earth without water if all lands are connected by perforations? The theory offers but a partial viewpoint that cannot explain *all* the observed phenomena.

Seneca's rationalist approach in testing these four theories may be traditional enough. Given his lack of scientific originality elsewhere in the *Natural Questions*, moreover, it is hardly likely that in the lost portion of Book 4a he ventured a strikingly novel explanation of the Nile's summer flood. But while from this one angle his treatment of the Nile may contain few surprises, his collective response to Anaxagoras, Thales, Oenopides and Diogenes in 4a usefully illustrates a key feature of his creative approach to the 'doing' of science in the *Natural Questions* more generally. For by beginning analysis from the viewpoint of 'the big picture', Seneca's scientific method at 4a.2.17–30 fully conforms to that dominant emphasis throughout the work, and throughout this study: to enlarge our thinking so as to bring us closer to that primary goal in the *Natural Questions*, for the mind's eye to see the all (cf. *animo omne uidisse*, 3.pref. 10). It is by recognition of this fuller perspective that the *angustiae* of the preface to 4a become all the more confining and repressive, as if narrows that separate the great waters and forces of nature on display in Books 3 and 4a.

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¹²⁰ DK 41 A 11; Bonneau (n. 62), 182–4. Herodotus' preferred explanation (2.25), based on evaporation (Bonneau 188–93), similarly casts the Nile's behaviour as fundamentally like that of other rivers (further, Lloyd [n. 115], 92).

¹²¹ Seneca seems to presuppose that volume *gained* in summer from no more loss to the earth's (winter) internal heat would always more than compensate for volume *lost* after the cessation of winter rainfall.

¹²² DK 64 A 18; Bonneau (n. 62), 180–2.