

*Imago Vitae Suae**Miriam T. Griffin*

Although Seneca's immortality derives mainly from the style he created and the philosophy he transmitted, his conduct as a man has also earned him fame, and notoriety. Ring-burdened Seneca, 'in his books a philosopher', fawning while praising liberty, extorting while praising poverty, is one of literature's great hypocrites.¹ To a more sympathetic eye, he has been 'the sage tossing on his couch of purple' as he struggles with the temptations of a decadent age and a tyrannical prince.² Then again, approached in a spirit of robust common sense, he has had his genius diagnosed as a mere gastric disorder or a paranoiac abnormality.³ This enduring biographical concern with Seneca is only fair, for he himself adopted, as a stylist, the maxim 'a man's style is like his life', and, as a moralist, the rule 'let our speech be in harmony with our life'.⁴

In his own lifetime, Seneca's moral and political behaviour won him admirers and disciples, but critics and slanderers as well. The historian Tacitus records a diatribe directed against him at the height of his power alleging sexual licence and the accumulation of excessive wealth by dubious means, all belying his philosophical pretensions (*Ann.* 13.42; cf. Dio Cassius 61.10). Yet, in addition to the inevitable crowd of political associates and dependants that he owed to his position close

¹ W.S. Landor, 'Epictetus and Seneca', *Imaginary Conversations*; Macaulay, 'Lord Bacon' (1837).

² Dill 1904, 13.

³ The first view is that of Jerome 1923; the second that of E. Phillips Barker in *OCD*¹, s.v. 'Seneca'.

⁴ *Epist.* 114.1: *talis hominibus oratio qualis vita*; 75.4: *concordet sermo cum vita*.

to the Emperor, Seneca had a more intimate circle of friends who believed in him as a moral teacher. To these men he offered not only encouragement and the lessons of his own struggle for moral improvement, but himself as a model, such as Socrates had been to Plato (*Epist.* 6.5–6). It is thus with some verisimilitude that Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.62) makes Seneca offer on his deathbed, as his most precious legacy to his friends, the ‘image of his life’.

What picture of his life has Seneca left?⁵ The historical tradition about him was formed by his own younger contemporaries. Among these was probably the author of the *Octavia*, a historical tragedy in which Seneca appears as the brave and virtuous adviser of a tyrant who will not listen.⁶ That assessment is also found in Juvenal, who celebrates, in addition, Seneca’s generosity as a patron (8.211–14; 5.108ff.; 10.15–18). Thirty years after Seneca’s death, the poet Martial, who had come to Rome from a less civilized part of his native province, was still expressing his admiration (4.40.1; 12. 36). Another literary protégé, Fabius Rusticus, produced a history of the period that gave Seneca special prominence and credit (*Tac. Ann.* 13.20). But other historians produced more qualified portraits, recording the sordid charges of Suillius Rufus and others that have been preserved for us by the third-century historian Dio Cassius, for example that Seneca provoked Boudicca’s rebellion in Britain by his usury, that he encouraged his wife’s suicide attempt.

The definitive account of his period of power under Nero was produced by Tacitus, who was a child when Seneca died. In using his literary sources and in evaluating oral tradition, the historian had to look out for the various types of bias we have mentioned and to reckon with a change in literary fashion that branded Seneca’s style as corrupt. The chief exponent of that view was the Flavian professor of rhetoric, another Spaniard, Fabius Quintilianus. Tacitus, as is clear from the *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, thought that Quintilian went too far in blaming Seneca for the decline of Latin eloquence, but he shared the change in taste and had to allow for it in his own reading of Seneca’s works.⁷

⁵ Much material relevant to the verdict on Seneca as a man, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, can be found in Trillitzsch 1971. The collection starts with Seneca’s autobiographical references and ends with Erasmus.

⁶ On the problem of authenticity and date see Coffey 1957 and Herington 1961.

⁷ Quintilian 10.1.125. ff.; *Tac. Ann.* 13.3: Seneca had a ‘charming talent and one suited to the taste of his time’.

Suetonius, a less conscientious writer, made no attempt to escape the current prejudice (*Nero* 52). It is not surprising that Tacitus's portrait of Seneca in the *Annals* is at times agnostic or equivocal. What is more interesting is that this acute and cynical judge, well aware of literary pose and moral falsity, but knowing also the hazards and temptations of imperial politics, delivered on balance a favourable verdict.⁸

Even if Seneca had not been a moralist, his high political standing as one of the most influential *amici principis* ('friends of the Princeps') in the reign of Nero would still have attracted sharp criticism. For, like Maecenas and Agrippa before him, Seneca was a new man of non-senatorial family but personal talent who thereby rose to power under the Principate. The Civil Wars had been, as such periods tend to be, a time of social mobility, but even afterwards the new imperial system offered rapid promotion to those who could impress the Emperor and his favourites with their abilities. Yet Maecenas, eccentric and effete as he was, and Agrippa, who preferred not to use his undistinguished *nomen*, were at least born in Italy; Seneca was 'of equestrian and provincial origin'.⁹

His birthplace was the Roman colony of Corduba in Baetica,¹⁰ the richest and most peaceful of the Spanish provinces. But, according to a distinction that apparently mattered to the Romans (though it cannot in fact have been rigidly maintained or, in particular cases, proved), he was not of Spanish blood, but of Italian immigrant stock, *Hispaniensis* not *Hispanus*. His family name Annaeus proclaims an ultimate ancestry in north-eastern Italy (Syme 1958, App. 80), but there is no telling when the family emigrated. From the beginning of the second century BC, when the Spanish provinces were organized, Italian veterans, traders, mine speculators, and political refugees settled there in considerable numbers. Corduba had been founded early as a community of Roman *émigrés* and was later reinforced by Augustus, who settled veterans there and gave the town the status of a Roman colony, with the grand title Colonia Patricia.¹¹ Seneca's lost biography of his father

⁸ Ryberg 1942; Syme 1958, 551ff.; Trillitzsch 1971, 94ff.

⁹ On Agrippa's *nomen*, Elder Seneca *Controversiae* 2.4.13; Tac. *Ann.* 14.53 (*equestri et provinciali loco ortus*).

¹⁰ Martial 1.61.7ff.; cf. 'Seneca' *Epigram* 3 (Prato p. 18).

¹¹ The date when Corduba acquired colonial status and other points of detail and dispute on pp. 25–9 are discussed in Griffin 1972.

probably had something to say of his earlier ancestors;¹² without it, we know only that the first member of the family of literary consequence, Seneca's father, L. Annaeus Seneca, was himself born in Corduba and was well established there (Martial 1.6).

Father Seneca was a Roman *eques*, hence a man with a substantial census rating and the high social standing in his native city that normally went with it. It is likely that the principal source of his wealth was agricultural land, for the banks of the Guadalquivir on which Corduba stood were covered with olive groves and vineyards; and the *patrimonium* of his sons was administered by their mother Helvia during their long absences from Spain, a situation easiest to imagine if their wealth consisted of landed estates. He probably held no municipal office, nor did he avail himself of the opportunities created by the first Princeps for *equites* to serve Rome in a financial or administrative capacity. And, though he devoted a good deal of his life to the study of rhetoric, he was neither a teacher nor a practising advocate. The epithet Rhetor by which he is sometimes known has no ancient authority behind it, but derives from the work of a humanist scholar who realized, as many before him had not, that the works of the father and the son, transmitted together in the manuscripts, were in fact composed by different Senecas. To mark the distinction, he called the author of the works we call the *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae*¹³ Seneca Rhetor.

Born between 55 and 50 BC, the Elder Seneca was prevented from going to Rome for his very early education by the dreadful Civil Wars started by Caesar and Pompey and continued by their followers throughout the decade of the forties (*Contr.* 1, pref. 11). Corduba, the effective capital of the province of Hispania Ulterior, wavered between the two sides, trying to save its wealth and status. Even after the battle of Philippi, Sextus Pompey menaced the sea between Spain and Italy until 36 BC, so that it was somewhat belatedly that this ambitious provincial finally found himself in Rome studying under an insignificant teacher from Spain called Marullus (*Contr.* 1, pref. 22). By that time he had been through his preparatory education with a *grammaticus* in Corduba, at whose school he exhibited the

¹² Haase frags 98–9 = Vottero 97, 1 and 2.

¹³ The actual title is *Oratorum et Rhetorum sententiae, divisiones, colores*.

outstanding powers of memory to which we owe our most detailed knowledge of the declamatory schools (*Contr.* 1, pref. 2). As a schoolboy, he could repeat in reverse order single lines of verse recited by his more than two hundred fellow-pupils; in old age he was able to recall word for word many of the *sententiae* of famous declaimers that he had heard even on his first visit to Rome, including some by the boy Ovid. In Rome he enjoyed an early acquaintance with the great general, orator and historian Asinius Pollio, for Seneca tells us that he was admitted to Pollio's private declamations in the 30s BC (*Contr.* 4, pref. 2–4): in fact, the acquaintance could go back to the days when Pollio was governing Spain for Caesar and spending much of his time on literary pursuits in Corduba (Cicero *Ad Fam.* 10.31–3). Father Seneca's eventual decision to write history may owe something to Pollio, whose history he admired (*Suas.* 6.25), and whose frankness he apparently emulated. The son describes his father's work as 'a history running from the start of the civil wars, when truth was first put to flight, almost up to the day of his own death'.¹⁴ The wars meant are doubtless the great civil upheavals of his childhood. The history probably ended with the reign of Tiberius, for its author died in 39 or 40 (Sen. *Cons. Helv.* 2.4–5), leaving the manuscript for his son to publish. He may never have done so, for we have no certain fragment of that work.

The Elder Seneca had returned to Spain around 8 BC, where he married a certain Helvia, who bore him three sons: Annaeus Novatus, known after his adoption many years later by his father's friend, the senator L. Junius Gallio, as L. Junius Gallio Annaeanus;¹⁵ L. Annaeus Seneca, born in 1 BC or shortly before;¹⁶ and M. Annaeus Mela, father of the poet Lucan. By AD 5 the father had returned to Rome with his sons and was continuing his visits to the rhetorical schools and supervising their education. He wished his sons to have senatorial careers, but he regarded the study of rhetoric as essential to the pursuit of any art, even philosophy to which, by the time the *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae* were being composed, his youngest son was wholly devoted (*Contr.* 2, pref.).

¹⁴ Haase frag. 99: *historias ab initio bellorum civilium, unde primum veritas retro abiit, paene usque ad mortis suae diem.*

¹⁵ His full name after adoption is given by an inscription at Delphi, SIG³ 801D, and one at Rome, AE, 1960, no. 61.

¹⁶ Seneca *Tranq. An.* 17.7; *Epist.* 108.22 (cf. Tacitus *Ann.* 2.85.4).

That was after 37, and the old man was nearly ninety when he acceded to his sons' request to recall and compile for them the best sayings of the declaimers whom they had been too young to hear, giving his judgement of each (*Contr.* 1, pref.). By that time his sons were adult and the two oldest embarked on their careers as orators and senators; yet such was the 'old-fashioned strictness' of the old man¹⁷ that in this work, intended from the start for publication, he scolds them for preferring rhetorical bagatelles to solid historical matter (*Suas.* 6.16) and castigates the laziness and effeminacy of their whole generation whose standards of eloquence were consequently in decline (*Contr.* 1, pref.).

A man of strong character and married to a woman from a strict old-fashioned provincial home (*Sen. Cons. Helv.* 16.3), Father Seneca maintained that same atmosphere in his. Helvia was discouraged from pursuing a natural taste for literature and philosophy because he thought these pursuits inappropriate for women, and young Seneca was successfully deflected from a youthful passion for a fashionable brand of ascetic philosophy involving vegetarianism (*Cons. Helv.* 17.4; *Epist.* 108.22). For the youngest son Mela, Father Seneca had the typical weakness of the patriarchs, openly proclaiming him the cleverest of the three and indulging in him a taste for philosophy and a lack of ambition he would have found intolerable in the older ones. But his devotion to them all was undeniable, and his second son was to describe him in old age as 'a most indulgent father', recalling how filial affection had deterred him from committing suicide in youth when he despaired of recovery from consumption (*Epist.* 78.2). Seneca was also indebted for his style to his father's training and example: he took over many of his turns of phrase and his literary judgements.¹⁸ Finally, the sons were prevented from losing all feeling for their native Corduba when they moved to the capital. Father Seneca himself died in Spain despite long years spent in Rome, and, in the collection of declamatory material he made for his sons, he expresses his delight in writing about Spanish declaimers and especially in rescuing from oblivion those who had practised their art only in the province (*Contr.* 1, pref. 13, 20; 10, pref. 13). His sons were educated at Rome along with the son of one of these, a

¹⁷ Seneca, *Cons. Helv.* 17.3: *antiquus rigor*.

¹⁸ For a collection of parallel passages see Rolland 1906.

certain Clodius Turrinus (*Contr.* 10, pref. 16). The youngest son Mela married in Corduba and his son Lucan was born there;¹⁹ his more successful brother when imperial adviser extended his patronage to several young hopefuls from the province (Syme 1958, 591–2).

To his mother Helvia, Seneca owed his early taste for philosophy, and to her family the start of his political career (*Cons. Helv.* 15.1; 19.2). For Helvia had a stepsister whose husband, C. Galerius, was one of the new imperial brand of *equites* and rose to be Prefect of Egypt (Sen. *Cons. Helv.* 19.2–7; *PIR*² G 25), the highest post then open to a non-senator and one which put him above many senators in power and influence. This aunt had brought Seneca to Rome as a child and now, towards the end of her husband's sixteen-year term of office under Tiberius, she invited him to travel to Egypt for his health. The voyage and the climate were reputed good for tubercular cases. He returned with his aunt in AD 31, an eventful voyage on which they were nearly shipwrecked, and his uncle died (*Cons. Helv.* 19). Seneca was then past thirty, five years older than the minimum age for holding the quaestorship, the first magistracy that carried senatorial rank. He records gratefully how, some time after their return from Egypt, his aunt canvassed all of her influential connections to secure his election to that office, presumably having first obtained from the Emperor for him the grant of the *latus clavus* which gave him the right to stand. To judge from their father's description of them shortly after 37 as preparing for the forum and magistracies (*Contr.* 2, pref.), neither Seneca nor his older brother Novatus had advanced beyond the quaestorship by Gaius's reign, so that it is possible that they were both around forty when they entered the senate.

Ill-health may have played some part in this slow beginning, for both brothers were tubercular. A temperamental distaste may also be involved: Novatus was a gentle man with little taste for flattery, according to his brother (*Nat. Quaest.* 4, pref. 10ff.), while Seneca was profoundly absorbed in natural science and moral philosophy. Before his visit to Egypt, he was drinking in with rapture the lectures of the Stoic Attalus, whose ascetic recommendations he put into practice. By AD 19 he was an enthusiastic adherent of the only

¹⁹ Vacca, *Life of Lucan* (Rostagni, pp. 176ff.).

philosophical school to originate in Rome (*Epist.* 108.13–23), a basically Stoic sect with ascetic neo-Pythagorean elements. It may be significant for Seneca's late start that the founder, Q. Sextius, had himself been offered a senatorial career by Caesar the Dictator and refused (*Epist.* 98.13). After his return from Egypt in 31, any new ambitions Seneca may have had failed to flourish in the new political situation following the fall of Sejanus. The recall of his uncle Galerius precisely in 31 and his hasty replacement by a freedman suggests that, like that long-standing friend of the family Junius Gallio, the Senecas were somehow involved with the fallen praetorian prefect.²⁰ But it is also well to remember Tiberius's neglect of government in his last years: not many young *equites* were given the *latus clavus* in the last years of that bitter recluse's government.²¹

Seneca's works give, on the whole, a low estimate of Tiberius, showing him as a proud, ungrateful man, whose meanness was unworthy of a ruler and whose policy degenerated into a judicial reign of terror (e.g. *Ben.* 2.7.2–8; 3.26.1; 5.25.2). Seneca's youthful spell of vegetarianism, inspired by Sotion, a follower of the Sextii, had been brought to a hasty finish early in Tiberius's reign in AD 19, when abstinence from pork, on whatever grounds, was being construed as conversion to Judaism, and persistence in vegetarianism might have led to his being expelled from Rome as a proselyte.²² Yet his references to Tiberius are moderate, especially when compared with what he has to say of his successor.

It was probably in the reign of Gaius that both Seneca and Novatus reached the next step on the senatorial ladder, the aedileship or tribunate, of which Seneca tells us nothing. He was becoming a successful orator, enough, it was said, to provoke the Emperor's jealousy and his very unflattering criticism of his style as 'sand without lime' (Suet. *Gaius* 53; cf. Sen. *Epist.* 49.2.). In addition, Seneca may have already published at least one scientific work, on earthquakes (*Nat. Quaest.* 6.4.2 = Vottero 1998, 31–3) and was beginning to find favour in high places. Various shreds of evidence

²⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 6.3. The family connection with Sejanus was suggested by Stewart 1953.

²¹ This is an inference from Dio 59.9.5.

²² Sen. *Epist.* 108.22; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 2.85.4; Josephus *AJ* 18.84; Suet. *Tiberius* 36; Dio 57.18.59.

suggest an early connection with the sisters of the Emperor and with Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus, an aristocrat, a writer of history and poetry, and, by virtue of his ten-year governorship of Upper Germany, a political power.²³ In 39 a conspiracy to put Aemilius Lepidus on the throne was exposed. As a result, Gaetulicus was killed and Gaius's three sisters sent into exile. Seneca may well have been casting about for new friends when he wrote the first of his *Consolations*, the one addressed to Marcia, a well-born woman of senatorial family and connections who carried on the literary interests of her father, Cremutius Cordus. His works, burned in the reign of Tiberius, had been republished with Gaius's permission, as a demonstration of his belief in freedom of speech, though the republication was a censored version (Suet. *Gaius* 16; Quintilian 10.1.104).

At last, in January 41, the tyrant was dead, murdered by a tribune of the praetorian guard with the co-operation of many senators and *eques*, but not, apparently, of Seneca. He may have been in the theatre on the fateful day and he published his approval of the deed years after, without however betraying any intimate knowledge of the assassination, and in fact implying the reverse by speculating at a distance about the motives of the conspirators (*Const. Sap.* 18; *Ira* 1.20.9). Seneca's friends Gaetulicus and Julius Graecinus were avenged (*Ben.* 2.21; *Epist.* 29.6), Gaius' two surviving sisters were recalled, but Seneca's misfortunes were only beginning. On the throne now was a better Emperor, but one less in control of what happened.

Seneca was now middle-aged, and not yet praetor, hence of little standing in the senate. He had given up oratory, perhaps at first to avoid the consequences of Gaius's jealousy, but finally for more fundamental reasons: his weak chest had probably always made speaking an effort and he no doubt realized, like his father (*Contr.* 1, pref. 7), that the virtual monarchy by which Rome was governed had diminished the importance of oratory as a source of power or a form of public service. Like one of his Sextian teachers, Papirius Fabianus, a declaimer turned philosopher, Seneca concentrated on natural science and took up the challenge set by Cicero to write philosophy

²³ Notably, Sen. *Nat. Quaest.* 4, pref. 15; Dio 59.19 (a story of dubious truth and significance); Dio 60.8.5–6; Tac. *Ann.* 12.8.2.

in Latin. His talents as an orator he was learning to employ as a castigatō of vice; the spiritual comfort of Stoicism he was to administer to others—and himself. For in 41, Seneca lost a son, the only child he was to have. He apparently lost his wife as well.²⁴ Towards the end of the year, he was relegated to the island of Corsica and deprived of some of his property on a charge of adultery with Gaius' sister, Julia Livilla. Seneca himself tells us that he was tried before the senate, which declared him guilty and prescribed the death penalty; but that Claudius asked that his life be spared (*Cons. Polyb.* 13.2). Yet Tacitus says that Seneca was thought to nourish a grudge against Claudius for an injury (*Tac. Ann.* 12.8.8). These statements can only be reconciled by assuming that Claudius's clemency counted for little with Seneca because he felt that his conviction had been altogether unjust and would not have happened under a better Emperor. In his *Consolation* to his mother Helvia, Seneca offers the comforting picture of himself as an innocent victim sustained by his virtue and his philosophical beliefs. Even in the other *Consolation* he wrote from exile, that addressed to Polybius, he asks that the Emperor recall him as an act of *justice* or clemency.

It would seem then that Seneca was either innocent or at least not manifestly guilty; otherwise these works designed to win him sympathy would instead have exposed him to ridicule. The historian Dio Cassius makes out a plausible case for his being an innocent victim of Claudius' young wife Valeria Messalina, who was envious of Livilla and determined to be rid of her (*Dio* 60.8.5). Seneca himself alludes in a later work to some victims of Messalina and Claudius' most powerful freedman Narcissus, friends of Seneca's addressee Lucilius, who proved loyal to them under questioning (*Nat. Quaest.* 4, pref. 15). The passage is general but he may be including himself among the victims. Allegations of immorality involving royal princesses were a favourite weapon in the struggles concerning the succession. Reasonably, as actual liaisons of this kind could support or create claims to the throne, given a system of government that was in fact a hereditary monarchy, but could not be described as such and therefore could not rely on a law of succession or any other fixed

²⁴ The death of his wife is suggested by the fact that she is not mentioned in this work written from exile and containing a considerable amount of detailed information about his family.

system for deciding claims. In 41 Messalina had just produced an heir, and she may well have feared the influence on the susceptible Claudius of attractive nieces with the blood of Augustus in their veins. Julia Livilla she removed, but she met her match in Julia Agrippina, who may already have had enough sway over the uncle she was later to marry to cause his mitigation of Seneca's sentence: Tacitus says that she later recalled Seneca expecting him to be loyal and mindful of her favour.²⁵ Seneca spent nearly eight years on Corsica, reading works on natural history and the masterpieces of consolation literature (*Cons. Helv.* 1.2; 8.6). He analysed the native dialect (*Cons. Helv.* 7.9) and brooded on Ovid's last works,²⁶ doubtless drawing parallels between his own fate and the poet's eight years in dismal Tomis. Bidding for the sympathy of Polybius, he complains, like Ovid, that his Latin is becoming rusty (*Cons. Polyb.* 18.9); yet there were two Roman colonies on Corsica and he may have been accompanied into exile by a loyal friend (Martial 7.44; cf. Sen. *Epist.* 87), surely enough to keep him in practice. In any case, Seneca kept his style fresh by writing. To mention only works that survive, he composed or at least planned much of *De Ira*, and he applied his reading of consolations to the composition of two such works: one addressed to his mother Helvia, the other to the 'insolent and pampered freedman of a tyrant' (in Macaulay's words), Polybius, at the time looking after petitions and literary matters for Claudius. In the guise of a work consoling Polybius on the death of his brother, Seneca made a transparent appeal to be recalled to witness Claudius's imminent British triumph (13.2). The work that has come down to us contains praise of Polybius and of Claudius so exaggerated that some scholars have construed it as satire, intended or unconscious.²⁷ Such an apology overlooks both Seneca's important lapse from good taste in the funeral eulogy of Claudius, and the standards of adulation of his time, standards that already seemed shocking to Pliny half a century later.²⁸ One of the indictments that Dio Cassius brings

²⁵ *Ann.* 12.8.2: *memoria beneficii*.

²⁶ The end of the *Consolatio ad Polybium* is a distinct echo of such Ovidian lines as *Ex Ponto* 4.2.15ff.

²⁷ Intended satire: Alexander 1943. Unconscious satire: Momigliano 1934, 75–6.

²⁸ Tacitus *Ann.* 13.3 where *quamquam* shows that Tacitus thinks that Seneca did not intend the laughable effect produced by his exaggerated praises of Claudius; Pliny *Epist.* 8.6.

against Seneca is the composition of a book sent from exile praising Messalina and Claudius' freedmen, a book Seneca afterwards suppressed or repudiated. Dio's meaning, as transmitted through an excerptor, is not clear (61.10.2). Though the extant Consolation does not contain praise of Messalina, the identification with the work mentioned by Dio is hard to challenge: the opening chapters of the extant piece were lost early and may have been flattering to Messalina, and Dio's excerptor may have transmitted inaccurately some phrase of Dio's meaning that Seneca tried to suppress the work. In any case, Polybius was unmoved or already experiencing that decline in influence with Messalina that ended in his death. Other exiles came home for Claudius' triumph (Suet. *Claudius* 17.3), but Seneca had to wait until Messalina was dead and Agrippina married to Claudius.

The year 49 opened with the imperial nuptials, followed soon after by the recall of Seneca and his designation as praetor for the next year. Both improvements in his fortunes Seneca owed to Agrippina, though they were formally carried through by Claudius and the senate (Tac. *Ann.* 12.8; Suet. *Claudius* 12). Agrippina, according to Tacitus, thought an act of mercy towards a promising writer, who was widely regarded as an innocent victim of the previous wife, would divert attention from the sinister circumstances of her own marriage to Claudius. For it was an incestuous union by Roman law and darkened by the suicide of L. Junius Silanus, a descendant of Augustus betrothed to Claudius' daughter Octavia (Tac. *Ann.* 12.2–4; 8). Silanus was surely not alone in seeing what Agrippina intended and would certainly achieve, namely, the betrothal of her son to Octavia as a first move towards his ultimate replacement of Claudius' son Britannicus as heir apparent. Seneca must have known that the price for his return to the literary life of the capital and the restoration of his property and status would be collaboration in the schemes of his benefactress. A late source (Schol. Juv. 5.109) records that he was hoping to go to Athens on his return. At most this reflects a vain wish at the time or a later defence of his motives for accepting recall, but it might simply be an attempt to explain why such an educated man had never been to Athens.

Seneca's older brother did go to Greece, probably as a result of Seneca's change of fortune. He is attested as proconsul of Achaëa in

51/2 by an inscription at Delphi (SIG³ 801D), called there by his adoptive name. It is likewise as 'careless Gallio' that he has been immortalized by *Acts* (18.11–17) because of his reluctance to be embroiled in the religious quarrels of the Jews. It may also have been at this time that the youngest brother Mela gave up his single-minded devotion to philosophy to become a procurator of the imperial estates, a 'perverse ambition' in Tacitus' view, leading not only to wealth but to political power equal to that of consular senators by the safer route of remaining an *eques* (*Ann.* 16.17).

Seneca and Gallio went on to become suffect consuls in 55 and 56 in the reign of Nero, but still, as under Claudius, Seneca's power and significance owed little to his place in the senate. He became a courtier, exercising for the rest of his life those qualities that he himself describes in *De Tranquillitate Animi* (6) as necessary to life at court: control of one's temper, one's words, and one's wit. At the same time, Seneca was an extremely productive and popular author, developing the new anti-Ciceronian style whose roots are apparent in the pieces of declamation preserved by his father. From now on, the philosophical sentiments in his treatises laid him open to charges of hypocrisy, while the extreme reticence he preserves in them about his activities and position makes it tempting to think that he kept his life and his literary work rigidly separate. But the historical evidence we have about life at the court of Claudius and Nero does explain, at least in part, his preoccupation with the fragility of power and wealth, the possibility of sudden punishment and death, the appropriate time and reasons for committing suicide, and the right reasons for undertaking or abandoning a public career.²⁹

His immediate task was to instruct Agrippina's son Domitius. By his adoption as Claudius' son in February 50, Seneca's pupil became Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus, and, by the three-year advantage in age he had over Britannicus, he became the expected heir to the throne. Seneca was to teach him rhetoric and, no doubt, to impart some of his own charm and polish. It was a difficult task. In his treatise *De Ira*, already complete or near completion in 49, Seneca shows his awareness of the difficulties involved in educating the children of

²⁹ The problem of the connection between Seneca's life and his philosophical writings is the theme explored in Griffin 1976 (1992).

wealthy and powerful families: such children will have their passions inflamed by flattery and indulgence if they are not disciplined and made to live on terms of equality with their peers (2.21.7–11). The mixture of praise and admonition with which Seneca was to address the eighteen year-old Nero (now Princeps) in *De Clementia* shows what psychological skill he must always have needed in teaching his royal pupil. Tacitus makes Seneca claim to have exercised *libertas* in his dealings with Nero, but the historian's own phrase *honesta comitas* ('honourable affability') is probably nearer the truth (Tac. *Ann.* 13.2). Nero declaimed in Greek and Latin and acquired some skill in *ex tempore* speaking, but his artistic and athletic interests never allowed him to reach the standard of eloquence required for major speeches as Princeps. Seneca was generally believed to have written these (Tac. *Ann.* 13.3; 13.11; 14.11). According to Suetonius, Agrippina banned philosophy from Nero's curriculum, but she could not have included in that ban the practical moral instruction traditionally associated with teaching in rhetoric (Suet. *Nero* 52; Plin. *Epist.* 3.3.4). In fact, an anecdote in Plutarch shows that Seneca was thought to have given his pupil counsel of this sort, teaching him on one occasion to bear the loss of a costly and irreplaceable marquee with self-restraint (Plut. *De cohibenda ira* 461F). Seneca was adaptable. Stoicism, he explains in *De Clementia* (2.5.2), is not, as widely believed, a harsh doctrine unsuitable for rulers. What advice he gave Agrippina and her son on practical politics no doubt represented a considerable bending of Stoic doctrine.

Until Nero's accession in October 54, Seneca was simply his teacher, his *magister* or *praeceptor*; from then on he was also one of his principal *amici*. In fact, he never held any official position apart from the magistracies and senatorial seat which, as we have said, were not the source of his power. No historian mentions any occasion on which Seneca spoke in the senate or was even present, and the unwillingness of the Neronian senate to vote on measures put to them by the consuls without prior reference to the Emperor suggests that Seneca, whose views would be taken to carry imperial sanction, rarely attended meetings (Tac. *Ann.* 13.26; 14.49; 15.22). One of his enemies, it is true, accused him of sponsoring the first senatorial decree of the reign (one cancelling an edict of Claudius that had encouraged informers, Tac. *Ann.* 13.5; 13.42), but it is likely that even this showpiece of senatorial liberty was supported from behind the

scenes. It was, in fact, from the equestrian order that most of Seneca's political associates and the friends to whom he addressed his essays were drawn. In some cases, the two categories just mentioned overlap, for many of Seneca's friends were favoured with governmental positions. To Pompeius Paulinus, the father of his second wife (whom he probably married on his return from exile) and Prefect of the Corn Supply from about 49 to 55, Seneca addressed *De Brevitate Vitae*. To Annaeus Serenus, who held the important command of the night-watch from about 54 until some time before 62, Seneca dedicated a group of three dialogues in which Serenus is depicted as a pupil in three stages of moral development: a sceptic in *De Constantia Sapientis*, a struggling convert in *De Tranquillitate Animi*, and a confident Stoic in *De Otio*. To the obscure Lucilius Junior, who attained the unimportant post of procurator in Sicily shortly before 62, Seneca sent more works than to anyone else: some are lost, but *De Providentia*, the *Naturales Quaestiones* and the great *Epistulae Morales* survive.³⁰

Seneca's most important political associate was an *eques* who received no philosophical treatise and needed no patronage. Sextus Afranius Burrus from another civilized western province, Gallia Narbonensis, was, like Seneca, a protégé of Agrippina. Though the inscription recording his career, found at his home town of Vaison, gives as his earlier posts only a military tribunate followed by procuratorships of the properties of Livia, Tiberius, and Claudius (*ILS* 1321), Burrus had apparently acquired a considerable military reputation before he was elevated by Claudius in 51 to the sole command of the praetorian guard. According to Tacitus, this step consolidated Agrippina's power, for she, at one stroke, secured control of the guard and rid herself of two allies of Britannicus who shared the post before (Tac. *Ann.* 12.42).

³⁰ The table of contents of the Codex Ambrosianus (on which the text of the dialogues principally depends) starts *In primis ad Lucilium De Providentia*. Roszbach plausibly suggested that the *In primis* was copied inadvertently from a longer table of contents prefixed to a lost complete collection of the dialogues where it signified that Lucilius was the principal addressee. It would follow that Lucilius was the addressee of a large number of dialogues from which the Codex A selected one. Some of these are lost; others may be among those surviving in a fragmentary state with the name of the addressee missing.

The harmony of Seneca and Burrus was as fortunate as it was remarkable. Tacitus's description of their collaboration in handling Nero recalls Seneca's argument in *De Ira* that spoiled and well-born pupils must be alternately goaded with the spur and held in with the reins. They were in their different ways equally influential, Burrus through his military position and his strict morality, Seneca through his instruction in rhetoric and his agreeable, though upright, personality, supporting each other so as to be able to restrain the Emperor's susceptible youth by licensed pleasures should he spurn virtue (*Ann.* 13.2). But Burrus was more than Nero's reins: of the two advisers he alone had the chance of building up considerable independent power which the Princeps needed and feared. It was he, for example, who calmed the praetorians and the urban populace after Nero's murder of Agrippina, thereby removing the threat of a popular rising (*Tac. Ann.* 14.7; cf. 14.13). Therefore it is not surprising to find that Tacitus dated the serious decline in Seneca's influence to the death of Burrus (*Ann.* 14.52). Tacitus is our most detailed source for the activities of Seneca and Burrus. His account was based on three contemporary sources who could survey their doings from close-range but different standpoints: the senior senator Cluvius Rufus, the equestrian officer and procurator Pliny the Elder, and the young protégé of Seneca, Fabius Rusticus (*Ann.* 13.20). Tacitus and Dio both credit the two *amici* with virtual control of imperial policy in the early years, but they differ on the nature of the control and the policy. According to Dio, Seneca and Burrus sponsored reforms through legislation (*Dio* 61.4.2); according to Tacitus, they worked behind the scenes, so much so that Seneca could be credited by some with all of Nero's good actions, by others with all of his crimes (*Ann.* 14.52; 15.45), and their work concerned not so much the substance as the manner of government. Dio presents no example of a reform carried out to support his view and, in an attempt to give it any plausibility, he has to make Seneca and Burrus give up their interest in government impossibly early, in 55 (*Dio* 61.7.5). Tacitus, on the other hand, can offer a picture of their role that he illustrates and that fits the political character he attributes to Nero's early reign, that is *civilitas*, a return after Claudius to proper forms and procedure, particularly as regards relations with the senate. There is no doubt that Tacitus' picture must be preferred, with due allowance for the

possibility that he has exaggerated the importance of Seneca and Burrus. For Tacitus was clearly fascinated by Seneca, largely because Seneca displayed that combination of talent and flexibility, that exercise of political skill without display that always attracted the historian (Syme 1958, 545). There may also be a family connection, for Seneca's works show him to have been an admirer and possibly a friend of Julius Graecinus, the grandfather of Tacitus's wife. But there was also the Senecan style which had captivated his generation in youth. For Seneca's doctrine, however, Tacitus cares nothing—only the philosopher's enemies allude to that in the *Annals*—but, despite the reaction in taste, Tacitus shows his thorough knowledge of Seneca's works by his deliberate echoes of their language and thought.³¹

One of the scenes in which these allusions are particularly apparent is the dialogue between Seneca and Nero in *Annals* 14.53–6. The year is 62. Seneca, his power broken by the death of Burrus and the growing influence of one of the new praetorian prefects, Ofonius Tigellinus, asks for permission to surrender some of his wealth to Nero and to retire from life at court. Seneca is made to compare his services to Nero with those of Agrippa and Maecenas to Augustus. Now Seneca himself, in a work written during his period of greatest influence with Nero, makes some significant remarks about the relations of these two senior *amici* with the Princeps. Augustus, in a fit of temper, reported to the senate all the sordid details of his daughter Julia's erotic adventures, then repented, saying, 'None of these disasters would have happened to me, had either Agrippa or Maecenas been alive.' Seneca comments bitterly, 'There is no reason to believe that Agrippa and Maecenas regularly told him the truth; had they lived, they would have been in the ranks of those who concealed it. It is a custom of kings to praise those absent in order to insult those present, and to attribute the virtue of free speech to those from whom they no longer have to hear it' (*Ben.* 6.32, 2–4). This anecdote, like the parallel drawn by Nero in the retirement dialogue between Seneca and Lucius Vitellius (*Tac. Ann.* 14.56.1), suggests that one function of Seneca and Burrus was to counsel the

³¹ E.g. *Ann.* 13.27 echoes *Sen. Clem.* 1.24.1; *Ben.* 3.16.1; 3.14.1–2. *Ann.* 14.53–4 echoes *Ben.* 2.18.6ff.; 1.15.5; 2.33.2.

Principes on his personal affairs where they touched politics, and to invent and impose on the public an official version of such events.

This side of Seneca's and Burrus' activity is abundantly illustrated by Tacitus. Their first task was to curb the political influence of the overbearing Agrippina and to end the Claudian pattern of excessive influence by wives and freedmen, while publicly showing honour and respect to the dead Emperor and his widow in order to quiet the anxieties of those who had flourished under the old régime and were worried by Nero's succession. In controlling the adolescent Princes, Seneca and Burrus, somewhat indulgent and detached, had an unwilling ally in Nero's aggressive and tactless mother. She humiliated him by the respect she showed to the freedman Pallas, and by her assertion of equal imperial authority. She thwarted his youthful impulses by confining him to an unloved wife selected by her for political reasons. She tried to bully him by threatening to support his rivals to the throne. It was Seneca who, with great presence of mind, averted Agrippina's design of mounting Nero's tribunal to receive ambassadors, prompting Nero to rise and descend the dais with a courteous gesture of welcome. It was Seneca who covered up Nero's affair with the freedwoman Acte by inducing his protégé Annaeus Serenus to act as a decoy. Seneca and Burrus averted a complete break between mother and son in 55, when Agrippina, having stampeded Nero into murdering Britannicus by supporting his claim to the succession, was reported to have put her influence behind another rival. Seneca warned Nero against incestuous relations with his mother and, with Burrus, managed public opinion after the clumsy matricide which they had refused to execute (*Tac. Ann.* 14.2; 14.10–11). Their innocence of the murder is clearly attested by Tacitus and is more credible than the story in Dio Cassius making Seneca an accomplice.³² For Seneca and Burrus must have appreciated that their power depended on the continued existence and influence of Agrippina, from whom they provided a refuge. It was a dangerous game they played, and her ultimate destruction in 59 considerably diminished their control over the Emperor, who found others more polite about his chariot-racing, singing, and poetry.

³² *Tac. Ann.* 14.7; Dio 61.12, noting his reliance on authorities that he regards as trustworthy.

Throughout the period ending with Burrus's death, and even for some time afterwards, Seneca had an opportunity to exercise patronage. We have already mentioned some of the friends who may have achieved office through him. The careers of his brothers Gallio and Mela continued; his nephew Lucan was recalled from his university course in Athens to assume the quaestorship five years before the legal age.³³ His brother-in-law Pompeius Paulinus reached the consulship and went out to govern Lower Germany (Tac. *Ann.* 13.53). The young relative of Seneca's uncle, P. Galerius Trachalus, was launched on a senatorial career (*PIR*² G 30). And Seneca was also thought to have a hand in appointments that were made for reasons of state rather than for the gratification of his dependants (Tac. *Ann.* 13.6, 14; Plut. *Galba* 21.1).

The advisory functions so far described were shared by Seneca with Burrus. But it fell to Seneca alone, if not always to invent, then at least to advertise the formulae justifying what was done. Lucius Vitellius had persuaded the senate, not merely to accept but to advocate Claudius' marriage to Agrippina, and he may well have influenced that Emperor's pronouncements on the Jews, for he was experienced in Eastern politics (Tac. *Ann.* 12.5–6; Jos. *AJ* 20.12). Seneca went farther and actually wrote Nero's official speeches: a funeral eulogy of Claudius; an accession speech addressed to the praetorian guard and one to the senate; speeches to the senate on clemency in 55 (Tac. *Ann.* 13.3; Dio 61.3.1); and perhaps the humiliating letter to the senate in which the Emperor spun a tale of remorse and suicide to explain his mother's end, but, by including a list of her crimes in justification, virtually confessed to her murder. Tacitus notes that Seneca was generally thought to be the author of this letter, and that it brought him no credit.³⁴ Certainly, it accords ill with Seneca's own condemnation of Augustus' unrestrained communication to the senate on the subject of Julia, and it forms a contrast to the brief edict issued by Nero on the death of Britannicus, which simply expressed grief and excused the haste with which the obsequies were performed. But whoever wrote that edict—and it might have been Seneca—had an easier task. For the murder of

³³ Suet. *Lucan* 11.2–3; 11–12 (Rostagni, pp. 143, 145).

³⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 14.11. Quintilian 8.5.18 confidently attributes the letter to Seneca.

Britannus was carried out secretly and could be dissimulated. But Nero's ex-teacher Anicetus, prefect of the fleet at Misenum, had bungled Agrippina's death. The ship carrying her home from an affectionate meeting with her son was to have collapsed entirely, killing her in the process. But she survived the shipwreck, which attracted spectators who also saw guards surrounding the villa afterwards (Tac. *Ann.* 13.17.1; 14.8). Some explanation had to be offered. Even so, Seneca may have chosen words that were inappropriate to the occasion; he had already done so in writing the funeral encomium on the dead Claudius. Here Seneca had proceeded according to the traditional formula, praising Claudius's ancestors and his scholarly talents, turning then to his achievements as Princeps, first in foreign policy, then in governing the Empire. But he chose to attribute to Claudius qualities (*providentia, sapientia*) that could only remind the audience of the deceased's absent-mindedness and gullibility, thereby inadvertently raising a laugh (Tac. *Ann.* 13.3).

This funeral speech must have seemed particularly absurd to those of the inner court circle who had heard Nero's own jokes about Claudius's stupidity and cruelty, particularly after they attended the recitation of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, in which all of Claudius' vices and weaknesses were exposed to ridicule. Some scholars have tried to deny that this cruel satire, which has offended the taste of modern readers more than it offended or even interested his ancient or post-classical critics,³⁵ is by Seneca, but the manuscripts all attribute it to him and the arguments against his authorship are very weak. Although the humour may seem in conflict with Seneca's usual philosophical or tragic solemnity, we know from a letter of Pliny that he wrote light verse and from Tacitus that he was believed to put on comic imitations of Nero's singing (Plin. *Epist.* 5.3.5; Tac. *Ann.* 14.52.3). Indeed the extant dialogues contain satirical descriptions of current *mores*. Dio actually affirms that Seneca wrote a farce on Claudius' consecration called the *Apocolocyntosis*, the title being, he explains, a pun on the word for consecration. A description similar to Dio's, that is 'Divi Claudii apotheosis per satiram', is prefixed to our best manuscript of the work, so that, although the

³⁵ Note that Pliny (*Panegyricus* 11.1) seems to blame Nero alone for the ridicule of Claudius' consecration.

title 'Apocolocyntosis' is not preserved there nor in the other manuscripts (which call it 'Ludus de morte Claudii'), the identification with the skit Dio mentions can hardly be doubted. The title 'Transformation into a Gourd' is probably a pure play on the word *apotheosis*, with perhaps additional comic overtones because gourds may have been used as dice-boxes and Claudius was addicted to the game: the fact that no actual transformation of this kind takes place can hardly seem an argument against identification to anyone with enough humour to enjoy the piece.³⁶ Finally, the contrast with Seneca's earlier praise of Claudius in the *Consolatio* to Polybius and the funeral *laudatio* may not be morally edifying, but it is all too explicable and Seneca alludes to it himself. Before the other courtiers who had themselves laughed in private at the consecration they solemnly celebrated in public, Seneca enjoyed parodying his own work from exile: there (15–16) Claudius had been made to complain of the misfortunes of Augustus and his own relatives; in the *Apocolocyntosis* (10.4–11.1) Augustus blames Claudius for the sufferings of his. In the *Consolatio* (17.4) the thought of Caligula moves Seneca to exclaim 'pro pudore imperii'; in the satire (10.2) the thought of Claudius moves Augustus to say 'pudet imperii'. Seneca even makes a joke of his well-known hostility to Claudius, through whom he had lost not only his integrity but also nine years of his cultured and witty life: he piously borrows the historians' cliché, 'There will be no concession made to resentment or partiality' (1.1).

Claudius died on 13 October 54 and was probably buried soon after. But the consecration need not have followed immediately.³⁷ Seneca may have taken advantage either of the abandoned mood that accompanied imperial funerals or of that traditional at the Saturnalia in December, for the presentation of his farce. The criticism of Claudius includes those charges mentioned in earnest in Nero's accession speech to the senate: the power of his freedmen, the venality of his court, the monopoly of jurisdiction by the Princeps,

³⁶ An excellent summary by Coffey 1961 of the problems concerning authorship, date, title and purpose of the preserved work is still worth consulting. See also Eden 1984, 1–13.

³⁷ Furneaux *ad loc.* rightly pointed out that the notice of the vote of *caelestes honores* to Claudius immediately after his death, in Tacitus *Ann.* 12.69, is proleptic, the real notice of *consecratio* coming in 13.2.

and his neglect of proper procedure. The highpoint of the indictment of Claudius is a speech by Divus Augustus who vetoes his deification at the council of the gods on the grounds of his folly and cruelty. But there are also trivial criticisms: Claudius' voice, his walk, his pedantry. The ridicule of Claudius is relieved principally by the praise of Nero, which similarly combines the serious promises of a new type of government with trivial praise of Nero's good looks and voice.

Many scholars have thought that the *Apocolocyntosis* has a serious political aim, that by attacking Claudius's deification Seneca either made an attack on Agrippina, who was the priestess of Claudius' cult and the obstacle to the reform of his methods of government, or on Britannicus whose claim to the succession was inadvertently strengthened by his father's elevation.³⁸ There are difficulties in seeing the work as aimed at Agrippina: whereas at court Claudius' poisoning was the subject of jokes, the *Apocolocyntosis* seems to credit an official version of his death as being due to fever (6) and taking place at the time Agrippina had announced (2.2; 4.2) and not earlier as some said it did—which seems odd in a work attacking Agrippina. But then Messalina is treated surprisingly charitably,³⁹ and that is odd for an attack on Britannicus. It is unlikely, in fact, that the farce is a serious attack on the consecration. Coins show *divi Cl. f.* still advertised in 55 (and on one rare one of 56), while official inscriptions carry the filiation even later, and the spirit of amnesty advertised by the deification was carefully preserved in appointments. The mistake is to take a work in which almost nothing is serious too seriously. Even Augustus is laughed at here for the self-magnification of the *Res Gestae* and his obsession with his family (10). It is probably more appropriate to laugh than to read between the lines.

The policy of civil harmony without reprisals was stated explicitly in Nero's opening speech to the senate. There too Nero promised to follow the example of his predecessors, notably Augustus, and sketched his formula for government. He repudiated the worst Claudian abuses (judicial irregularities, control by freedmen, venality of the

³⁸ For earlier discussions, see Coffey 1961. Since then, a powerful if ultimately unconvincing case for the work being an attack on Britannicus and his party has been argued by Kraft 1966.

³⁹ This point was made forcibly by Baldwin 1964, who used it as an argument against Senecan authorship. But Messalina was old news in late 54.

court) and stated the principle of divided responsibility between Princeps and senate (Tac. *Ann.* 13.4). That must not be taken too literally: similar promises were regularly made by new Principes. Since Tacitus tells us that Nero was true to his promises in his early years, we can tell from his account of those years what was being promised: not, clearly, a true constitutional dyarchy with the Emperor running the army and military provinces and the senate in sole control of Italy and the public provinces. That was in practice impossible, given the financial and military system which was retained. Nero was promising merely to accord the senate and its members as much responsibility as was possible given the system, and to show that body the kind of respect it had not known under Claudius. More things were done through the senate, and the Princeps was generous, approachable and merciful (Tac. *Ann.* 13.5; Suet. *Nero* 10).

A year or two after Nero delivered his accession speech, at the end of 55 or in 56, Seneca published his only work of political philosophy. Dedicated to the Princeps and containing a discussion of the qualities necessary in a ruler, *De Clementia* must have seemed a public, if not an official, statement. The author says that his purpose is to delight Nero by holding up to him a mirror in which he can see his virtue. Yet this is a eulogy that is also an exhortation: the Emperor is warned that his clemency must be maintained and his own security and glory are adduced as incentives. There are lessons for the reading public too: the blessings of the *laetissima forma rei publicae* are enumerated and Seneca explains that the Principate is indispensable to the survival of Rome. The Roman people will avoid disaster, he says, 'as long as it can bear the reins; once it breaks them or refuses to submit to them again after they have given way, this unity and the structure of this great Empire will shatter into pieces' (1.4.2). Seneca also reassures the public and defends himself by denying the common view that Stoics disapprove of clemency (2.5ff.). The mixture of eulogy, admonition, and reassurance found in this work is perfectly intelligible in the contemporary political context. For it was widely believed that Nero had arranged the death of Britannicus in 55. Many were prepared to justify the murder on the ground that rule was indivisible; some very powerful *amici*, who probably included Seneca, were bribed to acquiesce in the killing. Seneca would probably have practised dissimulation in any case, seeing that his own retirement would certainly mean the

domination of Agrippina and perhaps his own death. More important, Nero's general political behaviour was still up to the standards of his early promises: his relations with the senate were good, and he had only just started the unconventional behaviour that was to offend all but the Roman *plebs* and his Greek subjects. *De Clementia* was designed to commit Nero to the clemency he had so far shown outside the palace, and to reassure the literate public that the murder of Britannicus and the tensions at court between the Princeps and his mother, the Princeps and his advisers, did not foreshadow a change in the character of the government.

Clemency had first become a mainstay of political propaganda with Julius Caesar, and Augustus and his successors had adopted it as an imperial virtue. The elevation of clemency to the position of chief imperial virtue by Seneca suits the political climate after Britannicus's murder, but the quality had received emphasis from the very start of the reign because of the cruelty of Nero's predecessor. It figured prominently in the accession speech to the senate and in that announcing the restoration to the senate of Plautius Lateranus (Tac. *Ann.* 13.11). Yet *De Clementia* does not simply repeat the principles of the accession speech. Seneca presents a picture of the state as an organism whose soul is Nero, and he constantly uses the words *princeps* and *rex* interchangeably. In one passage (1.8.1), Nero is called king by implication. Much of the counsel Seneca offers was found in the Hellenistic treatises on kingship that were written by philosophers of all schools. But the Romans were for historical reasons sensitive to the word *rex*, which they regarded as synonymous with the Greek word for tyrant rather than that for king.⁴⁰ Seneca's use of it here can hardly be due to carelessness in translating from or thinking in Greek. Rather he is outlining a political ideology more realistic and more positive than the negative resignation of the senate: the Principate should not be regarded as a second-rate Republic, but as the ancient and venerable institution of monarchy; there can be no constitutional safeguards, for the only guarantee of good rule is the character of the ruler; his education and his advisers are vitally important, and his subjects have a clear duty to obey him as long as he looks after their welfare.

⁴⁰ Cicero *Rep.* 2.47–9; 52. For the survival of this sentiment under the Principate, see, for example, Sen. *Ben.* 6.34.1; Lucan 7.440ff., 643; Tac. *Ann.* 3.56.2; Pliny *Pan.* 55.7.

Seneca was a realist in the realm of political practice as well as in theory. His advice resulted in the maintenance of the forms and authority the senate valued, and champions of senatorial liberty were well satisfied while his influence lasted.⁴¹ According to Tacitus, the turning point of Nero's reign came early in 62⁴² with the death of Burrus and the consequent loss of influence by Seneca. In the popular view, the death of Agrippina marked the turning point,⁴³ when Nero, with two murders to his credit, and the check of maternal discipline gone, gave free rein to his artistic and sporting enthusiasms, even cultivating philosophers other than Seneca. Certainly, from 59 on, Seneca and Burrus found it harder to discipline Nero, and there were men who encouraged his emancipation. Ofonius Tigellinus, Nero's evil genius (according to Tacitus), now came into his own. A friend of Nero through his breeding of racehorses, Tigellinus became prefect of the night-watch after Seneca's protégé Annaeus Serenus died with his officers at a banquet featuring poisonous mushrooms (Plin. *NH* 22.96). Among the new favourites were such senior senators as Aulus Vitellius, who inherited his father's talent for obsequiousness, Petronius, who became Nero's arbiter of taste, and born courtiers like Cocceius Nerva and Eprius Marcellus.

Burrus' control of the praetorian guard had given the advice of both Seneca and himself persuasiveness and weight. When he died early in 62, he was succeeded by Tigellinus and Faenius Rufus, but the power lay with the first. Seneca now asked leave to withdraw from court and to surrender a large part of his property and money. Nero refused, and Seneca remained, to outward appearances, a favoured *amicus*. His friends continued to profit from his position: his brother-in-law was appointed by the Princeps to a special financial commission (Tac. *Ann.* 15.18); his younger brother continued to manage imperial estates; his friend Lucilius did the same in Sicily and was hoping in 64 for later employment at Rome (*Epist.* 19.8). But

⁴¹ Tac. *Ann.* 13.49 (AD 58): Thrasea Paetus regards a modest role in the Neronian senate as compatible with his policy of *libertas senatoria*.

⁴² Tac. *Ann.* 14.51–2. The time of year is inferred from the number of incidents that Tacitus shows must be fitted between Burrus's death and the death of Octavia on 9 June 62 (Suet. *Nero* 57).

⁴³ Tac. *Ann.* 15.67. Tacitus opens Book 14, Dio Book 61 with the murder of Agrippina.

Seneca no longer had a say in important appointments or in Nero's conduct; and he reduced his style of life and his public appearances, pleading ill-health and devotion to study (Tac. *Ann.* 14.56 *ad fin.*). He represents himself in his Letters to Lucilius as travelling in Campania and Latium. Yet the Campanian trip in the spring of 64 might be more official than it at first appears, for Seneca makes vague allusions in these letters to his involvement in *occupationes* (tasks) and *officium civile* (public duty) (*Epist.* 62; 72; cf. even later 106). Nero was at that time performing at the theatre in Naples, and Seneca may have been perforce among the crowd of courtiers that Nero brought in with him to fill the seats (Tac. *Ann.* 15.33–4).

Seneca knew that appearances had been sufficiently preserved for him to be blamed for Nero's crimes. After the great fire in July of 64—which is not mentioned in Seneca's letters covering that period, perhaps because of the danger involved in mentioning or seeming to mention its cause—Nero pillaged temples in Greece and Asia to replace the treasures lost in the fire. Seneca was concerned to avoid all implication in this sacrilege, according to Tacitus, and so once more asked to retire, this time into the country, and to be allowed to return the greater part of his wealth. This time Nero's financial difficulties induced him to accept the money, but he again refused leave to retire.⁴⁴ Seneca then withdrew to his room and lived like an invalid. But not permanently, for, though his own letters covering this last period of his life are lost, Tacitus notes that he was again in Campania in the spring of 65 (Tac. *Ann.* 15.60).

That April Seneca died by imperial command, though he was allowed, as were most men of his rank, to take his own life. Officially, he was punished as one of the participants in the conspiracy against Nero's life, whose head, or figurehead, was C. Calpurnius Piso. The question of his guilt or innocence is one that can hardly be answered conclusively, but it nevertheless merits consideration, for it clearly affects the picture we have of him. Here, as so often, our historical sources do not agree. Dio Cassius, according to his Epitomator, asserted confidently that Seneca and the praetorian prefect Faenius Rufus were members of a plot to murder Nero, the other participants including a centurion of the guard, Sulpicius Asper, and a military tribune, Subrius

⁴⁴ Tac. 5.45.3; Dio 62.25; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.64.4.

Flavus. He does not say what man or what system was to replace Nero (Dio 62.24.1). Tacitus states that Nero had no evidence that Seneca was in the Pisonian conspiracy. He simply used the story of an exchange of letters between Seneca and Piso (the only evidence he could collect even under threat of torture) to rid himself of a man whose disapproval he resented. For Tacitus, the death of Seneca was to be counted among Nero's crimes (Tac. *Ann.* 15.61). Writing between Tacitus and Dio, Polyaeus (*Strateg.* 8.62) records that Epicharis, whose role in the conspiracy is also recorded by Tacitus, was persuaded to join the conspiracy by Seneca and was the mistress of his brother Mela.

No one doubts that Tacitus's account is not only the most copious and detailed but also the most well-informed—he could still profit from discussions with eye-witnesses (Tac. *Ann.* 15.73)—and careful. But, despite his belief in Seneca's innocence, Tacitus transmits evidence that has led readers to be dissatisfied with his verdict. He himself suggests that Seneca may have known the conspirators' plans, for he says that he returned to his villa near the city on the very day set for the murder of Nero 'by chance or deliberately' (*Ann.* 15.60: *forte an prudens*).⁴⁵ Tacitus also allows that the conspirator Antonius Natalis who accused Seneca may have been a go-between for Piso and Seneca (Tac. *Ann.* 15.56), who admitted to an exchange of messages with Piso that prove at least that they were normally on friendly visiting terms, for Piso had complained through Natalis at not being permitted to call on Seneca. The reply he was accused of giving—that their mutual interests would not be served by frequent meetings but that his safety depended on that of Piso—Seneca denied, for it could be construed as treasonable: the phrase about safety was reminiscent of the oath of loyalty taken to the *Principes* by soldiers and civilians.⁴⁶ If Seneca did actually use these words,

⁴⁵ For the day, see Treves 1970.

⁴⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 15.60: *respondisse Senecam sermones mutuos et crebra conloquia neutri conducere; ceterum salutem suam incolumitate Pisonis inniti*. Compare ILS 190; Suet. *Gaius* 15.3; Epictetus 1.14.15. Alexander 1952 tried to show that Seneca's reversal of the terms *salus* and *incolumitas* in his paraphrase of Natalis's charge against him (*Ann.* 15.61) was designed to make his message to Piso seem less treasonable. But the two terms seem to be used almost interchangeably of the *Principes*. In fact, the parallels just cited use *salus* (which Alexander thought more innocuous), and a temple of *Salus* was dedicated after the detection of the conspiracy. We probably have to do with a mere verbal variation by Tacitus.

however, he could at least have been trying to discourage Piso's attempt by warning him against taking risks. Again, Seneca's presence in Campania could have given him information, for it was there that Epicharis tried to corrupt the commander of the imperial fleet at Misenum (Tac. *Ann.* 15.51). (If even part of Polyaeus's account is right and Epicharis was connected with Mela, then the possibility of Seneca's knowledge is even stronger.)

Finally, Tacitus's account includes two remarks which were widely circulated at the time and which bear on Seneca's involvement. Subrius Flavus, one of the praetorian officers who was most active in the conspiracy, was quoted as saying that it would not remove the disgrace to replace a lyre-player with a tragic actor, alluding to Piso's stage performances (Tac. *Ann.* 15.65; cf. 15.67.1). That suggests that he had someone other than Piso in mind to succeed Nero. Tacitus reports the rumour that the candidate was Seneca and that he knew of the plan, a rumour echoed in Juvenal's lines, 'If a free vote were given to the people, who would be so depraved as to waver in his preference for Seneca over Nero?' (*Sat.* 8. 211–14), and receiving some support from the last words of another praetorian as reported in Suetonius and Tacitus: Sulpicius Asper was asked by Nero why he wished to kill him and replied that there was no other way in which he could help the Emperor's vices. This idea that it is justified to kill a man vicious beyond redemption occurs at least twice in Seneca's works (*De Ira* 1.6.3; *Ben.* 7.20.3).

On the basis of these pieces of evidence, it has been claimed that Tacitus was wrong to deny Seneca's guilt. Seneca was at least the ideological inspiration behind the conspiracy, if not ambitious on his own behalf: it was by prior arrangement that he arrived in Rome on the day when Nero was to be killed, coming from Campania where he had worked with Epicharis. But none of this evidence is conclusive. Seneca could have known of Piso's plans through Piso himself, or through Faenius Rufus with whom he probably had a connection going back to the early days of his co-operation with Burrus.⁴⁷ He may have come to his villa fearing for the safety of his property and his household in the turmoil he expected. The praetorian officers in the conspiracy may well have found some of the effete members of

⁴⁷ Faenius Rufus, like Burrus and Seneca, was originally a protégé of Agrippina.

the conspiracy uncomfortable partners and have hoped some other man than Piso could be put in to replace Nero: perhaps the praetorian prefect Fabius Rusticus or Lucius Silanus whom Piso feared. The echoes of Seneca's philosophy need not mean much: the idea that the death penalty is the only remedy for incurable vice is found in Plato and was doubtless a philosophical cliché by the time of Seneca.⁴⁸ Moreover, other ideas of Seneca's do not fit the picture of Seneca the tyrannicide: he regarded the murder of Caesar as a folly, yet the whole plan of the conspiracy was modelled on that assassination (Sen. *Ben.* 2.20; Tac. *Ann.* 15.5); as we have seen, he took no part in the murder of Gaius though he regarded it as justified; finally, he had a horror of civil war (*Ben.* 1.10.2; *Epist.* 73.9–10), which was always a risk in such plans.

We have then no evidence strong enough to invalidate Tacitus' belief in Seneca's innocence. His sympathy for Nero's adviser would not have ruled out a portrayal of him as a conspirator, even one who falsely protested his innocence, for Tacitus, though he disapproved of Piso, apparently approved of the plan to remove Nero, and even of one of the conspirators who at first lied and declared his innocence (Tac. *Ann.* 15.51.1; 15.67.1). There are features of Tacitus' narrative that are best explained, not by the determination of his source (probably Fabius Rusticus) or himself to tell one story rather than another, but by the source's need to put a favourable interpretation on the true story, that is the fact of Seneca's non-participation, which would be well-known to Fabius and to Seneca's other friends whom he must have counted as his most devoted readers. Thus those members of Seneca's family who were implicated, Lucan and his father, emerge disgracefully from Tacitus's account: Lucan bargains for his life with that of his mother and then goes on to supply other names; Mela provokes Nero by greedily trying to recover Lucan's estate and then tries to incriminate another man in his will. By contrast, Seneca's older brother Gallio is treated sympathetically (Tac. *Ann.* 15.56–7; 16.17; 15.73). A simpler explanation could be found for this contrast by supposing a split between Lucan and his uncle which involved their intimate friends, Fabius Rusticus taking

⁴⁸ Plato *Gorgias* 473–80; 525b and elsewhere in *Republic* and *Laws*. Compare Cicero *De Finibus* 4.56.

one side, the poet Persius and doubtless more taking the other.⁴⁹ Yet it is likely that a split between Seneca and Lucan, however temperamental in origin, would involve differences on a political issue like the conspiracy, for their works show Lucan as a great admirer of Brutus and Cassius while Seneca deplored Caesar's murder. Rusticus' troubles may again lie behind the savage way in which Faenius Rufus, a protégé of Agrippina like Seneca and Burrus and probably a political associate, is handled by Tacitus: he could hardly be right to join the conspiracy if Seneca stayed out.

Tacitus points out that Seneca's will showed the contempt for wealth and pomp that he preached. His death too fits his teaching: he had long been prepared for it, keeping a supply of hemlock by him (cf. *Epist.* 70.18); he showed no fear or undue haste and, like Socrates, he waited until the order was given (cf. *Epist.* 70.8–12). His last words that he dictated were widely circulated and known to Tacitus' readers. They were probably, like Thræsea's later on, philosophical in content, to judge from the contrast Tacitus draws between them and the blunt reproach of Nero's vices uttered by Subrius Flavus (*Tac. Ann.* 15.67). Seneca's suicide was certainly theatrical, but in the atmosphere of Nero's later years it was a source of inspiration to courage. Thræsea copied it, likewise pouring a libation to Jupiter Liberator, for death was, according to the Stoics, the avenue to freedom provided by Providence (*Tac. Ann.* 16.34–5). Thræsea, like Seneca, offered himself as an *exemplum* to his friends. Over four centuries later, the philosopher Boethius in prison found Seneca's end an inspiring example and paid him the honour of comparing his death to that of other philosophical martyrs including Socrates himself.

But what of his life? 'You talk in one way, but live in another': this is the charge that Seneca tried to answer in *De Vita Beata* and that which his biographers and readers have been pondering ever since. Almost all of Seneca's literary activity belongs to his mature years. From the publication of the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, probably in 39, he poured out a tremendous quantity of prose and verse. Because of his reticence about everything but his spiritual life and philosophical ideas, most of his works can only be dated within broad

⁴⁹ Persius, according to the *Life* by Valerius Probus (Rostagni pp. 167ff.), was educated with Lucan, but only met Seneca once and thought little of him.

limits,⁵⁰ but we do know that, aside from his two overtly political works (*Apocolocyntosis* and *De Clementia*), many of the tragedies with their hatred of tyranny and cruelty belong to his period of political power, as well as many of the shorter dialogues (*De Brevitate Vitae*, *De Constantia Sapientis*, *De Tranquillitate Animi*, *De Otio*, *De Vita Beata*), and probably part of *De Beneficiis*. All of these works, like those written when Seneca was losing or had lost power in 62 and later (*Naturales Quaestiones*, *Epistulae Morales*), are full of condemnations of flattery and collaboration with tyranny, and of diatribes against sexual licence, wealth, and luxury. Yet Seneca's enemies claimed that he was guilty of all of these vices.

We have already discussed the servile adulation of Emperor and freedmen in the *Consolatio ad Polybium*. It is perhaps fair to Seneca to remember that Ovid had appealed to Augustus at greater length and that both he and Seneca showed some courage in claiming innocence, particularly as they were subjected to greater suffering than Cicero, whose laments from exile were more querulous and pathetic than theirs. On the other hand, Cicero did not publish his own laments and Seneca did, whether or not he later tried to withdraw the work from circulation. The flattery of *De Clementia* can be excused as the only vehicle of instruction possible under an autocracy,⁵¹ but that in the *Apocolocyntosis* exceeds this purpose, while that in the *Naturales Quaestiones* (7.21.3; 7.17.2; 1.5.6) does not serve it at all. Yet Seneca, in his philosophical works, while certainly expressing admiration for those who exercise freedom of speech before rulers (*Tranq. An.* 14.3; *Ben.* 5.6.2–7) and claiming to use it himself before Nero (*Clem.* 2.2.2), never demanded, and, in fact, condemned the ostentatious provocation of those in power. He stated that *contumacia* ('stubborn arrogance'), that trait so often ascribed to senators with Stoic sympathies, was incompatible with life at court (*Tranq. An.* 6.1). For him, what counted was the giving of honest advice where it was needed (*Ben.* 6.29–30). As a good Stoic,

⁵⁰ Discussions of the chronology of the prose works are to be found in Giancotti 1957 (for the twelve dialogues of the Codex Ambrosianus); Griffin 1976 (1992), 395–401; Abel 1985.

⁵¹ The method is avowed in *Clem.* 2.2; cf. Thræsea's use of the technique in Tac. *Ann.* 14.48.

he thought that personal humiliation did not touch the soul and was sometimes acceptable as a means to an end (*Const. Sap.* 14.2; 19.3), and, as a shrewd critic of facile heroics, he advised against offending rulers, even to the point of disguising political withdrawal as retirement for health reasons (*Epist.* 14.7; 19.2, 4; 68.1, 3–4; 73). The last he certainly carried into practice.

Equally pragmatic was his willingness to compromise with evil during his years of influence. Some might have thought the balance between the good he could do and the evil he must countenance had tipped with the murder of Britannicus or—where popular opinion put the turning point of the reign—with Agrippina's murder. But Tacitus agreed with Seneca: it was 62, with the return of *maiestas* trials and the perversion of Seneca's doctrine of clemency that mattered more. Yet Seneca should at least have realized that the lesson of *De Clementia*, that the Princeps was absolute in power and controlled only by self-restraint, was a dangerous one for a Princeps like Nero. To that extent, Seneca was, as Dio called him, a *tyrannodidaskalos* ('an instructor in tyranny').

In his writings, Seneca condemned adultery by the husband or wife. For his sexual life, we have no evidence aside from the charges of adultery and pederasty traceable to Suillius Rufus. These were based on Seneca's conviction for adultery in 41, and were probably no more than slander. It is notable that most of Agrippina's political protégés were alleged to have enjoyed her favours (*Tac. Ann.* 12.7; 12.65; 15.50.5). Otherwise, Seneca's *Letter* 104 (1–5) proclaims a deep affection for his wife Pompeia Paulina, which accords well with the value he set on marriage in *De Matrimonio* and appears to be confirmed by his wife's wish to die with him and her later devotion to his memory (*Tac. Ann.* 15.64).

The principal reason for regarding Seneca as a hypocrite has always been that he enjoyed great wealth while praising poverty. As Suillius Rufus asked: what philosophical doctrines had taught him to amass 300 million sesterces in four years of friendship with the Emperor? Tacitus makes Seneca offer to surrender his wealth in 62 because it brought him a bad name and gave the lie to his claim to be satisfied with little. Undeniably, Seneca was very rich. He inherited a respectable fortune from his father, and he received from Nero estates in Egypt, capital that earned him interest, and money to buy at least one

extra villa.⁵² His position of influence brought him substantial legacies. Nor was he entirely passive in acquiring wealth: his skill in viticulture and the profits he thereby derived are well attested,⁵³ and the stories that were told of a financial killing in Britain suggest, at least, that he was a cunning investor. Seneca was accused of a luxurious style of life, and it is more than likely that he lived up to his position at court. Tacitus notes that, like other great men, he was greeted and escorted each day by a crowd of clients and dependants. These he treated generously, dining them well and sending them gifts, as Juvenal and Martial attest, comparing him with Calpurnius Piso and Aurelius Cotta (Martial 12.36; Juvenal 5.109). Seneca was on friendly terms with Piso, whose taste for high living and culture he may well have shared, in the period before his retirement. The general picture is clear, though one need not accept details like the five hundred tables of citrus wood that Dio says graced his banquets. Finally, he probably acquired some of his wealth by acquiescing in crime, especially if he was among those whom Nero bribed into silence after the murder of Britannicus.

There are obvious things that can be said in Seneca's defence. First, that he was generous with his own wealth, and probably encouraged Nero's liberality. Next, that he kept to certain ascetic habits acquired (under the influence of Attalus) in youth, such as abstinence from oysters, moderation in wine, rejection of soft mattresses (*Epist.* 108.15–16; 23), and was able to practise extreme frugality as regards food after 64. That he requested a simple funeral in a will written when he could have afforded an ostentatious one.⁵⁴ Finally, that Seneca did actually hand over a large part of his wealth to Nero to help in the reconstruction of Rome (Dio 62.25.3; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.64.4).

And yet, the discrepancy between words and deeds remains, and an even more interesting problem. For Seneca could have justified almost all of his actual practices in Stoic terms, and, in doing so, have strengthened the moderate view of Stoicism he advertised in *De Clementia*. In fact, he did so in one work, *De Vita Beata*. For all

⁵² Tac. *Ann.* 13.42; Sen. *Cons. Helv.* 14.3; *Epist.* 77; Tac. *Ann.* 14.53.5–6. Pliny *NH* 14.49ff. shows that the villa at Nomentum was acquired between 61 and 64.

⁵³ Sen. *Nat. Quaest.* 3.7.1 *Epist.* 86.14ff.; Pliny *NH* 14.51; Columella *RR* 3.3.3.

⁵⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 15.45.3; cf. Sen. *Epist.* 83.6; 87.1–5; 123.3; Tac. *Ann.* 15.64.

Stoics, although virtue was the only good and vice the only evil, some positive value attached to such things as health, beauty and wealth, and some undesirability to their opposites. Though none of these 'indifferents' affected a man's happiness, which was acquired by virtue alone, it was emphasized by some Stoics, notably Panaetius, that wealth was useful as the material of virtuous acts, and that it could add a certain joy to life. This view Seneca took over in *De Vita Beata*, going as far as to say that even the wise man would actually prefer to have some wealth with his virtue, providing it was not acquired at another's expense or by sordid methods. The wise man would like to have a splendid house and ample resources for generosity to individuals of every degree (23.5–24.3). There are traces of this positive view in Seneca's other works, and in *De Beneficiis* (5.4.2–3; 1.15.5–6; 2.18.5; 2.21.5) he specifically allows gifts from men in power if they are of good character, explaining that under duress even that condition is waived (2.18.7; 5.6.7). Tacitus used this argument in composing Seneca's request to retire in *Annals* 14.53.

But the usual attitude to wealth in Seneca's works is more negative. In addition to spiritual detachment from it (which he could claim to have demonstrated by its surrender), Seneca often praises poverty in itself, declaims against efforts made to acquire wealth, and suggests that men would be better off without it (notably, *De Tranquillitate Animi* 8). He constantly urges the need to prepare for poverty by frugal living, and inveighs at excessive length against luxury as an unnatural outgrowth of the passions. The problem is twofold, for the well-attested popularity of Seneca's works suggests that not only Seneca, but his readers as well, preferred to write and talk about wealth in this negative way. Many of his readers were men of considerable property, but they felt bored with or guilty about it, or anxious under a régime which required the Emperor to spend a lot of his personal fortune and did not authorize him to tax wealthy citizens in Italy.

Perhaps an even more important consideration was the opportunity offered by the theme of the evils of luxury—for so long a standard *topos* in the rhetorical schools—to a virtuoso preacher like Seneca. Even Quintilian, who disliked his style and its influence, had to admit that Seneca was an exquisite lambaster of vice. He added that a more disciplined style would have earned the author the admiration of the learned rather than the love of boys (10.1.130), a point to which

Seneca had already supplied the answer in Letter 108 to Lucilius. There he recalls how, even in the theatre, verses condemning avarice and urging contempt of wealth win applause, because people accept the condemnation of vice if put with poetic or rhetorical effect and not in coldly analytic argument. The most promising pupils, he adds, are the young, who are easily roused to love of virtue by an effective speaker, learn most readily, and are most easily persuaded to put what they have learned into practice. Seneca then strengthens the case for rhetorical teaching aimed at the young, by recounting the tremendous impact made on him by the first philosophy lectures he heard and by testifying to the lasting effect some of them had on him.

In this same Letter, Seneca also admits to his swift return from the more extreme ascetic practices to ordinary life (*Epist.* 108.15). This frankness and modesty about his own moral achievements throughout his works is the only effective answer to the charges of hypocrisy and the only one Seneca himself ever offered. In *De Vita Beata*, for example, he says of the Middle Stoic views he presents: 'I do not offer this defence for myself, for I am sunk in vice, but for a man who has achieved something' (17.4). In the *Letters*, he hopes for a place among those on the lowest level of spiritual progress (75.15), and he describes the *Letters* themselves as conversations between one moral invalid and another (27.1). Accordingly, when Seneca urges Lucilius to moderate his grief at the death of a friend, he confesses to his own weakness on a similar occasion and explains what self-examination has taught him (63). Again, in the famous Letter 47 advocating kind treatment of slaves, Seneca criticizes men who seize every pretext for being angry with their slaves. Lucilius, he says there, is a good master, but Seneca shows himself, in an earlier Letter (12), to be guilty of just this fault: he visits his suburban villa after a long period of absence and, noting signs of decay which remind him of his own advanced age, relieves his irritation by scolding his slaves for neglecting the property. But he recognizes and admits his error, and incidentally reveals his former and customary kindness to his slaves and their habit of speaking frankly to him. It was this tenderness, this insight into weakness, this awareness of how hard it is to be good, that doubtless made Seneca an effective teacher for those who, once stirred by his style, tried to follow the Stoic way. The opening chapters of *De Tranquillitate Animi* show him administering moral

therapy to a friend who came and described the symptoms of his relapse and wished to try once more to be cured. For his disciples, contemporary and later, Seneca's power as a healer of souls has more than made up for his shortcomings as a model of virtue. The literary portrait of himself as a moral teacher that Seneca has left in his essays and letters⁵⁵ is rightly judged a more precious legacy than the historical *imago vitae suae*.

⁵⁵ For the place of the *Epistulae Morales* in the development of autobiography see Misch 1950 vol. 2, 418ff.