

## DRAMA IN SENECA'S STOICISM

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Wise men, Seneca says, are born to set an example.<sup>1</sup> Since they set this example by their actions it seems useful to look into the employment of dramatic similes and techniques in Seneca's moral prose. Instances of dramatic passages are sufficiently frequent to warrant such an inquiry. I select a few that are significant for the form. The first of these is the famous example of Cato in *De providentia* 2.7–12.<sup>2</sup> The wise man has reached the point where he can no longer live an honorable life. He therefore resolves to commit suicide and when the sword proves ineffective he finds another way out. Seneca presents the story much in the manner of a film which shows both Cato the actor, and the gods who are at once his directors<sup>3</sup> and his audience. At the same time the film has a commentator (Seneca) who provides us (the spectators) with the appropriate application of the spectacle.

Seneca goes to great lengths to emphasize the dramatic aspect of his example. He is not amazed, he says, if the gods on occasion *impetum capiunt* "get a kick out of" the *spectaculum* of great men wrestling with some calamity.<sup>4</sup> An intrepid youth awaiting a wild animal with his hunting spear is a pleasing sight, a spectacle that pleases the more according as greater courage is shown,<sup>5</sup> but it becomes a *spectaculum*

<sup>1</sup> *De prov.* 6.3: "nati sunt in exemplar."

<sup>2</sup> That Seneca is well aware of the fact that this and other examples are worked for all they are worth appears from *Ep.* 24.6: "decantatae in omnibus scholis."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. *De const.* 2.1: "Catonem autem certius exemplar sapientis viri nobis deos immortalis dedisse quam Ulixen et Herculem prioribus saeculis." See also *De tranq.* 16.3.

<sup>4</sup> "Si aliquando impetum capiunt *spectandi* magnos viros conluctantis cum aliqua calamitate."

<sup>5</sup> "Tantoque hoc *spectaculum* est gratius, quanto id honestior fecit." It must be kept in mind that *spectaculum* refers to all manner of games rather than to plays, although the distinction is not as strict as we are inclined to make it. In the present example the play element seems to prevail.

worthy of the gods' notice<sup>6</sup> when a "good man" (*vir fortis*) is matched with a bad fortune. There is nothing which pleases Jupiter more than to watch Cato erect amid the ruin of his country.<sup>7</sup>

Cato's speech follows. I note that the actor speaks about himself in the third person: *Cato qua exeat habet*.<sup>8</sup> He shows his sword to the audience (*ferrum istud*) and he apostrophizes his *animus*: *aggredere, anime, diu meditatam opus, eripe te rebus humanis*.

Then the commentator comes back, expressing his certainty that the spectacle pleases the gods<sup>9</sup> when they see Cato helping his army to escape, when he is reading Plato to the very moment of death, when he plunges the sword into his own chest. But, the commentator continues, the divine audience is not satisfied with a *single* performance.<sup>10</sup> The actor is called back to show himself in an even more difficult part. I am certain that in the sentence, "Retenta ac revocata virtus est, ut in difficiliore parte se ostenderet," not only is *parte* used in the theatrical sense but *retenta* and *revocata* are used in the same way.<sup>11</sup> Cato's exit receives some extra attention in the last sentence but one: "quidni libenter spectarent alumnum suum tam claro ac memorabili exitu evadentem." The transition from the spectacle to reality is provided in the use of *exitus* in both the sentence just quoted and in the last sentence: "mors illos consecrat, quorum exitum et qui timent laudant."

A similar though slightly less elaborate example<sup>12</sup> is found in *De constantia sapientis* 5.6–6.7. The philosopher Stilbo is summoned before Demetrius Poliorcetes after the capture of Megara and is asked whether he has lost anything. The wise man's answer is, of course, no—*omnia mea mecum sunt*—notwithstanding the fact that he has lost his fortune and his daughters to the enemy and also notwithstanding the fact that the king "ipsum . . . circumfusus victoris exercitus armis ex superiore loco rogabat." The stage is set—the king on his throne, the surrounding body guard, the philosopher standing (alone) before him. In the next chapter the actor *prodit in medium* and witnesses to his philo-

<sup>6</sup> "Spectaculum dignum ad quod respiciat intentus operi suo deus."

<sup>7</sup> "Quam ut spectet Catonem . . . stantem . . . inter ruinas publicas rectum."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. *Herc. f.* 960; *Troades* 576; *Medea* 166, 517; also *Ep.* 24.7.

<sup>9</sup> "Liquet mihi cum magno spectasse gaudio deos."

<sup>10</sup> "Non fuit diis immortalibus satis spectare Catonem semel."

<sup>11</sup> For *revocare* cf. *Livy* 7.2.8, *Val. Max.* 6.2.9 (Forcellini s.v.).

<sup>12</sup> *Ep.* 9.18 has the same story in abbreviated form.

sophic faith in a major speech on the theme "attollere se homo natus supra humana potest." The words "en adsum vobis probaturus" make him the typical *exemplar*, and Seneca strengthens the dramatic element of the speech by employing an apostrophe to the king in 7.6: "non est quod me victum victoremque te credas."

Seneca's protagonists are not always wise men. In *De ira* 1.18.3-6 he cites Piso as an example of the *iratus*. A soldier has returned from his assignment without his colleague. Piso orders the soldier's execution. In the nick of time the colleague returns unharmed and the centurion stays the execution. Wild with fury Piso climbs up the tribunal and orders all three—soldier, colleague, and centurion—to death. The climax of the dramatic action is Piso's short speech. The tribunal provides the stage setting.

In the last instance the playlet is narrated rather than its script written, but there is no less dramatic vividness in this scene than in the other scenes. Many more such scenes are to be found in Seneca's moral prose,<sup>13</sup> but even more frequently Seneca manages to compress anecdotes which are otherwise very similar into a few lines, as in *De ira* 3.22.2:

quid enim facilius fuit Antigono quam duos manipulares duci iubere, qui incumbentes regis tabernaculo faciebant, quod homines et periculosissime et libentissime faciunt, de rege suo male existimabant? audierat omnia Antigonus, utpote cum inter dicentes et audientem palla interesset; quam ille leviter commovit et: "longius," inquit, "discedite, ne vos rex audiat."

All essentials of the playlet are present in the way this anecdote is told: the stage setting is there and so are the action and the speech.<sup>14</sup> Usually

<sup>13</sup> For further examples see *De benef.* 3.23, 4.37-38, 5.24, 6.31; *De clem.* 1.9, 1.15. A passage in the letters (*Ep.* 12.1-3) might be mentioned here, but its form reminds one of a modern novel rather than of a play. The other passages are, all of them, strongly dramatic, though Seneca does not emphasize that element anywhere quite as much as in the passage on Cato in *De prov.*

<sup>14</sup> Two similar scenes follow in the subsequent paragraphs. I noted also the following instances: *De ira* 3.8.6, 12.5-7, 14.1-2, 15.1, 23.2-3, 23.7-8, 38.1, 38.2; *Ad. Marc.* 22.4-8; *De tranq.* 14.4-9 (several scenes from the last days of Kanus Iulius); *Ad Helv.* 13.7; *De benef.* 3.23.5, 24, 27.1-4, 37.4; 6.32.1-2, 37.2; 7.21.1-2; *De clem.* 2.1.1-2; *Ep.* 24.6-8 (Cato!), 24.9-10, 27.7-8, 59.12, 70.10, 70.26 (called a *spectaculum*), 77.14, 77.18, 82.12, 90.14, 95.42, 122.10-14. An interesting and dramatic picture (*imago*) is painted in *Ep.* 104.31.

the passage or string of passages is followed by moralizing comment which is all but rendered superfluous by the dramatic effectiveness of the examples.

The criterion of setting, action, and speech is not an arbitrary one: the use of *spectaculum* in *Ep.* 70.26 seems to indicate that Seneca himself thinks of these as theatrical scenes. This is not to say, of course, that such anecdotes as occur e.g. in *Ep.* 66.51, 70.20 and 70.23 are undramatic. The story of Marcellinus' death in *Ep.* 77.5-10 is called a *fabella*, a word which may refer to an anecdote, an event from real life—which it is—or to the dramatic treatment of such an event. I am not sure that the two were ever completely separated in Seneca's mind. Another story, this one of a more legendary character, is told in *De benef.* 7.21.1-2. Seneca starts it with "*hic locus fabulam* poscit," and what follows contains all the elements of the criterion I have used. However, the mere use of this word does not prove my point: cf. *N.Q.* 5.15, where *fabula* is used of a similar anecdote, but where a speech is lacking.

In view of these indications the word "anecdote" becomes singularly inadequate as a label for these passages, the more so because the very frequency of the stage simile in Seneca seems to indicate that the theatre with its plays and its actors is never far from his mind. This he has in common with literature of diatribe in general. Teles has some very clear instances,<sup>15</sup> nor are they lacking in Epictetus<sup>16</sup> or Cicero,<sup>17</sup> to mention but a few authors. One has to remember that the genres of Seneca's prose are very much indebted to the diatribe, one of whose characteristics is the interjection. Its frequency adds a certain flavor that may reasonably be called dramatic. In the present paper I am not concerned with this aspect, but there can be little doubt about the kinship between the precepts of rhetoric and the practice of the diatribe. Yet there seem to be good reasons why one should not ascribe Seneca's interest in dramatic similes, his use of playlets, and similar phenomena

<sup>15</sup> Pp. 5.1 and 16.4 Hense, who discusses the stage simile pp. cvii-cxi. See also Oltramare, *Les origines de la diatribe romaine* (Lausanne 1926) 53, note 3. Some further instances of the stage simile in Seneca's letters: 29.12, 42.5, 74.7, 76.31, 77.20, 80.6, 84.9-10, 108.6, 108.8, 114.6.

<sup>16</sup> *Diatr.* 4.1.165, 4.7.30; *Ench.* 17; fr. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Cato Maior* 23.86: "senectus autem aetatis est peractio tamquam fabulae."

to "mere rhetoric" or to the influence of the diatribe, to the exclusion of other considerations.

Not only is "mere rhetoric" at best an ill-defined notion, but there are also frequent passages in which dramatic terminology leads us to the very core of Seneca's moral philosophy. Next it should be noted that Seneca appears to be quite aware of the import of his techniques. In *De ira* 2.17 he carefully distinguishes between an angry man and an orator who *imitates* anger. The latter is compared with actors on the stage, and Seneca is convinced of the effectiveness of this procedure: "ubicumque alieni animi ad nostrum arbitrium agendi sunt, modo iram, modo metum, modo misericordiam, ut aliis incutiamus, ipsi simulabimus, et saepe id, quod veri adfectus non effecissent, effecit imitatio adfectuum."<sup>18</sup> In fact, we are influenced by "ludicra scaenae spectacula," by "lectiones rerum vetustarum," by songs, by the sound of trumpets, by pictures, etc.<sup>19</sup> This is precisely the reason why, e.g. in letters 7, 8, and 10, Seneca advises the budding philosopher not to mix with crowds, an admonition which in one form or another returns frequently.<sup>20</sup> This is the other side of the coin and again we

<sup>18</sup> Similarly *Ep.* 11.7: "artifices scaenici qui imitantur adfectus . . ."; 95.66: "proponamus laudanda, invenietur imitator." The history of the notion "imitation" falls outside my scope. It is clear that Seneca stands in the line that starts with Plato. I may be allowed to quote Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1139A31 (6.2): *Πράξεως μὲν οὖν ἀρχὴ προαίρεσις—ὁθεν ἡ κίνησις ἀλλ' οὐχ οὐ ἔνεκα—προαιρέσεως δὲ ὄρεξις καὶ λόγος ὁ ἔνεκά τινος. διὸ οὗτ' ἀνευ νοῦ καὶ διανοίας οὗτ' ἀνευ ἡθικῆς ἐστὶν ἕξεως ἡ προαίρεσις.* Conversely we find in *Poetics* 48A1 the opinion that (a) imitators always imitate men in action (*πράττοντες*) and (b) that men in action always show moral character. See also G. F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics, The Argument* (Leiden 1957) 239 (on *Poetics* 49B36 ff.).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *De ira* 2.2.3–5. In this respect some of the quotations from existing drama are interesting. See e.g. *Ep.* 115.15, and below, note 40.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. also *Ep.* 76.2–4, 80.1—the crowds actually assemble in the theatre. Coupled with Seneca's aversion to ostentation (see below, p. 246) this sentiment finds an interesting parallel in G. Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence* (New York 1949) 93 ("An Essay in Autobiography"): "The supreme mission of the philosopher cannot consist in proclaiming a certain number of official truths liable to rally votes at international congresses. In the last analysis, such truths inevitably turn out to be sheer platitudes. The imperishable glory of a Kierkegaard or a Nietzsche consists perhaps mainly in this, that they have proved, not only by their trials and by their whole life, that a philosopher worthy of the name cannot be a man of congresses, and that he deviates from his path every time that he allows himself to be torn from the solitude which is his calling. It is only by clinging to this solitude that he remains at the disposal of those who await from him, if not a lead, at least a stimulation."

are not concerned with it here. We are concerned with the stage, the play, the actor, realizing that at any given moment the latter may turn around and become part of the audience of another play.

"Hanc personam induisti: agenda est," Seneca says (*De benef.* 2.17.2). The term for playing a part is *agere*, a rich rather than a vague word, which returns frequently with its theatrical connotation.<sup>21</sup> Apart from the meaning "to act" or "to be active," it is also used for "to act in character," "to do whatever is right in a particular situation."

There seems to be a slight difference in meaning between *persona* and *partes*. In *De benef.* 3.28.1, speaking of the question whether slaves are able to confer *beneficia*, Seneca asks, "quare potius persona rem minuat, quam personam res ipsa cohonestet?"<sup>22</sup> In *De benef.* 2.18.1 we read, "sunt aliquae partes mariti, sed non minores uxoris," and a little earlier (2.17.6) the word *partes* is used to indicate the activity, the part to be played, as well.<sup>23</sup>

It would take me too far astray to go into the entire chapter of rhetorical characterization and its link with the moral precepts in the Stoa. Seneca himself mentions Posidonius' *ethologia* (*Ep.* 95.65).<sup>24</sup> The examples show that *partes*, which sometimes is used in the singular, and *persona* fit one another roughly as "part and character," as what is to be enacted and how it is to be enacted, though this rule of thumb does not fit every case.

There is no doubt in my mind that Seneca uses this theatrical meta-

<sup>21</sup> This usage seems to be akin to the "legal" usage. Cf. *agere causam*, e.g. *De prov.* 1.1; *De benef.* 3.7.4.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 94.1: "propria cuique personae praecepta." See also *Ep.* 85.35: "duas personas habet gubernator: alteram communem cum omnibus, qui eandem conscenderunt navem: ipse quoque vector est; alteram propriam: gubernator est. Tempestas tamquam vectori nocet, non tamquam gubernatori." (One may compare Cicero's *quarta persona*, *De off.* 1.32.115.)

<sup>23</sup> Only slightly different in *De benef.* 4.2.2: "Non est virtus si sequi potest: primae partes eius sunt, ducere debet. . .": here too the activity of virtue is stressed. Cf. *De benef.* 4.13.1-2; *Ep.* 14.13: "nullae partes tuae sunt; ultimae partes Catonis"; 28.10, 78.18 (and Summers *ad loc.*).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the passages quoted by Gummere *ad loc.* Professor de Vogel calls this "a phenomenology of virtues" (*Greek Philosophy* 3 [Leiden 1959] 265); cf. M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* (Göttingen 1940) 325-26: "Schon in den philosophischen Schriften verbindet sich die Kunst der rhetorischen Ausmalung, der 'Ekphrasis', mit einem intuitiven Blick für die intimsten seelischen Vorgänge, um mit plastischer Lebenswahrheit das wahnsinnige Treiben und die Hässlichkeit der Affekte zu schildern." In fact it seems to me that this has become an integral part of Seneca's *philosophical* activity.

phor consciously in order to *suggest* that man is nothing unless in action. That this is his opinion is expressed frequently in such *sententiae* as "maxima pars vitae elabitur male agentibus, magna nihil agentibus, tota vita aliud agentibus."<sup>25</sup> It is an essential part of his moral philosophy, which in *Ep.* 89.14 is mentioned as the third topic in the division of the *moralis pars philosophiae*. It returns time and time again in his discussions with the Epicureans. One should compare the scornful quotation in *De benef.* 4.4.1: "Itaque non dat deus beneficia, sed securus et neclegens nostri, aversus a mundo *alia agit* aut, quae maxima Epicuro felicitas videtur, *nihil agit*, nec magis illum beneficia quam iniuriae tangunt."<sup>26</sup>

The old controversy whether the active or the contemplative life is to be preferred is unessential: "natura nos ad utrumque genuit, et contemplationi rerum et actioni" (*De otio* 5.1). The remainder of this chapter of his *Essay on Leisure* is of importance for our role as spectators of the drama of this world and of the universe, to which I shall come back presently. It is of some importance however that Seneca finds action even in contemplation: "natura autem utrumque facere me voluit, et agere et contemplationi vacare. Utrumque facio, *quoniam ne contemplatio quidem sine actione est*" (*De otio* 5.8). *Contemplatio* and *actio* are elsewhere (*Ep.* 94.45) defined as the two constituent parts of virtue, respectively imparted through *institutio* (training) and *admonitio* (verbal admonition).<sup>27</sup> The theme that *otium* is by no means inactive

<sup>25</sup> *Ep.* 1.1; cf. also the definition of the *summum bonum* in *De vita beata* 4.2: "invicta vis animi, perita rerum, placida in actu. . ."

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 55.3-5, 93.4 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 8.1, 8.6 ("mihi crede, qui nihil agere videntur maiora agunt"), 56.8, 66.6, 85.37, 95.10, 98.13. Stoic speculation on the nature of the *animus* is apparent in such expressions as "animus mobilis et actuosus," *Ep.* 39.3. I am by no means sure that the dagger at *De otio* 2.2 is necessary. Gertz places it there on the grounds that *actus* and *contemplatio* are mutually exclusive. *Animos* may have to be changed with Lipsius to *animum*: I have not been able to find another example of the plural referring to a single man in Seneca's prose. For the notion it is interesting to compare the analysis of this old antagonism in Ortega y Gasset's "Notes on the Novel" in *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings* (Garden City, N.Y., 1956) 77-78. It is a pity that he takes the Stoic Sage without any qualification as his example of impassivity, otherwise the passage might have been written as a commentary on Seneca's "ne contemplatio quidem sine actione est." This is not to say that Seneca does not preach retirement. There are many passages in which he advises Lucilius to avoid the crowds and says that the wise man will avoid the forum, tyrants, etc. Cf. e.g. *Ep.* 7, 14, 28.6-7. His main objection is to an automatic identification of the contemplative life with inactivity. In

is further elaborated in Ch. 6 of the same essay which emphasizes the expression *agere vitam*. The connection with *induere personam* is not made here, but it is in *Ep.* 120.22:

Magnam rem puta *unum hominem agere*. Praeter sapientem autem nemo unum agit, ceteri multiformes sumus. Modo frugi tibi videbimur et graves, modo prodigi et vani. *Mutamus* subinde *personam* et contrariam ei *sumimus*, quam *exuimus*. Hoc ergo a te exige, ut, qualem institueris praestare te, talem usque ad exitum serves.<sup>28</sup>

To be a wise man then is to be active and this activity is sketched as a part played in a particular manner. It is to act rationally and in tune with the directives of nature, every single deed being based on a judgment.<sup>29</sup> Hence Seneca's expressed scorn for those who use philosophy for ostentation: "non in verbis sed in rebus est."<sup>30</sup>

In this context we may notice a famous passage in Jean-Paul Sartre,<sup>31</sup> who gives a description of a waiter in a cafe in order to illustrate his thesis "that we can be nothing without playing at being":<sup>32</sup>

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly (this of course was written in France . . .); his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. . . . All his behaviour seems to us a game. . . . But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing *at being* a waiter in a cafe. There is nothing here to surprise us. The game is a kind of marking out and investigation. The child plays with his body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it; the waiter in the cafe plays with his condition in order to *realize* it.

his discussion of Lucilius' mistaken purpose, "moratur . . . me res familiaris; sic illam disponere volo ut sufficere *nihil agenti* possit" (*Ep.* 17.1), Seneca carefully avoids *nihil agere* and substitutes *vacare animo* (*Ep.* 17.5).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 20.2: "facere docet philosophia, non dicere, et hoc exigit, ut ad legem suam quisque vivat, ne orationi vita dissentiat vel ipsa inter se vita; <ut> unus sit omnium actio [dissentio] num color [sit]." (Text as in L. D. Reynolds' OCT). A few lines further on (4) constancy is spoken of as a *tenor animi*. Cf. *De tranq.* 4.3: "in domibus, in spectaculis, in conviviis bonum contubernalem, fidelem amicum, temperantem convivum agat." Similarly 35.4, 59.14, etc.; opposite: 20.6, 52.1-2.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Seneca's discussion of *miseriordia* and *venia* in *De clem.* 2.6-7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ep.* 16.3. Cf. 20.1: "verba rebus proba"; also 24.15, 109.38.

<sup>31</sup> *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York 1956) 59.

<sup>32</sup> Sartre (above, note 31) 83.



In saying this the author is hardly original, except in so far as he has sharpened the edges of his definitions. His "conscience non-positionnelle de soi" is non-being, and exists only in so far as it is always directed towards a future choice. Thus to say "I am a waiter" is a mark of what Sartre calls "bad faith," to say "I choose to act as a waiter" is not. In the first phrase the implication is that circumstances and background compel me to be a waiter and that I resign myself to forces beyond my control, using them as an excuse. Seneca is as much aware of the falsehood of such an attitude as is Sartre. They are one in that they realize that man's actions do not take place in a vacuum, but that his attitude with regard to circumstances is based on choice.<sup>33</sup> It would be easy to find many passages in Sartre that parallel Seneca's *Ep.* 24.13-14, in which he speaks of the terrifying mask that has to be removed from things that seem to threaten us so as to reduce them to their natural proportions. The notion that we are interested in commonly occurs among the so-called existentialists. One of the clearest expressions of it is found in Ortega y Gasset's "In search of Goethe from within."<sup>34</sup>

A man—that is, his soul, his gifts, his character, his body—is the sum of the organs *by* which his life is lived; he is therefore equivalent to an actor bidden to represent the personage which is his real I. And here appears the most surprising thing in the drama of life: a man possesses a wide margin of freedom with respect to his I or destiny. He can refuse to realize it, he can be untrue to himself. Then his life lacks authenticity.

In much the same sense Seneca's wise man plays at being a wise man.<sup>35</sup> To Sartre "choosing to be a man" would mean little or nothing. The two Spaniards however, regard this as the most important choice to be made. Seneca regards man (entirely in line with the old Stoa) as the microcosm, free to choose whether he wishes to live in harmony with the macrocosm or not. Therefore he writes—and it sounds almost like a question and answer of a catechism—"Quid est ergo

<sup>33</sup> Cf. e.g. "Actio recta non erit, nisi recta fuerit voluntas, ab hac enim est actio," *Ep.* 95.57.

<sup>34</sup> Ortega y Gasset (above, note 27) 132.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ariston of Chios in Diog. Laert. 7.160: *εἶναι γὰρ ὁμοιον τὸν σοφὸν τῷ ἀγαθῷ ὑποκριτῇ, ὃς ἂν τε Θερασίτου ἂν τε Ἀγαμέμνονος πρόσωπον ἀναλάβῃ, ἐκάτερον ὑποκρίνεται προσηκόντως.* Cf. note 15 above.

ratio? Naturae imitatio. Quod est summum bonum? Ex naturae voluntate se gerere (*Ep.* 66.39). In other words, in choosing to play the part of the wise man Cato chooses his essential nature. In this context the remark (*Ep.* 20.13; cf. 18.5) that on occasion rich wise men play at being poor is interesting. We are rather unfortunately reminded of Marie Antoinette and the Petit Trianon, but the aim of the imaginary poverty in Seneca fits in well with his entire program of moral exercises, which aims at accustoming a man to any condition nature may assign to him. In fact no one can sustain a role that is not his natural one: "nemo enim potest personam diu ferre, ficta cito in naturam suam recidunt" (*De clem.* 1.1.6). With these words the fundamental difference between Seneca's and Sartre's philosophies is made explicit.

It is true that Seneca also says (*Ep.* 26.5) that only in the face of death can it be decided whether a man has been playing his role in good or in bad faith, but the context is a different one from the remark in *De clementia*, and the main emphasis is on the use of mere words borrowed from the philosophers for the sake of ostentation. The combination *simulatio . . . et mimus* seems to indicate all the Roman contempt for the theatre,<sup>36</sup> an overtone which is absent in the passage from *De clementia*.

The *mimus* simile is elaborated in *Ep.* 80.6-7, where Seneca speaks of "hic humanae vitae mimus, qui nobis partes quas male agamus assignat."<sup>37</sup> He then compares the *impersonata felicitas* of the rich

<sup>36</sup> *Mimus* is used neutrally in *Ep.* 42.14; *pantomimi* full of scorn, *Ep.* 42.17.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 115.15: "Dabat in illa fabula poenas Bellerophonates quas in sua [sc. fabula] quisque dat." The most commonly quoted parallel is Suet. 2.99 where the dying Augustus asks his friends, "ecquid iis videretur mimum vitae commode transexisse," and in English literature Shakespeare's

All the world's a stage  
and all the men and women merely players:  
they have their exits and their entrances;  
and one man in his time plays many parts, etc.

The comparison returns time and time again throughout the history of literature in the Western world. This is not the place to chase the origin, but the occurrence in Democritus' (Demokrates') apophthegmata (fr. 115 D) seems to indicate that it was traditional at a fairly early stage. Parallels in R. Helm, *Lucian u. Menipp* (Leipzig 1906) 45-53. For the origin of the Shakespeare passage see T. W. Baldwin, *Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* (Urbana 1944) 1.652 ff.

("... on occasion they cannot grieve openly but must act the happy ones amid sorrows that eat out their very hearts") with the role of kings played by ill-paid slaves, a comparison which in essence is a repetition of *Ep.* 76.31.

The scenes in which man acts, however, are not the only play. They are in a sense presented as minor scenes within the magnificent spectacle of nature: "natura nos ad utrumque genuit, et contemplationi rerum et actioni." That the universe is a *spectaculum* is a favorite image in Seneca.<sup>38</sup> In fact nature itself has ordered everything in such a way that it may be viewed; man's erect stature is explained in the typical teleological manner in *De otio* 5.4:

That you may realize that nature wished to be viewed, not merely to be looked at, notice what place she has given us. She has stationed us in the center and granted us a sweeping view of all things. Not only did she give man an erect stature, but intending to give him a shape fit for contemplation so that he should be able to follow the heavenly bodies gliding from their rising to their setting points and to turn his face with the (revolving) universe, she gave him a head on top and placed it on a flexible neck.<sup>39</sup>

The careful distinction between *spectare* and *aspicere* in this passage hints at the spectators' involvement in what they see. To contemplate the unique spectacle of the universe is the *opus suum* of the mind: to be involved in it is the mark of the true philosopher; it is the one involvement he is allowed.<sup>40</sup> The effect of this spectacle is explained in *Ep.* 39.2: "neminem excelsi ingenii virum humilia delectant et sordida: magnarum rerum species ad se vocat et extollit." From our

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ad Pol.* 9.3; *Ad Helv.* 8.4, 6, 20.2; *De benef.* 4.23.2; *Ep.* 89.1-2, 90.42, 92.6; in *Ep.* 90.28, *spectacula* refers to a static scene, rather than to action.

<sup>39</sup> "Ut scias illam spectari voluisse, non tantum aspicere, vide quem nobis locum dedit. In media nos sui parte constituit et circumspectum omnium nobis dedit; nec erexit tantummodo hominem, sed etiam habilem contemplationi factura, ut ab ortu sidera in occasum labentia prosequi posset et vultum suum circumferre cum toto, sublime fecit illi caput et collo flexili imposuit." Basore translates *spectare* and *aspicere* respectively as "gaze upon" and "behold." I chose "view" and "look at" so as to bring out the idea of a spectacle in *spectare* a little more clearly. I suppose that since one "watches" a game and "sees" a play, I should have chosen one of those, but neither seems to give an inkling of the involvement that is implied in the Latin word. Cf. *Ep.* 92.30 and in particular 94.56-57.

<sup>40</sup> A striking example of involvement in a play is told in *Ep.* 115.15. The audience became so incensed against the sentiments expressed by a character in one of Euripides'

point of view this is a moral effect, just as we shall see presently in the more detailed examples: the aim of creation is *bonitas*.<sup>41</sup>

But just as the wise man who acts his part in good faith has his counterpart in the non-wise who acts his in bad faith, so the theatre of Nature has its parallel in the games of fortune: "hanc enim imaginem animo tuo propone, ludos facere fortunam." The theatrical imagery in this passage (*Ep.* 74.7-9) becomes more involved when man's role is added in the sentence: "itaque prudentissimus quisque cum primum induci videt munuscula [coins, etc., referring to gifts of fortune such as wealth, power, and the like] a theatro fugit et scit magno parva constare." The wise man is cast in his role as a spectator and he is advised not to become involved in a byplay. The games of fortune seem to be staged in the theatre of nature, though there is, of course, no guarantee that Seneca's imagery does not shift from one passage to the other. We, men, are then the audience of the spectacle of the universe, and nature is its author. The chapter on the question why this play needs an audience may be deferred. The answer is provided in the *topos De natura dei* which in the Stoa is a subdivision of the larger *topos Περὶ φύσεως*. The thought that plays in general need an audience is present in Seneca at least by implication. Twice he quotes Epicurus with approval: "This—he said—I am saying not to many but to you: we suffice each other as an audience" (*Ep.* 7.12). The word here translated as "audience" is *theatrum*. And again, "We should choose some good man and forever keep him before our eyes, so as to live as if he were watching us and to act as if he saw everything we are doing."<sup>42</sup> The immediate sense of these quotations is, of course, that a bystander by his very presence keeps us from doing many a wrong, and as such they should be quoted in a treatment of Seneca's notion of *conscientia*

plays that the author had to get up and ask them to wait and see what would be the man's end. For involvement in the spectacle of the universe see also *N.Q.* 1 praef. 12; *Ep.* 89.1. It would be wrong to draw a distinction between "dramatic" and "religious" involvement, at least at the level of the wise man. The dramatic involvement is not a metaphor of but identical with religious involvement. The wise man provides a true religious experience for those who see him holding his own amidst calamities (*Ep.* 41.4-5, see also below, note 43), and his contemplation of the spectacle of the universe may well be called a religious activity. Diogenes of Babylon connects *θεωρεῖν*, *θεατῆς*, and *θέατρον* with *τὸ θεῖον* (fr. 64 von Arnim), and Seneca would no doubt agree.

<sup>41</sup> *Ep.* 65.10 together with 65.14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ep.* 11.8; cf. 25.5-6, 32.1, 43.3-4.

and its ramifications, which falls outside the scope of this paper. That this is what is primarily in Seneca's mind is strongly indicated in *Ep.* 25.7, where it is said that unless one has reached complete wisdom one had better not rely on one's own resources. Yet we also find the opinion that wisdom should be imparted to others where possible: "If wisdom is granted with the proviso that I should keep it incarcerated and should not publish it, I reject it: there is no pleasure in the possession of any good if a companion is lacking."<sup>43</sup> One companion, or a few friends, not a crowd, is meant. The crowd is the audience needed for the (dis)play put on by luxury and the like: "ambitio et luxuria et inpotentia scaenam desiderant," he says in a defense of retirement (*Ep.* 94.71), and again: "sine spectatore cessat dolor" (*Ep.* 99.16).

Conversely Seneca is convinced that we have obtained our notion of goodness from the exemplary actions of good men: "nobis videtur observatio collegisse et rerum saepe factarum inter se conlatio; per analogian nostri intellectum et honestum et bonum iudicant" (*Ep.* 120.4). The playlets immediately following this passage, with the actors Fabricius, who refuses to bow to gold from Epirus as well as to stoop to poison for Pyrrhus, and Horatius Cocles defending the bridge, illustrate this point: "haec et eiusmodi facta imaginem nobis ostendere virtutis."<sup>44</sup>

But the wise man must be careful in his choice of pupils: "nulli nisi audituro dicendum est" (*Ep.* 29.1). The reason is that his authority would be dissipated if he made an attempt to correct all. One is strongly reminded of Musonius Rufus and his abortive attempt to preach peace to the Roman army, and this is certainly the sort of thing in Seneca's mind when he attacks Cynic practice.

An inconsistency may be detected here when one compares the near-identification of the wise man and God (e.g. *Ep.* 53.11) with the difference between *ars* and *sapientia*. The comparison of the wise man with God if carried to its extreme would seem to imply that he should be ready to receive anyone as his pupil. This is the very attitude of the

<sup>43</sup> *Ep.* 6.4; cf. 109.9. In the context of "audience" would fit a treatment of praise and glory; the theatrical imagery ceases at this point, however. Cf. e.g. *Ep.* 79.13 ff., 102.16-17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ep.* 120.8; cf. 52.8.

Cynics that Seneca attacks in this passage. Secondly Seneca, in saying here "sapientia ars est: eligat profecturos, ab iis quos desperavit recedat," seems to forget that elsewhere he carefully distinguishes between, for instance, the grammarian who may knowingly use a solecism but would be ashamed of one he has used unconsciously, and the philosopher whose conscious crime is by far the more sinful (*Ep.* 95.9); and again in *Ep.* 85.32 where a distinction is made between the pilot whose art it is to bring the ship into port and the wise man whose purpose in the conduct of life is "non utique, quod temptat, efficere, sed omnia recte facere." A distinction seems to be implied between the formal or even informal *teaching* of philosophy on the one hand and the enacted wisdom of the example set by the wise man on the other. The former can and must be restricted to promising pupils; an example, of course, cannot be restricted to a select group.

The part of the audience, then, is of almost as much importance as the part of the actor and almost as active in its involvement. In this context a statement must be quoted which combines observation of wisdom (or perhaps better, wise men) and observation of the world:<sup>45</sup> "The very contemplation of wisdom certainly takes up much of my time; I regard it in amazement in no other way than on occasion I regard the world which I often see as one who looks at it for the first time." This stamps Seneca as a real philosopher, if not a great thinker.

The playlets, one might say, are compressed symbols of the reality in which the audience finds itself. They are held up as a mirror.<sup>46</sup> They serve much the same purpose in the author's prose as the famous *sententiae*, except that the latter are of a more general, the former of a more particular nature. It is the function, however, of the particular to point at the general, from which it receives its importance: "Nature has created C. Caesar so as to show the effects of the greatest possible vice in circumstances of the greatest possible fortune."<sup>47</sup> Note the explicit statement: "omnia rerum omnium, si observentur, indicia sunt" (*Ep.* 52.12). And one sees how in Seneca there is a real appreciation for the man who in his life acts as a miniature god: "At mehercules

<sup>45</sup> *Ep.* 64.6. The latter part of the statement may again be paralleled from the existentialists.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *De clem.* 1.1.1, "ut quodammodo speculi vice fungeret."

<sup>47</sup> *Ad Helv.* 10.4; cf. *Ep.* 66.1.

magni artificis est cluisse totum in exiguo. Tantum sapienti sua quantum deo omnis aetas patet" (*Ep.* 53.11). I have no doubt that his use of drama and especially the miniature dramatic scene stems from the same appreciation.