Seneca's Medical Imagery in the Eschatological Flood (*Naturales Quaestiones* 3.27-30)[1]

Myrto Garani

Abstract – Seneca ends the third book of his *Naturales Quaestiones*, which deals with the nature and causes of terrestrial waters, with the narration of an imminent eschatological flood (*Q Nat*. 3.27-30). In this passage the concepts of natural law and divine intervention coexist. In this article, I argue that to accommodate this innovative – for the Stoics – idea into his philosophical didactic plan, Seneca alludes to Ovid's Lycaon story (*Met*. 1.163-253) and responds to Ovid's medical imagery of amputation by offering the metaphorical imagery of purgation and plague instead. In doing so, he appropriates the Epicurean therapeutic method. At the same time, he plausibly alludes to Lucretius' and Vergil's narratives of plague as well as to Ovid's Phaëthon's story. In the last part of the article, I briefly discuss how the narration of the eschatological flood, which aims at shaping a *praemeditatio futurorum malorum* and may arouse Stoic pre-emotions, could be associated with the notion of Stoic *catharsis*.

Introduction

Seneca ends the third book of his *Naturales Quaestiones*, which deals with the nature and causes of terrestrial waters, with the narration of an imminent eschatological flood. In this epilogue he incorporates several quotations from Ovid's flood (*Met*. 1.262-312) and conflagration (*Met*. 1.747-2.400), thereby integrating Ovidian mythical time into cosmic time.

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He thus carves out a therapeutic *praemeditatio futurorum malorum*, i.e. a rehearsal of future ills with particular reference to the final cataclysm.[2]

Scholars (Berno (2019) 82-83; Inwood (2005) 170-174) have so far stressed the fact that in accordance with the orthodox Stoic doctrine, a terminal physical disaster such as a cataclysmic inundation is regulated mainly by Stoic natural law, conceptualized as fortune, which brings about sudden changes. This idea is already touched upon in the prologue to *Q Nat.* 3 (*Q Nat.* 3 *Praef.* 9):

> *Nunc cum maxime deus extruit alia, alia submittit, nec molliter ponit, sed ex fastigio suo nullas habitura reliquias iactat.*
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> At this very moment god is building up some, overthrowing others, and not putting them down gently but hurling them from their pinnacle so that nothing will be left. (Transl. Hine).

This is also what we read in the narration of the flood:[3] 3.27.3 *Ergo, cum affuerit illa necessitas temporis, multas simul fata causas movent*. 'So when that inevitable moment arrives, fate sets in motion many causes at once,'And 3.30.1:

> *Sunt omnia, ut dixi, facilia naturae, utique quae a primo facere constituit, ad quae non subito sed ex denuntiato venit. Iam autem a primo die mundi, cum in hunc habitum ex informi unitate discederet, quando mergerentur terrena decretum est.*
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> Everything is easy for nature, as I have said, especially what she has determined to do from the start and tackles not unexpectedly but with

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[2] Garani (forthcoming 2021a) and (forthcoming 2021b) with detailed bibliography. See also Mazzoli 1970 238-47; Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1990) 177-210; De Vivo (1995); Limburg (2007) 159-63; Trinacty (2018) 380-385. For the Stoic notion of *praemeditatio futurorum malorum* see Armisen-Marchetti (2008). Armisen-Marchetti (2008) 103: "*Praemeditari*, as the etymology indicates, is to perform the exercise of imagining possible misfortunes before they happen, so as to avoid being caught at a loss, and to fortify the mind against them in advance by mediating on the lessons of ethical philosophy on the nature of goods". 104: The Epicurean does not agree with the Stoics on the value of anticipating misfortune: "not only is *praemediatio* ineffective, it is positively harmful, since it condemns one to live in perpetual anxiety" (Cf. Cicero *Tusc*. 3.32-33).

[3] See also 3.27.1 *fatalis dies diluvia* "the fated day of the flood"; cf. 3.28.4 *haec fatis mota* (*non aestu-nam aestus fati ministerium est*) "They are set in motion by fate, not by the tide (for the tide is a servant of fate); 3.29.2 *sive corpus natura gubernabile* "a body governed by nature", 3.29.*3 in his fuit inundatio, quae non secus quam hiems, quam aestas, lege mundi venit* "These include the flood, which occurs, just like winter or summer, according to the laws of the world."; 3.29.4; *ut naturae constituta peragantur* "so that nature's decrees may be implemented".

> due warning. Already from the first day of the world, when it separated out from formless unity into its present structure, the date when the earth would be drowned was decreed. (Transl. Hine)

Yet in this very narration Seneca clearly implies that the imminent catastrophe that he describes is also caused by divine intervention as a punishment originating in human sin (*Q Nat.* 29.5, 30.8):

29.5:

> *Ergo, quandoque erit terminus rebus humanis, cum partes eius interire debuerint abolerive funditus totae ut de integro totae rudes innoxiaeque generentur nec supersit in deteriora praeceptor, plus umoris quam semper fuit fiet.*
>
> So whenever the end of human history arrives, when the earth's parts have to perish and all be utterly destroyed, in order that primitive, innocent people may be created afresh and no teacher of worse behavior may survive, then more liquid will be produced than there has ever been before. (Transl. Hine)

and 30.8:

> *Omne ex integro animal generabitur dabiturque terris homo inscius scelerum et melioribus auspiciis natus. Sed illis quoque innocentia non durabit, nisi dum novi sunt. Cito nequitia subrepit. Virtus difficilis inventu est, rectorem ducemque desiderat; etiam sine magistro vitia discuntur.*
>
> Every living creature will be created anew and the earth will be given men ignorant of sin, and born under better auspices. But their innocence, too, will not last, except as long as they are new. Vice quickly creeps in. Virtue is difficult to find; it needs a director and guide. Vices can be learned even without a teacher. (Transl. Hine)

Seneca seems to suggest that along with the laws of nature, what brings about the ultimate destruction is moral degeneration that clashes with the ideal of the Stoic sage.[4] To quote Volk (2006 192), "what Seneca has done is blend the Stoic idea of the mechanical and morally neutral destruction of the universe with the traditional idea of natural disaster, especially deluge, as a punishment for mortals and a wiping out of their sinful race."

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[4] Stahl (1960) 118; Berno (2003) 79-80, 93-102. See also Limburg (2007) 166.

In fact, earlier in Book 3 Seneca describes in detail the nature of this moral decline. As early as the prologue, Seneca makes prominent mention to *luxuria* (*Q Nat.* 3 *praef.* 13), the castigation of which notably appears in subsequent paragraphs of the book.[5] He then inserts a digression about underground lakes and their unnatural species (*Q Nat.* 3.16.5) and the description of the mostly unnatural human habits in the consumption of fish, such as the custom of letting them die on the dinner table, because of the beauty of their colour, which changes at this particular moment (*Q Nat.* 3.17.2, 18.1, 18.3). Seneca draws attention to the fact that this extravagant practice of allowing fish to swim on the dinner table was instigated by men, not by nature. He uses this image as a springboard to castigate luxury in general (*Q Nat.* 3.18.3):

> *Ad hunc fastum pervenit venter delicatorum ut gustare non possint, nisi quem in ipso convivio natantem palpitantemque viderunt. Tantum ad sollertiam luxuriae superbientis accredit, tantoque subtilius cotidie et elegantius aliquid excogitat furor usitata contemnens!*
>
> The stomachs of the gourmets have become so fastidious that they cannot sample anything they have not seen swimming and twitching at the dinner-party itself. How the resourcefulness of deadly luxury has increased! Madness that despises the familiar devises each day something so much more subtle and more elegant! (Transl. Hine).

It seems, therefore, that it is exactly this sort of reprehensible behavior that the final catastrophe is punishing.[6] What is even more, Seneca's depiction of fish strangely swimming in garum vividly recalls the similar, albeit mythical, *adynaton* that we read of in Ovid's flood (*Met.* 1.296 *hic summa piscem deprendit in ulmo* "one takes fish caught in the elm-tree's top"), when people caught fish from the tops of trees, an *adynaton* that foreshadows the end of the Golden Age.[7]

To support this pioneering philosophical idea, i.e., the coexistence of the concepts of natural law and God's intervention, Seneca echoes, as I have argued elsewhere in detail, the Ovidian story of Lycaon (*Met.* 1.163-253), whose sacrilege is deemed the ultimate cause of the mythical

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[5] He also mentions *furor* (*Q Nat.* 3 *praef.* 18.3), *nequitia* (*praef.* 18, 30.8). In 15.3 he criticizes *avaritia* (*Q Nat.* 3.15.3; cf. 30.3). For Seneca and luxury see Doody (2013) 292-295.

[6] Berno (2003) 79-80, 93-102.

[7] Garani (forthcoming 2021a).

flood (*Met*. 1.253-312), to which Seneca extensively alludes.[8] In the narrative framework of a council of the Gods, Jupiter narrates how Lycaon, king of Arcadia, killed a Molossan hostage and then served his cooked limbs to Jupiter to test Jupiter's divinity. As a consequence of Lycaon's cannibalism and impious lack of hospitability, Jupiter's anger is aroused. To punish the desecration of the tables of the Gods and Lycaon's wickedness, Jupiter destroys Lycaon's house and Lycaon is driven into exile; the cataclysmic flood then follows.

Taking it for granted that Seneca is alluding to Ovid's Lycaon story, in this paper, I will explore the metaphorical imagery that conveys the nature of this divine intervention in both contexts and its implications for Seneca's philosophical system. Whereas Seneca alludes to Ovid for the Empedoclean idea that along with natural laws, it was a human crime that provoked divine punishment in the form of the flood, I will argue that to accommodate this innovative -for the Stoics- idea into his philosophical didactic plan, Seneca responds to Ovid's medical imagery of amputation by offering instead images of purgation and plague. In doing so, he is, I suggest, alluding to Lucretius' and Vergil's narratives of plague and Ovid's version of the Phaëthon story.[9] This intertextual dialogue between Seneca and Ovid regarding their metaphorical medical imagery is legitimated by the fact that they both view the earth and the universe as a human body (Seneca *Q Nat.* 29.2-3 *sive animal est mundus, sive corpus natura gubernabile* "whether the world is an animated being or a body governed by nature"; Ovid *Met*. 1.33 *sectamque in membra coegit* "he reduced it, thus resolved, to cosmic parts"), which, once a crime is committed, is contaminated by disease.[10]

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[8] For full discussion of Seneca's allusion to Ovid's story of Lycaon see Garani (forthcoming 2021c).

[9] For Seneca's philosophy as therapy see Setaioli (2014). For Seneca's medical imagery see Steyns (1907) 51-70, Smith (1910). Cf. also Armisen-Marchetti (1989) 132-8, 305-7; Gazzarri (2020), Berno (2020). More general on Seneca's images and metaphors see Armisen-Marchetti (2015) and Sjöblad (2015) especially for the Letters.

[10] Vimercati (2021) 201-203 explains that "Seneca and Manilius reaffirmed a 'cardiovascular' reading of the universe as a circulatory system of blood and pneuma in the vessels, applying then this model to their interpretation of natural phenomena". For the analogy in Sen. *Q Nat.* see also e.g., 3.15.1-2, 5, 16.2; 5.4.2; 6.3.1, 14.2, 18.6, 24.2-4. Williams (2012) 62 n.30: On the Presocratic origins of the world-body analogy see Lloyd (1966) 232-72. See also Taub (2003) 143-44. Especially Althoff (1997). Cf. *SVF* 2.633-45; Manilius 2.60ff. For Seneca's debt to the medical Pneumatism and the interaction between physics and medicine in Seneca see Le Blay (2014).

The imagery of amputation in Ovid and Seneca

Jupiter states that thanks to Lycaon's crime, every human is to perish. Jupiter's wrath and indignation dominates the passage (*Met*. 1.181, 1.199, 1.209-39, 1.244). He also underlines the idea of punishment (*Met*. 1.209-210 *'ille quidem poenas (curam hanc dimittite!) solvit; | quod tamen admissum, quae sit vindicta, docebo*. "He has indeed been punished; have no care for that. But what he did and what his punishment I will relate"; Cf. also 1.230 *vindice flamma* "avenging bolt"; 1.242-43 *in facinus iurasse putes! dent ocius omnes, | quas meruere pati, (sic stat sententia) poenas*. "Let them all pay, and quickly too, the penalties which they have deserved. So stands my purpose.").

To account for his callous choice for the total disaster of humanity, the father of the gods describes the punishment in terms of amputation (*Met*. 1.190-191).

> *Cuncta prius temptanda, sed inmedicabile curae*
> *ense recidendum, ne pars sincera trahatur.*
>
> All means should first be tried, but what responds not to treatment must be cut away with the knife, lest the untainted part also draw infection." (Transl. Miller, revised by Goold).

It is noteworthy that the word *ensis*, which is not normally used for a surgical knife, as Barchiesi notes, here introduces a sense of indiscriminate violence (Barchiesi 2005 *ad loc*.). While Jupiter acknowledges the importance of exploring possible alternatives, he has shown no clemency either towards Lycaon, or towards the human race in general. In other words, Jupiter does not present himself as savior; his sole aim is to take revenge.

As scholars (Bömer (1986) *ad loc*., Barchiesi (2005) *ad loc.* and (2009) 126-35) have already pointed out, this Ovidian image recalls Cicero's medical imagery of a diseased body and its treatment, which should be applied, if necessary, to the *res publica*.[11] For example, in *De officiis*,

[11] For Ovid's allusion to Cicero's imagery see also Bretzigheimer (1993) 31-32, 61-62. For the development of the image in Greek political writing, see Brock (2013) 69-82, noting in particular [p. 75] Agamemnon's intention to apply knife or cautery to cure any ills that have arisen in Argos in his absence (Aeschylus *A*. 848-50), a threat which is unique in the fifth century.

Cicero evokes an image of the human body as a metaphor, in order to account for the murder of the dictator (*Off.* 3.32):[12]

> *Neque est contra naturam spoliare eum, si possis, quem est honestum necare, atque hoc omne genus pestiferum atque impium ex hominum communitate exterminandum est. Etenim, ut membra quaedam amputantur, si et ipsa sanguine et tamquam spiritu carere coeperunt et nocent reliquis partibus corporis, sic ista in figura hominis feritas et immanitas beluae a communi tamquam humanitatis corpore segreganda est.*
>
> And it is not opposed to Nature to rob, if one can, a man whom it is morally right to kill; —nay, all that pestilent and abominable race should be exterminated from human society. And this may be done by proper measures; for, as certain members are amputated, if they show signs themselves of being bloodless and virtually lifeless and thus jeopardize the health of the other parts of the body, so those fierce and savage monsters in human form should be cut off from what may be called the common body of humanity. (Transl. Miller).

Cicero claims that in the same way as when a human limb that has become affected with gangrene is amputated, bodies politic infected by tyrants must also be subject to the same sort of "treatment" before the whole body of the republic gets destroyed by the tyrant. In the 8th *Philippic*, Cicero adopts the same medical analogy of a diseased body to explain why it is necessary to cleanse the city from a dangerous citizen, by removing the pestilential Antony so as to save the healthy limbs of the body politic (*Phil*. 8.15):[13]

> *In corpore si quid eius modi est quod reliquo corpori noceat, id uri secarique patimur, ut membrum aliquod potius quam totum corpus intereat. Sic in rei publicae corpore, ut totum salvum sit, quicquid est pestiferum amputetur.*
>
> If something in the body is of the sort to cause harm to the rest, we allow it to be cauterized or cut so that this or that part may perish rather than the whole body. Likewise in the body politic: let whatever is noxious be amputated so that the whole may be saved. (Transl. Shackleton Bailey, rev. by Ramsey and Manuwald).

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12 Atkins (2018) 31, Walters (2020) 114. Cf. also Cicero *Sest.* 135 with Kaster (2006) 100, Walters (2020) 44-49. Walters (2020) 114 also points to a letter from Brutus (Cicero *ad Brut.* 1.16.7 [SB 25] for which authenticity is in doubt) which "similarly describes the assassination of Caesar as an act of surgical excision, while noting that some part of the malignant growth (that is, Antony) had been left behind." For Cicero's use of the medical motif see also Wiseman (2012).

13 Manuwald (2007) 967, Walters (2020) 114.

Still, even for Cicero surgery was unappealing, since it implies violence, as becomes clear from a letter from 57 BC. In this, Cicero states that in his confrontation with Clodius' gang, he opted for a less drastic cure than political surgery, of which he was sick (*Att*. 4.3.3 [SB 75] *chirurgiae taedet*).[14]

In Cicero's second *Catilinarian* speech, the imagery of mutilation alternates with that of purgation.[15] At the beginning of the speech, Cicero has depicted Catiline's departure as a purgation. But since Catiline has not 'drained off' and taken with him all his supporters, Cicero promises to heal those he can by means of oratorical counsel, but he states that the rest should be amputated (*Cat*. 2.11 *quae sanari poterunt, quacumque ratione sanabo, quae resecanda erunt, non patiar ad perniciem civitatis manere.*'I shall find a way to cure what can be cured; what needs excising, I shall not allow to remain to destroy the State' (Transl. Macdonald)). Cicero's surgical imagery conceals the violent measures to which he will soon resort.

As Walters (2020) 45-51 points out, '[p]laying on a persistent notion in Hippocratic medicine, which imagined health as resulting from conflicts within the body -with force deployed against counterforce for the wellbeing of the whole- Cicero's images work to justify political violence (*vis*) as a kind of radical treatment needed for the republic to survive. […] The need for therapeutic intervention could be cited as justification for action, while accusations of disease were used to mobilize resistance, crystalize threats in evocative terms, and smear one's enemies in memorable ways. The ubiquity of such imagery attests to its expected persuasiveness, as does its adoption as the official rhetoric of the senate.'

Ovid, therefore, in order to describe a general disaster, embraces the Ciceronian metaphor of amputation for the sake of political health that involves the murder of just one individual, i.e., the dictator. While Seneca, in his turn, alludes to Ovid's episode of Lycaon in his flood narrative, he does not recontextualize the Ovidian metaphor of mutilation,

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14 Walters (2020) 30.

15 Walters (2020) 32. Walters (2020) 35 also refers to a passage from Plutarch (Cat. *Mai*. 16.5), according to which, "while campaigning for censor in 184 Cato strenuously complained that Rome had need of a 'great cleansing' (μεγάλου καθαρμοῦ) and charged the people accordingly not to choose the most agreeable but 'the most violent of physicians' (τὸν σφοδρότατον … τῶν ἰατρῶν) to cut and burn the excess and effeminacy from the body politic.

with its specific Ciceronian political connotations of violence. Instead, he prioritizes the metaphor of purgation, which, as I shall argue below, is a significant choice.

In Seneca's philosophical treatise *De Clementia* (1.9.1-1.11.3), we read a story in which Augustus' wife, Livia, employs similar medical imagery to admonish her husband regarding his handling of the conspiracy of Gnaeus Cornelius Cinna (*Clem*. 1.9.6):

> *Interpellavit tandem illum Livia uxor et: 'Admittis,' inquit, 'muliebre consilium? Fac, quod medici solent, qui, ubi usitata remedia non procedunt, temptant contraria. Severitate nihil adhuc profecisti; Salvidienum Lepidus secutus est. Lepidum Murena, Murenam Caepio, Caepionem Egnatius, ut alios taceam, quos tantum ausos pudet. Nunc tempta, quomodo tibi cedat clementia; ignosce L. Cinnae. Deprensus est; iam nocere tibi non potest, prodesse famae tuae potest.*
>
> Finally, his wife Livia interrupted him and said, 'Will you take a woman's advice? Do as the doctors do. When the usual remedies have no effect, they try the opposite. Harshness has done you no good so far. After Salvidienus there was Lepidus, after Lepidus there was Murena, after Murena there was Caepio, after Caepio there was Egnatius, not to mention the others whose great audacity is shameful. Now find out how clemency can turn out for you: pardon Lucius Cinna. He has been detected-he cannot now do you any harm, but he can enhance your reputation.' (Transl. Braund).

Seneca offers Nero this exemplificatory story of Augustus to demonstrate the value of clemency in a ruler. This story is resumed in more elaborate terms in Cassius Dio's Book 55 (55.14.1-22.2).[16] Stephen Heyworth (2014) has argued that these two passages and the suggestion by the Ovidian Jupiter regarding the need for radical surgery, when, in Jupiter's view, the wickedness of mankind is incurable, perhaps recalls some specific political debate in which Augustus was involved and in which the emperor figures as the healer of the state. Although Heyworth argues that it is unlikely that Seneca is making any direct intertextual allusion to Ovid, given the fact that Ovid does not mention Livia, he nevertheless agrees that the Ovidian passage also has specific political connotations. Seneca's phrasing, however, is similar to Ovid's (Seneca *Clem*. 1.9.6 *temptant contraria*; Ovid *Met*. 1.190 *cuncta prius temptanda*). Even

[16] Braund (2009) 258-259. For the conspiracy of Cinna Magnus in Seneca and Cassius Dio and the role of Livia see also Adler (2011), Green (2018).

more significantly, both Seneca and Cassius Dio invert Ovid's medical imagery. Instead of Jupiter's decision to respond to a murderous conspiracy by amputation so as to take revenge, Livia uses it to plead for clemency. While Heyworth's suggestion that Ovid, Seneca, and Cassius Dio may have had an ultimate common source is certainly possible, Ovid's medical imagery recurs later in Seneca's treatise (*Clem.* 1.14.1-1.16.1), where it is used to argue once more against mutilation, this time in the context of a comparison between the ideal ruler and the benign father who displays tolerance and patience towards his errant son, as he tries every possible other means to discipline him before he is forced to disown and disinherit him to punish him (*Clem.* 1.14.3):[17]

> *Tarde sibi pater membra sua abscidat, etiam, cum absciderit reponere cupiat, et in abscidendo gemat cunctatus multum diuque; prope est enim, ut libenter damnet, qui cito; prope est, ut inique puniat, qui nimis.*
>
> Slow would a father be to sever his own flesh and blood; aye, after severing he would yearn to restore them, and while severing he would groan aloud, hesitating often and long; for he comes near to condemning gladly who condemns swiftly, and to punishing unjustly who punishes unduly. (Transl. Braund)

In this context, Seneca disapproves of such actions as surgical mutilation. As Braund (2009) 319 notes, in this passage, the use of the subjunctive underlines that the situation is hypothetical since Seneca cannot conceive of such a thing occurring. At the same time, the triple use of the verb *abscidere* invites us to ponder such an act with fear and terror.

It seems, therefore, that Seneca does not use the Ovidian metaphor of mutilation because he disapproves of political surgery that removes troublesome individuals. Since his Stoic universe is conditioned by the principle of συμπάθεια and all its members are interconnected, such a brutal healing process would not have the desired effect, i.e., the thorough-going, universal healing of human vice.

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[17] Braund (2009) 314-319. Cassius Dio 55.17.1 "Do you not notice that doctors very rarely suggest surgery and cauterization, to avoid aggravating their patient's illnesses, but mostly offer a soothing therapy of fomentations and gentler medications? Do not imagine that because those are conditions of the body, and these are conditions of the soul there is any difference between them" (translation by Braund (2009) 428). For discussion of Seneca's representation of ruler and ruled as a "mutually interdependent organic whole" (e.g., *Clem*. 1.4.1, 2.2.1) see Braund (2009) 58-59. For the importance of the body imagery in *Clem.* see also Béranger (1953) 231-232.

Seneca's flood as catharsis

The rejection of amputation as the ideal method of treating political problems does not mean that Seneca avoids medical imagery altogether.[18] In fact, when he deals with the educational method of the *proficiens*, Seneca explicitly embraces the idea of Stoic sage as a doctor. For example, in *Epistle* 75, he argues that one should cure serious, chronic diseases, which affect the whole community, even if it means using cauterization. This is a crucial duty, similar to that of a doctor during a plague (*Ep*. 75.7)

> *Aliud agitur; urendus, secandus, abstinendus sum. Ad haec adhibitus es. Curare debes morbum veterem, gravem, publicum. Tantum negotii habes, quantum in pestilentia medicus.*
>
> There is other business at hand. What I need is to be cauterized, operated on, given a restricted diet. This is what you are summoned to do. Your responsibility is to cure a long-term illness which is both serious and widespread. It is as big a job as a physician's in an epidemic. (Transl. Graver /Long).

In this context, passions are compared with the plague. As Gazzarri (2020) 193 rightly points out, "these lines underscore the subtle interplay between effective teaching and an appropriate style. The gist of dry Stoic rhetoric is summed up in the deployment of radical therapies: amputation, cauterization, and dieting."[19]

At *Epistle* 95.29, Seneca employs medical imagery to explain the various methods that a philosopher uses in order to cure the sin of luxury:[20]

> *Quomodo ista perplexa sunt, sic ex istis non singulares morbi nascuntur, sed inexplicabiles, diversi, multiformes, adversus quos et medicina armare se coepit multis generibus, multis observationibus. Idem tibi de philosophia dico. Fuit aliquando simplicior inter minora peccantes et levi quoque cura remediabiles; adversus tantam morum eversionem omnia conanda sunt. Et utinam sic denique lues ista vindicetur!*

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18 Cf. Sen. *De Ira* 1.6.2-4 in which the degrees of punishment employed by the good ruler are compared with the stages of treatment prescribed by a physician.

19 Cf. also Sen. *Ep*. 52.9-10 with Gazzarri (2020) 192.

20 For this *Epistle* see Gazzarri (2014), Schaffer (2009).

> 'Corresponding to this confusion of foods, diseases have arisen that are not single but complex, manifold, and multiform. To oppose them, medicine too has begun to arm itself with multiple diagnoses and multiple treatments. The same thing, I tell you, applies to philosophy. In days gone by, it was simpler; it dealt with lesser faults that were curable even with a mild treatment. To combat the huge wreckage of our moral condition, we need to try everything. I only wish that we could then defeat this corruption.' (Transl. Graver/Long).

95.34:

> *In hac ergo morum perversitate desideratur solito vehementius aliquid, quod mala inveterata discutiat; decretis agendum est, ut revellatur penitus falsorum recepta persuasio.*
>
> At this perversion of morality, we need something unusually forceful to dispel the evils that have become ingrained. We need to muster the principles of philosophy so as to utterly root out these falsehoods that have become such deep convictions.' (Transl. Graver/Long).

According to this statement, when no other treatment is possible, it is necessary to have recourse to radical measures. In other words, in case that the philosopher fails to eradicate passions, extreme medical treatment must be applied.[21]

To return to *Q Nat.* 3: in a fashion similar to what we have just read in *Ep.* 95, as we have already mentioned, luxury plays a central role. Therefore, it seems that, to cure such a catastrophic illness, extreme measures are needed. And Seneca puts forward the eschatological cataclysm as such an ultimate therapeutic solution. The Ovidian Jupiter, who takes revenge, is replaced by the Stoic God, who enters the cosmic stage to act as a healer when no other remedy is effective. Thus, the Senecan God sends the flood, to purge the body of the world and cleanse it from the sin (*Q Nat.* 30.4):

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[21] Regarding the eradication of emotions see also Seneca *Ep.* 116.1*: utrum satius sit modicos habere adfectus an nullos, saepe quaesitum est.* […] *Ego non video, quomodo salubris esse aut utilis possit ulla mediocritas morbi.* 'Philosophers of our school exclude them [emotions] altogether, whereas the Peripatetics restrain them. I do not see how it can be healthy or useful to have even a moderate amount of an illness' (transl. Graver/Long).

> *Quemadmodum corpora nostra ad egestum venter exhaurit, quemadmodum in sudorem eunt vires, ita tellus liquefiet et aliis causis quiescentibus intra se quo mergatur inveniet. Sed magis omnia coitura crediderim.*
>
> Just as our stomach drains the body through diarrhea, just as our energy turns into sweat, so the earth will be liquefied, and, even when other causes come to a halt, it will find within itself the resources to be drowned. But I should prefer to believe that every cause will combine. (Transl. Hine).

In this passage, the flood is equated with some sort of bodily cleansing with a view to renewal. Thanks to the literal fluidity of the physical earth, Seneca emphasizes the purgatory force of the flood, which is described as a process of literal purification. As Williams (2012) 128 points out: "the cataclysm itself now begins to resemble a form of world-bodily catharsis after renewal." This Senecan image of literal catharsis is particularly significant since the idea of catharsis, as we perceive it as a religious concept, does not seem that have formed part of Stoic ideas regarding the end of the world, irrespective of whether this occurs as a result of a flood or of ἐκπύρωσις.[22] Seneca *Q Nat.* 3.26.7 carries forward the physical explanation regarding the process whereby certain springs cleanse themselves, which he explains in the passage just before the flood narrative:[23]

> *Hoc quibusdam locis fontes faciunt, ut non tantum lutum sed folia testasque et quicquid putre iacuit expellant. Ubique autem facit mare, cui haec natura est, ut omne immundum stercorosumque litoribus impingat. Quaedam vero partes maris certis temporibus hoc faciunt.*
>
> In some places there are springs that expel not just mud, but also leaves, bits of pottery, and rotting sediment. The sea does this everywhere, for its nature is to drive all filth and sewage onto the shores. Some parts of the sea do this at regular intervals. (Transl. Hine).

and 3.26.8:

> *Ceterum publica est illa: omnis aquarum stantium clausarumque natura se purgat.* […] *Mare vero cadavera stramentaque et naufragorum reliqua similia ex intimo trahit, nec tantum tempestate fluctuque sed tranquillum quoque placidumque purgatur.*

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[22] Mansfeld (1983).

[23] Williams (2012) 128. See also Garani (2020a) 220-223.

> But this cause is universal: all standing, confined waters naturally purify themselves. […] The sea hauls corpses and equipment and the other debris of shipwrecks from the depths and is cleansed not just by storm and wave, but also when it is peaceful and calm. (Transl. Hine).

This image seems to foreshadow in analogical terms the application of the same natural law on an eschatological scale.

Regarding Seneca's decision to employ the imagery of purgation over Ovid's metaphor of amputation, to describe the end of the world caused by the deluge, in this preference, Seneca may be echoing the Epicurean therapeutic approach to philosophy.[24] As Konstan *et al*. (1998) 20 remark: "Although the application of the language of disease and cure to philosophical enterprise was widespread in antiquity the conception of philosophy as a medical art assumed in Epicurean thought a foundational significance." Likewise, Diogenes of Oenoanda compares false beliefs to a plague that spreads from person to person (fr. 3 cols. IV.4-13 Smith οἱ πλεῖστοι/ καθάπερ ἐν λοιμῷ/ τῇ περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων/ ψευδοδοξίᾳ νοσοῦσι/ κοινῶς, γείνονται δὲ/ καὶ πλείονες (διὰ γὰρ/ τὸν ἀλλήλων ζῆλον/ ἄλλος ἐξ ἄλλου λαμβάνει τὴν νόσον ὡς/ [τ]ὰ πρόβατα) 'the majority of people suffer from a common disease, as in a plague, with their false notions about things, and their number is increasing (for in mutual emulation they catch the disease from one another, like sheep) transl. Smith) and describes Epicurean philosophy as 'drugs of salvation' (fr. 3, cols. V.14-VI.2 Smith τὰ τῆς σωτηρίαςσωτηρίας … [φάρμα] κα). What is of particular significance for the present discussion is the fact that in the Epicurean contexts the purgatory imagery dominates.[25] Lucretius presents Epicurus as healer (*DRN* 6.24 *veridicis igitur purgavit pectora dictis*; 5.43 *purgatumst pectus*; 5.18 *puro pectore*). A more elaborate Epicurean application of the language of disease and cure to philosophical therapeutic education can be found in Philodemus' fragmentary treatise *De libertate dicendi*.[26] Philodemus claims that philosophical arguments and frank criticism can remove misconceptions held by Epicurean students. Frank criticism is compared with two forms of unpleasant, albeit necessary medical treatment: drugs, such as wormwood (col. IIb) and

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[24] Del Mastro (2019). For Seneca's intertextual reception of Epicurus and Epicureanism see Schiesaro (2015), Graver (2020).

[25] For Epicurean therapeutic strategies see Tsouna (2009), McOsker (2020).

[26] Konstan *et al*. (1998) 20-23, McOsker (2020) 312-314, especially 313. See also Gigante (1975), Fowler (1983) 68-72.

hellebore (Tab. XII extrem. fr.) and surgery (col. XVIIa).[27] As for purgation, the Epicurean teacher is already purged, affectionate, superior and experienced in healing methods (fr. 44.6-9 ἀντὶ τοῦ καθαρεύοντι καὶ στέργοντι καὶ κρείττονι καὶ γινώσκοντι θεραπεύ[ε]ιν). Thus, all should undergo the sting of such a wise man's frankness until we manage to purify ourselves (fr. 16.3-4 καθαρεύοντας). Moreover, Philodemus offers a point-by-point comparison of medical and philosophical methods of purgation and illustrates the point that more and more intensity in therapy can be compared with stronger and stronger purgatives (frr. 63-4 see especially the use of the words κενώματος, κενῶσαι, διὰ κλυστρῆρος […] κενοῖ; cf. fr. 46.4-5 καθάρσεως δεῖται).

Unfortunately, just as happens in hopeless medical cases, when doctors strive to treat incurable patients, some students cannot be cured (fr. 69 and fr. 84.11-12). Philodemus makes the same point in his treatise *De ira* (*De ira* col. xix 12-21 Armstrong/McOsker (2020) 224-225):

> ἀπροβάτους δ' αὐ|τοὺς ἀνάγκη γίνεσθαι καὶ | τῶι μήτε καθηγητὰς | ἀνέχεσθαι μήτε συσχο|λάζοντας, ἂν ἐπιτιμῶσι | καὶ διορθῶσιν— ὡς τὰ [θ]η|ριώδη τῶν ἑλκῶν οὐδὲ | τὰς τῶν ἠπιωτάτων |φαρμάκων ὑπομένει |προσαγωγάς
>
> They necessarily become incapable of progress because they can put up with neither their teachers nor their fellow students, whenever these rebuke and correct them, just as the malignant kinds of ulcers cannot endure the application of even the mildest medicines. (Transl. Armstrong/McOsker).

Should, therefore, the Epicurean wise man's efforts by means of philosophical words to bring about a catharsis of mind and soul on the part of the uninitiated addressee come to nothing, the Epicureans explicitly state that even more drastic measures should be applied. And such an incurable moral illness seems to be the situation that Seneca describes in the context of *Q Nat.* 3. The flood stands in for such radical efforts at purgation. The flood impacts upon the sinless and innocent, too, of course, and in addition to its punitive value, offers healing, too. Last but not least, in contrast to Epicurus, who purges souls within a universe governed by chance rather than by any gods, in Seneca's narration, the Stoic God holds an energetic role.

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[27] Konstan *et al*. (1998) 22.

Seneca's flood as plague

The idea of the flood as a purgatory, healing drug, both literally and metaphorically, is only one aspect of the medical imagery of the passage in question. Seneca adds a significant metaphorical image which complicates in intertextual terms our reading of the passage (*Q Nat.* 29.6-7):

> *Vide ergo ne terra debeat minui, ut validiori infirma succumbat. Incipiet ergo putrescere, dehinc laxata ire in umorem et assidua tabe defluere. Tunc exilient sub montibus flumina ipsosque impetu quatient; inde aura tacta manabunt; solum omne aquas reddet, summi scaturient montes. Quemadmodum in morbum transeunt sana et ulceri vicina consentiunt, ut quaeque proxima terris fluentibus fuerint, ipsa eluentur stillabuntque, deinde current et, hiante pluribus locis saxo,* [*per*] *fretum saliet et maria inter se componet.*
>
> So consider whether earth does not also need to be diminished, so that the weaker may succumb to the stronger. So, it will begin to decay, then to decompose and turn to liquid, and to dissolve into a steady stream of putrefaction. Then rivers will spring up beneath mountains and make them crumble under the onslaught. Then fields that are affected will become sodden; all the ground will exude water; the mountaintops will bubble over. Just as healthy parts become diseased, and an ulcer spreads to adjacent areas, so the regions closest to land that is already awash will themselves dissolve and form a trickle, then a fast current. (Transl. Hine)

In order to describe how the corrosive power of water dissolves the earth, Seneca compares the flood to a contagious disease.[28] This comparison adds a crucial new dimension to the image of the flood. How can the image of a healing flood be synthesized with the metaphorical illustration of a lethal disease? In other words, how can a disease cure the world?

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[28] As one of the readers rightly suggested to me, one could certainly compare this passage with the narrative of pestilence in Seneca's *Oedipus*. For interesting considerations see Trinacty (2014) 138-140 and *passim*; Gardner (2019) 206-220 discusses the way in which Seneca's version of the Sophoclean Oedipus tragedy appropriates elements from Latin epic; reflecting on Oedipus' traditional role as φαρμακός, both infected "carrier" and saviour to the civic body, the emphasis of the discussion is placed upon the competing claims of individuality and belonging to a community. Still, since Seneca's tragedy pertains mainly to the health of the body politic and its contagion in Neronian Rome, and not to the end of the world, I will not take the argument any further.

To answer these questions, first we explore the significance of certain intertextual allusions that can be traced in this passage. Seneca's image of contagious disease looks back to Lucretius' well-known plague in *DRN* 6 and to Vergil's animal plague to be found in *G.* 3. The intertextual relation between these two passages is now taken for granted.[29] In addition, at the beginning of the description of the flood, Seneca intertextually alludes to these two texts regarding the subversion of Golden Age. Notably, Ovid himself, who is Seneca's main intertext for the passage under consideration, alludes to Vergil's plague in connection with the ἀδύνατα that take place just before the final catastrophe.[30]

As far as Lucretius is concerned, the plague, which is now commonly considered to be a metaphor for the moral collapse of the society (Schiesaro 2007),[31] is compared with erysipelas, with is also called sacred fire (*DRN* 6.1162-1171):

> *Nec nimio cuiquam posses ardore tueri*
> *corporis in summo summam fervescere partem,*
> *sed potius tepidum manibus proponere tactum*
> *et simul ulceribus quasi inustis omne rubere*
> *corpus, ut est per membra sacer dum diditur ignis.*
> *intima pars hominum vero flagrabat ad ossa,*
> *flagrabat stomacho flamma ut fornacibus intus.*
> *nil adeo posses cuiquam leve tenveque membris*
> *vertere in utilitatem, at ventum et frigora semper.*
>
> Yet you could not perceive the outermost part of the body of anyone to be burning with excessive heat on the surface, but rather to give forth a sensation of warmth to the hand, and at the same time to be red all over with ulcers as it were burnt into it, like when the accursed fire spreads abroad over the limbs. But the inward parts in men burnt to the bones; a flame burnt in the stomach as in a furnace. There was nothing so light or thin that you could turn it to use for their bodies; only wind and cold always. (Transl. Rouse, revised Smith)

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[29] For Vergil's Noric plague and its intertextual relationship with Lucretius, see in particular Harrison (1979); West (1979); Freudenburg (1987).

[30] For detailed discussion of Seneca's tangible allusions to both Lucretius' and Vergil's plagues, see Garani (forthcoming 2021a) and (forthcoming 2021b).

[31] Schiesaro (2020) 35 points to the fact that Sallust *Cat.* 10-13 discusses the origin of the Catilinarian conspiracy through the prism of Lucretius' plague.

In the Vergilian description, the Lucretian metaphor becomes a symptom of the plague (Harrison (1979) 9). Since people make clothes from infected wool, they, too, are contaminated by the *sacer ignis* (*G*. 3.564-6 *ardentes papulae atque immundus olentia sudor/' membra sequebatur nec longo deinde moranti/ tempore contactos artus* sacer ignis *edebat*. "Nay, if any man donned the loathsome grab, feverish blisters and foul sweat would run along his fetid limbs, and he had not long to wait before the accursed fire was feeding on his stricken limbs" (transl. Fairclough 1916, revised Goold 1999)). In Lucretius' narrative, the language of fluidity (*fluebat*, 6.1204) and of bodily fluids (*proluvie*, 6.1200; *profluvium*, 6.1205) dominates.[32] To quote Gardner (2019) 91:

"When such fluidity of matter is articulated within the immediate context of contagious disease, it does more than simply add to the armament of a staunch materialist: it observes the collapse of boundaries (both bodily and social) and diagnoses collective, contagious behaviors as the origins of such collapse. The plague's corrosive power is initially enacted in Lucretius at the level of the body but the Epicurean premise that all humans "inhabit a city without walls" looks forward to the transference of those operations from the body to the body politic."

In his turn, Vergil, who incorporates into his plague narrative the Lucretian image of fiery disease, applies the image of bronze and gold that get melted in a raging furnace, which Lucretius had used as an analogy to describe the way in which the plague acts (*ut fornacibus intus*, *DRN* 6.1169), to the bones that now shrink and melt (*G*. 3.482-85):

> *Nec via mortis erat simplex, sed ubi ignea venis*
> *omnibus acta sitis miseros adduxerat artus,*
> *rursus abundabat fluidus liquor omniaque in se*
> *ossa minutatim morbo collapsa trahebat.*
>
> Nor was the pathway to death uniform; but when the fiery thirst had coursed through all the veins and shrivelled the hapless limbs, in its turn a watery humour welled up and drew into itself all the bones, as piecemeal they melted with disease.' (Transl. Fairclough 1916, revised by Goold 1999).

[32] For dissolution and liquefaction in Lucretius see *DRN* 3.551-555. Cf. Segal (1990) 148.

In other words, whereas in Lucretius, the sick body is metaphorically liquified, in Vergil, liquefaction is literal. In both cases, the destruction reflects endless universal fluidity.[33]

Lucretius makes use of the language of atomism that deals with liquefaction and decay and denotes eternal universal fluidity in order to describe the symptoms of the plague, while Virgil gives literal images of liquefaction. Seneca appropriates this same phrasing to describe in literal terms the physical corrosion of the earth and so suggest the idea of eternal fluidity. Seneca also read of this idea in Ovid's speech of Pythagoras, in the last book of *Metamorphoses*, a passage with which he intensively engages intertextually (*Met*. 15.1-484).[34] In this intertextual play with both Lucretius and Vergil, Seneca makes a remarkable conceptual inversion: whereas in Lucretius' diseased human body metaphorically liquefies, and in Vergil, it literally liquefies, Seneca views the earth and then the world (*mundus*) metaphorically as a body that then literally, i.e., geologically, liquefies.

Although in Lucretius, the plague is a symptom of moral decay, it does not involve any divine origin or moral consequence. In fact, it is just a stage in the cycle of growth and decay, which is conditioned by natural laws. This is not the place to discuss the controversial role of gods in the Vergilian plague.[35] In regard to Seneca's flood, which is metaphorically compared with plague, I will just repeat that the cause and the ultimate goal are identified with divine intervention and catharsis correspondingly.

Seneca's Flood as Homeopathic Healing

We have not yet answered the question raised in the previous section: How is it possible for a moral disease, such as love of luxury, to be cured by means of another disease, such as the cataclysm? Given the fact that fire is the standard conceptual metaphor for disease, whether

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33 Harrison (1979) 8 for Vergil's innovation and the clinical paradox which Lucretius does not mention as symptom of the Athenian plague. For Vergil see also Gardner (2019) 124. Gardner (2019) 90-91 points also to Diskin Clay's discussion 1983, 265]; according to the latter the innovative flux of matter that determines the symptoms of Lucretius' plague allows the poet to defend his larger philosophical claims of a world whose atoms are in constant flux (*DRN* 2.1139-40).

34 Garani (2020a) and (forthcoming 2021c).

35 Gale (2000) 227.

it is the plague, especially as we read it in Seneca's intertexts, i.e., in Lucretius and Vergil, or some moral disease, we need to bring to the discussion of the Senecan flood yet another intertext, the Ovidian story of Phaëthon and the conflagration (*Met.* 1.747-2.400), connotations of which are already present in the flood narrative, since Seneca quotes a verse from this very story (*Q Nat.* 3.27.13, cf. Ovid *Met*. 2.264). This verse describes how the Cyclades increased in number due to the conflagration caused by Phaëthon's ascent to the sky, and some scholars (Delgi'innocenti Pierini (1990) 178, Timparano (1984) 174) have regarded this quotation as a *lapsus memoriae* on the part of Seneca.[36] Other scholars (Schiesaro 2014) emphasize the point that Phaëthon was hybristic in his insistence, despite his father's warnings, on driving the Sun's horses and that his arrogant enterprise was doomed to failure.[37] Against this standard interpretation of the passage, we should read anew what Ovid writes. Still, with our focus now upon the idea of punishment, not only of Phaëthon but of the whole world, too, that is about to undergo annihilation, thanks to Phaëthon's recklessness. From this point of view, we should ask whether the conflagration thus caused is to be considered merited punishment of divine origin, as the Ovidian flood is.[38] In contrast to Jupiter's avenging actions in response to Lycaon's impiety, it seems that Phaëthon's fall, rather than being triggered by any intervention on the part of the father of the gods, is the result of an accident. Notably, too, once Jupiter arrives in response to the Earth's request (*Met*. 2.279-300), his ultimate goal is not to take revenge, but in fact to save the world (*Met*. 2.304-306 *At pater omnipotens, superos testatus et ipsum,/ qui dederat currus, nisi opem ferat, omnia fato/ interitura gravi, summam petit arduus arcem* "But the Almighty Father, calling on the gods to witness and him above all who had given the chariot, that unless he bring aid all things will perish by a grievous doom, mounts on high to the top of heaven" (transl. Miller 1916, revised Goold 1977)).[39] In other words, if the extinguishing of

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[36] For discussion of this quotation see Garani (forthcoming 2021a) with further bibliography.

[37] For discussion of this passage see also Brown (1987), Wheeler (2000) 66-69, Feldherr (2016). Cf. in Ovid *Met*. 1.253-8 that conflagration was put forward as an alternative punishment to flood.

[38] We should note in particular the occurrences of the verb *merere*, meaning "deserve": Ovid *Met*. 2.279 *si placet hoc* meruique, *Met*. 2.290-91 *sed tamen exitium fac me* meruisse*: quid undae,/ quid* meruit *frater?*; *Met*. 2.385-93: 2.393 *non* meruisse *necem*.

[39] Due (1974) 31-2. See also Bretzigheimer (1993) 37-46, Wheeler (2000) 45.

Phaëthon's conflagration does not bear any punitive value, then Jupiter's thunderbolt is clearly intended to repair the damage. In fact, if we follow Jupiter in his effort to repair the damage caused by Phaëthon's conflagration, his actions vividly recall those of the divine demiurge during the cosmogony at the beginning of *Met.* 1. For example, his care for Arcadia (*Met.* 2.405-6) echoes that of the creator (*Met.* 1.48 *cura dei*). And his order to the forests to become green again recalls the creator's corresponding commands (*Met.* 2.408 *laesasque iubet revirescere silvas* "he bids the damaged forests grow green again", 1.43-44 *iussit et extendi campos, subsidere valles,/ fronde tegi silvas, lapidosos surgere montes* "Then did he bid plains to stretch out, valleys to sink down, woods to be clothed in leafage, and the rock-ribbed mountains to arise" (transl. Miller 1916, revised by Goold 1977)). More to the point, in order to terminate the conflagration that was caused by the fall of Phaëthon, Jupiter checks *fire* by means of blasting *fire* (*Met*. 2.313 *saevis conpescuit ignibus ignes* "quenched fire with blasting fire"). In other words, his thunderbolt, which is usually burdened with negative connotations of revenge, now acquires the power to heal. The Ovidian corrective approach reminds us of the homeopathic method of religious catharsis when fire is used as a cathartic drug.[40]

We should bear this Ovidian dimension in mind, along with Seneca's embracing of the heroic connotations of the Ovidian figure of Phaëthon, which are echoed as early as the prologue to *Q Nat.* 3 (*Q Nat.* 3 *praef*. 3; cf. fr. 2 Courtney).[41] As long as Seneca appears to believe that moral disease cannot be healed by purgation alone, but requires also the force of some sort of contagious disease, the flood is presented as a φάρμακον, its semantic weight being simultaneously both negative and positive, since its effect is presented as both a punishment and a catharsis, i.e., as a redemptive treatment.[42]

To recapitulate our findings so far: Seneca employs medical imagery, which condenses various intertextual allusions (Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid), in order to suggest that the eschatological flood has a double aim, both to punish and to heal. At the same time, the burden of divine

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[40] Heraclitus (DK 5=117 Kahn) ridicules the homeopathic principle involved in the use of sacrificial blood, so as to cleanse pollution by blood. Cf. Belfiore (1992) [278-290, 300-314], especially 280-281.

[41] For a detailed discussion of Seneca's reception of the sublime figure of Phaëthon see Garani (2000b). Cf. also Sen. *Q Nat.* 6.2.8-9, *Prov.*5.10-11, *VB* 20.5.

[42] Lloyd (2003) 56 with reference to Derrida's distinction of φάρμακον.

punishment is alleviated once we read it in association with the Lucretian and Vergilian intertexts of the plague, which hint at the cycle of growth and decay. Last but not least, the Ovidian 'homeopathic' image of Phaëthon bridges the gap between Seneca's innovative idea of the coexistence of punishment and natural recurrence since it points to the optimistic prospect of regeneration after total destruction.

Seneca's Flood and the Notion of Tragic Catharsis

As has been already suggested in the prologue to this paper, Seneca's ultimate aim in narrating the eschatological flood is to forge a so-called Stoic *praemeditatio futurorum malorum*, i.e., a pre-studying of future ills with particular reference to the final cataclysm. This Stoic technique consists in familiarizing oneself in imagination with misfortunes to come and, in particular with death. The Stoics thus invest this technique with 'prophylactic value' before actual misfortune occurs.[43] Bearing in mind that for Seneca, the flood will come about as a cathartic punishment, we may now ponder again the potential impact upon the reader. In other words, once the addressee is faced with the imminent eschatological flood and its cathartic imagery, can we claim that this narration has any association with the Aristotelian notion of psychologic catharsis?[44]

According to Aristotle's theory of catharsis, the function of the tragic performance is to evoke fear and pity to the audience (*Po.* 6.449b24-8). In line with this, Sorabji (2000) 76 remarks that: "[m]ost interpretations agree that catharsis *lightens* emotions in the audience by *first* [my emphasis] arousing them, whether *catharsis* is the analogue of purgation by laxative and emetic, or of religious purification." Given that the Stoics argued for the total eradication of the passions, rather than their arousal and then elimination, there are scholars (Staley (2010) 75-81) who claim that the Stoics would not have accepted the Aristotelean idea of catharsis.

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[43] Armisen-Marchetti (2008) 105. *Ead*. 111-112: "For Seneca imagination of the future guided by reason cannot be dangerous, for suffering cannot result from something that is mere imagination and not a real experience. […] In *praemeditatio*, imagination places itself in the service of reason; in anxiety, it is exactly the other way round: imagination overwhelms and sweeps away reason, with the complicity of the judgement."

[44] The discussion of the philosophical elements in Seneca's tragedies, as well as the interrelation between his tragedies and his philosophical writings falls far beyond the scope of this paper. See e.g., Chaumartin (2014); Fischer (2014).

Still, we should recall the fact that in the treatise *De ira*, Seneca does not deny altogether the existence of reader's emotions and responses to dramatic performances and historical narratives (*Ir.* 2.2.3-5):

> *Hic subit etiam inter ludicra scaenae spectacula et lectiones rerum vetustarum. Saepe Clodio Ciceronem expellenti et Antonio occidenti videmur irasci; quis non contra Mari arma, contra Sullae proscriptionem concitatur? Quis non Theodoto et Achillae et ipsi puero non puerile auso facinus infestus est? Cantus nos nonnumquam et citata modulatio instigat Martiusque ille tubarum sonus; movet mentes et atrox pictura et iustissimorum suppliciorum tristis adspectus; inde est quod adridemus ridentibus et contristat nos turba maerentium et effervescimus ad aliena certamina. Quae non sunt irae, non magis quam tristitia est, quae ad conspectum mimici naufragii contrahit frontem, non magis quam timor, qui Hannibale post Cannas moenia circumsidente lectorum percurrit animos, sed omnia ista motus sunt animorum moveri nolentium nec adfectus sed principia proludentia adfectibus.*
>
> This sensation comes upon us even when we're watching shows at theatrical games and reading ancient history: we often seem to become angry with Clodius as he drives Cicero into exile, or with Antony as he orders his death. Who's not stirred when faced with Marius' arms or Sulla's proscriptions? Who doesn't hate Theodotus and Achillas and the actual child who dared a grown-up crime? Sometimes a song sets us on edge, a double-time tune, the martial sound of war trumpets; a horrific picture stirs our minds, or the grim sight of punishments, however justly meted out. For the same reason we answer others' smiles with our own and grow sad in a crowd of mourners and feel the blood tingle while watching other men in competition. Such responses aren't forms of anger, any more than what causes us to frown as we watch a staged shipwreck is true sadness, or fear that flashes through people's minds as they read of Hannibal's laying siege to Rome after Cannae. These are all movements of minds stirred despite themselves; they're not passions but the first preludes to passion." (Transl. Kaster)

In connection with this passage Rapp (2015) 452-453 explicates Seneca's three-stage model of emotions: "In the generation of a particular episode of emotion we have to distinguish three successive stages, the first of which consists in an involuntary impulse (*ictus*); it is only after this first impulse, at the second stage, that we are able to (voluntarily) assent or dissent to this spontaneous movement; by the third stage, the emotions have already got out of our control (*Ir.* 2.4). What happens to the spectator of a stage play, Seneca explains (*Ir.* 2.2),

is like the first stage of an emotion, which is not yet an emotion itself, but the beginning of or the prelude to a full-fledged emotion." In this context, during the first stage, the emotions, which the Stoics called προπάθειαι (pre-emotions), are generated through reading upon the psychological dispositions of the reader.[45] Graver (2007) 191-211 and (2017) 293 calls them 'progressor emotions.' In view of this, it has been suggested (Sorabji (2000) 76) that such 'first movements' may provide a Stoic reply to Aristotle's theory of tragic catharsis.

Let us now turn back once again to the eschatological flood, which Seneca demonstrates to be a segment of cosmic history.[46] While the reader is faced with this piece of 'historical' narrative and follows in detail the final tragic moments of the very last survivors as they are on the brink of drowning, we could argue that he reacts in a way congruent with what we have just read in the passage of Seneca's *De Ira* quoted above, that is, the reader displays 'progressor emotions': he feels pity for these miserable human beings (*Q Nat.* 3.27.11 *inter miseros*) and fear of the possibility of his own demise in that cosmic deluge. As Seneca states in *Q Nat.* 6 in association with earthquakes, 'We never marvel at these things without fear. Since the cause of the fear is igno-

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[45] Seneca *Ir*. 2.4.1-2 *Et ut scias quemadmodum incipiant adfectus aut crescant aut efferantur, est primus motus non voluntarius, quasi praeparatio adfectus et quaedam comminatio; alter cum voluntate non contumaci, tamquam oporteat me vindicari, cum laesus sim, aut oporteat hunc poenas dare, cum scelus fecerit; tertius motus est iam impotens, qui non si oportet ulcisci vult, sed utique, qui rationem evicit. Primum illum animi ictum effugere ratione non possumus, sicut ne illa quidem quae diximus accidere corporibus, ne nos oscitatio aliena sollicitet, ne oculi ad intentationem subitam digitorum conprimantur. Ista non potest ratio vincere, consuetudo fortasse et adsidua observabo extenuat. Alter ille motus, qui iudicio nascitur, iudicio tollitur.* "Now, to make plain how passions begin or grow or get carried away: there's the initial involuntary movement—a preparation for the passion, as it were, and a kind of threatening signal; there's a second movement accompanied by an expression of will not stubbornly resolved, to the effect that "I should be avenged, since I've been harmed" or "this man should be punished, since he's committed a crime." The third movement's already out of control, it desires vengeance not if it's appropriate but come what may, having overthrown reason. We cannot avoid that first mental jolt with reason's help, just as we cannot avoid the other movements that (as I've mentioned) befall our bodies, just as we cannot avoid having another's yawn provoke our own, or avoid closing our eyes at the sudden poke of another's fingers. Reason cannot overcome those movements, though perhaps their force can be lessened if we become used to them and constantly keep a watch for them. That second movement, which is born from deliberation, is eradicated by deliberation" (transl. Kaster). For further discussion about the Stoics' first movements see Sorabji (2000) 66-95; Brennnen (2005) 82-113; Graver (2007) 85-108; Konstan (2015) and (2017), Tielman (2021).

[46] Garani (forthcoming 2021a)

rance, is it not worth acquiring knowledge to remove your fear? How much more worthwhile it is to investigate causes, with your whole mind focused on this goal!' (*Q Nat.* 6.3.4: *nihil horum sine timore miramur. et cum timendi sit causa nescire, non est tanti scire, ne timeas? quanto satius est causas inquirere, et quidem toto in hoc intentum animo!*).

How does, then, Seneca deal with the arousal of pity and fear provoked by such a historical narrative which projects the reader, in both scientific and literary terms, forward to an appalling event in the future? At this point, we should revisit one of Seneca's major intertexts, Lucretius' *DRN* and briefly assess the notion of Aristotelian catharsis when seen within this Epicurean context. As Piergiacomi (2019) 141 remarks: "[t]he fact that poetry may become cathartic by participation in Epicurean teachings implies that the only cathartic poetry is *didactic poetry* [my emphasis]. In other words, the more poems aid philosophical teachings and arguments, the more cathartic they are. Poetry is cathartic when it assists philosophy." It seems, then, that following in Lucretius' footsteps, when Seneca engages intertextually with various poetic texts and resorts to medical imagery to shed light on how both natural laws and the Stoic God condition the cycle of growth and decay and therefore the final deluge, he aims to invest this *praemeditatio futurorum malorum* with some sort of cathartic function, which may probably be the Stoic equivalent to the Aristotelian tragic catharsis and which will liberate the reader from his fears and assist him in accomplishing his moral catharsis.

Myrto Garani
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
magarani@phil.uoa.gr

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