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The intimacy of wounds: care of the other in Seneca's *Consolatio ad Helviam*

Victoria Rimell

V.Rimell@Warwick.ac.uk

0044 (0)7498290192

Department of Classics and Ancient History

Warwick university

Coventry CV4 7AL

United Kingdom

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Abstract

In this close reading of Seneca's consolation to his mother, I propose new ways of understanding the text as a whole, building critically on responses to Fantham's thesis of 'displacement' (Fantham 2007), and mapping how the notoriously violent opening relates to the central body of the text, and to its concluding chapters. The paper focuses on Seneca's metaphors of the wound and wounding, and on what kinds of ethical relation might be imagined and sustained by the counter-intuitive process of irritating, revisiting and sharing in psychophysical wounds rather than closing them. In considering the disruption to invulnerable male identity that the wounded mother may be seen to represent in this text, I reassess the significance of the *ad Helviam* in the development of Stoic ethics and explore what is missing in Foucault's tendentious account of imperial Stoicism as a quasi-medical regimen and social practice in which 'all is lost if you begin with care for others' (Foucault 2005, 198).

The intimacy of wounds: care of the other in Seneca's *Consolatio ad Heluiam*

The aim of this paper is to put into practice new ways of reading the *Consolatio ad Heluiam matrem*, which was written at some point during Seneca's relegation to Corsica (c.42-29 CE), and is the only surviving Latin text in which an author addresses his own mother.ⁱ My point of departure takes the form of a basic question to which many scholars have already responded, in different ways: that is, does the *ad Heluiam* console (the mother, Seneca's readers), and if so, how? I will suggest that the text's power to console consists in its performative affirmation of interconnectedness, or of ethical relation, through an ambivalent acknowledgement of shared psychophysical vulnerability. While it is undoubtedly the case that this consolation functions as a philosophical and socio-political document within a web of consolatory texts that includes *Letters* 63 and 99, the *ad Marciam* and the *ad Polybium*, it also represents a unique experiment in approaching female grief, one that must do violence to the sovereign subject held up as the Roman and Stoic ideal, even in this very text.ⁱⁱ Thus far, critics have tended to read the *ad Heluiam* either as a shoring up of Stoic masculine impermeability through the othered (wounded, violated) body of the mother, or as an enactment of Stoic ideas about community through the performance of intimacy with the mother within a network of kinship ties. I will start (in **section I**) by reviewing these approaches in detail and discussing the problems associated with both sets of readings: the former, I will argue, reduces the violence of the *ad Heluiam* to masculinist appropriation (an argument which flattens out some of the text's most interesting aspects), while the latter, more generalising reading elides violence completely and does not attend to the text's meaningful playfulness, its poetics, or what Wilson calls Seneca's 'passionate discourses' of the passions (Wilson 1997, 59). My approach is not quite a third way. I am interested in the text's performance of violence, in particular its use of wounds as symbolic sites of opening

towards the (m)other, and the presentation of consolation as a counter-intuitive re-opening or irritation of wounds in the first chapters. I suggest that this substantial frame (chs.1-4 of 20), which gestures towards a complex weave of discourses to do with ‘virtuous’ or ‘shameful’ wounding and with the dynamic, gendered, medicalised body in imperial Roman thought, is not just a prelude to a reassertion of rational control performed in the centre of the consolation (5-13), but also a lingering provocation, and a lens through which we are invited to read the consolatory entanglements laid out in chs.14-20. Paradigmatically, the *ad Heluiam* dwells on what Nussbaum in *The Therapy of Desire* calls ‘the spectacle of violation’ – that is, the need to expose ‘the core of [the] self to the possibility of invasion’ if one is to live ‘a passionate life’ – in such a way that it is *not* necessarily ‘repellent’, but rather a condition of possibility for relationship and for consolation itself.ⁱⁱⁱ

What Seneca does, I will argue in **sections II-IV**, in a text which I insist is doing significant philosophical work, is to enact the ontological implications of this engagement with the mother *as* a conflict, one that flirts with but is not reducible to tragi-epic drama (with an eye on the politically disruptive work of mourning mobilised in tragedy in particular). In broad terms, building on work by critics like Henderson, Gunderson, Ker and Dressler, I am focused here on what kinds of thinking and experience are possible when we are attuned to Seneca’s texts as dramatic sites of debate and affectively charged poetic dimensions in which what is being mapped philosophically, in ways that demand our participation, is an open-ended struggle rather than a done deal.^{iv} The literal content of Seneca’s texts is inseparable from (the challenge of interpreting) the precise shape, texture and framing of that content, and there is more to this than what Inwood helpfully outlines as the ‘protreptic value’ of Seneca’s ‘two-level mode of discourse’, whereby audiences are invited to reflect on the gap between paradoxical theory and social reality, or between philosophical ideal and social convention.^v

Specifically, I want to consider the challenge to the fortress of Stoic male identity that the maternal may be seen to represent in this text, and the extent to which Seneca's dramatized inseparability from his mother (or what Parker 2012 would diagnose as his 'mother trouble') operates as a framework for thinking through dependency, time, loss, and ethical responsibility in the context of Seneca's exile and in the precarious climate of mid-first-century Rome. I will be exploring the extent to which the text exploits what Wilson calls the 'self-disturbing act' of consolation to suggest, in flashes, a way of living with grief that on one hand is a comforting reminder of our constitutive sociality, and on the other becomes a challenging mode of political resistance that reorients us towards non-dogmatic identities.^{vi}

Two larger points, I hope, will emerge from this reading. First, it will enable us to envisage how the political, philosophical and personal functions of this text (and their appeal to multiple audiences) might intersect, or indeed become inseparable. Secondly, it will reassess the significance of the *ad Helviam* in the development of Stoic ethics and of Roman engagement with classical medicine in this period, not least because this consolation presents a radical challenge to Foucault's and Hadot's paradigmatic emphasis on the cultivation of the self in Hellenistic ethics as centred on a medicalised regulation and mastery of the desiring body, whereby the male philosopher is aligned with the detached, dispassionate physician of the Hippocratic tradition.^{vii} The Foucaultian paradigm dictates that techniques of self-control and self-containment may have a positive outcome for the community, but that caring for others is secondary, almost a side effect, rather than an ethical imperative in itself. As Foucault puts it in *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 'care of the self...must produce or induce behaviour through which one will actually be able to take care of others. But all is lost if you begin with care of others' (198). The *ad Helviam*, I suggest, troubles this picture, and reveals the extent to which Seneca grapples not only with the *impossibility* of the ideal underpinning Hellenistic philosophy's 'care of the self – the self-sufficient, impermeable free male subject

– but also with the productive potential of this (struggle with) loss or ‘failure’.^{viii} I take up Brooke Holmes’ corrective that the body Foucault takes as a given in classical antiquity is in fact an ‘emergent phenomenon’ and a ‘philosophical problem’.^{ix} We are witness to this emergent body in the *ad Helviam* when we see Seneca playing *both* heroic, articulate physician *and* humbled, stuttering patient, *both* healthy, objectifying expert *and* a suffering subject prone to illness whose empathic account of psychophysical wounds shakes up the dualisms of Foucault’s model. While critics have long recognised the importance of process, practice and fallibility in Senecan Stoicism (Seneca presents himself as a *proficiens*, a ‘learner’, and admits his flaws), Seneca’s place in a history of ideas significantly coloured by Foucault has meant that we continue to privilege the drive towards self-mastery in Senecan thought and to suppress the challenge of a vulnerable relational self that comes to the fore in the consolatory mode especially. The emergent body in this text, configured through the maternal, is – to echo Kristeva - a subject-in-process, or a subject on trial.^x Through the figure of the wound, a tear through which the *ad Helviam* converses with medicine from the Hippocratics to Celsus, with Greco-Roman epic, tragedy and erotic elegy, and also with a broader imaginary of the heroic or demeaning display of wounds and scars in Roman thought, the self-regulating, disembodied subject of Foucaultian consolation becomes porous to the temporality of maternal grief and to the vulnerability encoded in the penetrable adult female body.^{xi} This paper considers how disruptive, limiting, therapeutic or generative such an opening might be.

I. *contrariis curari*: approaches to the *ad Helviam*

The *ad Helviam* is an uneven, multifaceted text.^{xii} It begins as a juddering, emotionally intense address to Helvia on the challenges, timing and visceral violence of this consolation, drifts into increasingly impersonal argumentation (including bits of dialogue with an

anonymous male interlocutor), in which the author claims that the exiled Stoic does not suffer, and turns back in its final, third act (chs. 14-20) to Helvia's subjective experience of grief and to how she might find comfort in close family relationships, in which Seneca himself is also imbricated. This inconsistency and polyphony have spurred very different definitions of and approaches to the text. The *ad Helviam* has been read as philosophical or anti-philosophical,^{xiii} personal (directed at Helvia) or political (intended for the emperor and his circle),^{xiv} as a 'novel disquisition' on exile,^{xv} a genuine attempt at consoling Helvia,^{xvi} a self-consolation whose real aim is to demonstrate virtue in extirpating passions,^{xvii} a defence against adultery (the purported crime for which Seneca is exiled) in which the philosopher attaches himself to his mother's exemplary *pudicitia*,^{xviii} an 'oblique commentary on the nature and limits of Roman imperial power and self-regard in Seneca's age',^{xix} or as a text which envisages the Hellenistic cultivation of the self as a 'true social practice',^{xx} moving outward from the private sphere to the political and cosmic.^{xxi}

Yet while critics are attuned to the 'peculiar tension[s]'^{xxii} of the *ad Helviam* and to its jagged transitions, many seem disinterested in what is at stake, philosophically, in Seneca addressing a consolation to his mother in the first place, in the context both of his central concern with female experience of grief in the tragedies (e.g. Hecuba and the Trojan women, Medea, Clytemnestra) and of a broader and much debated Stoic interest in women's equal rational capacities and place in the world.^{xxiii} Even scholars who, more recently, have turned directly to the question of the mother in the *ad Helviam* seem motivated to occlude or gloss over the weird intimacy of Seneca's mode of engagement with Helvia, especially in the disjunctive opening chapters, where he imagines having staunched his own wound with his hand as he crawled towards his mother, and compares himself to a man trying to lift his head from his own funeral pyre, before announcing his plan to 'expose and re-open all the wounds which have already healed' (*omnia proferam et rescindam quae iam obducta sunt*, 2.2).^{xxiv} In

the wake of Foucault, who cites the *ad Helviam* in his *Care of the Self* as documenting an ‘intensification of social relations’ in the first century (1986, 52-3), and after Fantham’s landmark 2007 article on the *ad Helviam* and *ad Polybium* as ‘texts of displacement’, the mother and the maternal in the *ad Helviam* are seen as rhetorical ploys in a self-serving strategy of specular reversal and substitution. As a result, the *mutual* woundedness and layered medical-philosophical perspectives of the text’s opening paragraphs (echoed and transformed through chs. 15-20) simply fade from view.^{xxv} Read against Foucault’s template, this is a public, political document that performs virtuous male self-fashioning before an audience which, as it were, looks over the mother’s shoulder. The victim of relegation, as Fantham outlines, becomes the triumphant consoler of his mother back in Rome, and the mother’s grief takes the place of the philosopher’s own suffering, which he can now transcend: in short, her penetrable, wounded body allows for his exemplary, bodiless self-regulation.^{xxvi} For McAuley, this is an ultimately narcissistic exercise in which Helvia is reduced to a textual mirror. Seneca needs to conquer his mother’s womanly grief (*vincere dolorem*, 4.1) as it is shameful to him and threatens to taint his own self-image. In doing so he performs his own heroic resilience, underscoring at the same time the political inefficacy of his punishment. Paradigmatically, Seneca’s promise to re-open the mother’s *uulnera*, McAuley suggests, stages a ‘textual rape’, by which he asserts proper paternalistic control over the body that birthed him (2016, 181). Gunderson’s parallel reading (2015, 88-104), which draws on Irigaray’s *Speculum*, envisions Seneca’s treatment of his mother as a symbolic matricide in which Helvia’s exceptionality is contingent on the erasure of her subjectivity and on her representation as an honorary man.^{xxvii} Wilson, too, stresses that the point of what *is* ultimately an *exulceratio* (an irritation that produces painful rawness, 1.2) is on one hand, and in dialogue with Senecan tragedy, to explore inconsolability, and on the other to act out a phallic, self-aggrandising battle with grief in which what is significant is not

the end but the struggle itself. As he puts it ‘it is more important to contend with grief than to be free of it’ (Wilson 2013, 110). But whether or not, or in what way, that wrestling with (the mother’s) grief might be a transformative process or philosophical spur remains a mute question, and the philosopher’s successful self-reliance – after Foucault - is a given.

Little real dialogue has emerged between these literary-critical readings and other approaches more focused on philosophical content, for example those of Gloyn and Reydams-Schils, who want to see the consolation as affirmative and constructive within a recognisably Stoic framework for understanding relationships and community, and therefore make sense of the mother in the *ad Helviam* as a figure for relationality, or as the reproductive epicentre in Hierocles’ image of concentric circles of care.^{xxviii} Gloyn in particular discusses the extent to which Seneca consoles Helvia in chs.14-20 by the ‘practical’ strategy of emphasizing her embeddedness in a supportive network of kinship ties: Helvia is not just a mother but a grandmother, sister, daughter, niece, etc., and her relatives are entwined in multiple, active and passive ways with both her and Seneca himself.^{xxix} Yet Gloyn (much less Reydams-Schils) is not interested in the poetics of the *ad Helviam* and her discussion is limited to explaining how the text is therapeutic in the literal content of what it says to Helvia, in so far as that content relates to Stoic *oikeiōsis*. The perverse violence of the text is elided, and we are made to forget that this is not, straightforwardly, a heart-warming confirmation of the webs of familial care, but rather, I would suggest, a performative excavation of the vulnerability, figured by the mother and the maternal body, that is the condition of those relationships of dependency and ethical responsibility.^{xxx}

In Gloyn and Reydams-Schils, we find no engagement with those critics who insist that for Seneca the literary or the figurative is a mode that affords the staging and teaching of philosophical ideas in idiosyncratic, and even shocking or counter-cultural ways. For Reydams-Schils, in particular, after Inwood and others, the literary gets in the way of the

philosophical, and is a distraction to filter out:^{xxxii} she suggests a hierarchical opposition between literature and philosophy which mirrors the one often assumed to be operative between the intimate/maternal/bodily on the one hand and the philosophical on the other in the *ad Heluam* (2005, *passim*). Meanwhile, McAuley (2016, 169-200) and Williams (2006, 168-70) see the consolation's playful sociality as an 'aspect' which operates alongside the core lecture on masculine, Stoic self-sufficiency and alongside the splitting or repudiation involved in a dynamic of displacement. For these critics, then, the performative weaving of relationality in the *ad Heluam* is subsequent to and entirely compatible with individual sovereignty (and thus with a modern liberal individualist model of selfhood, uncritically assumed). Yet this reading must obviate the bristling fleshiness of Seneca's text, the philosophical friction it reveals and exploits, and necessarily involves appropriating the mother as same in order to maintain the fiction of Seneca's non-dependency. It is assumed, after Freud and Lacan, that the adult psyche must be forged out of an aggressive separation (or to echo Fantham, displacement) from the mother, despite the fact that in the *ad Heluam* Seneca overtly does *not* perform what Irigaray (or theorists of an ethics of care such as Gilligan, Kittay and Held) would call a disavowal of maternal origin, and of what it represents – male vulnerability and dependency, or the lie of dematerialised self-mastery.^{xxxiii}

In using the figure of wounding to frame his consolation, I will argue, Seneca doesn't simply repeat a sensationalising tragi-epic topos about the performance of masculine, military *uirtus*, as Salazar proposes (2000, 223). Instead, he engages in provocative, critical ways with the wound as figurative gap between putative Stoic ideal and (potential) lived reality, a reality in which the process of cultivating the ethical subject by securing the real and symbolic body against penetrability is open-ended, unstable, or even bound to fail.^{xxxiii} The *ad Heluam* represents Seneca's most developed and provocative exploration of a trope that plays a key role throughout his prose works.^{xxxiv} Crucially here, permeability is not simply projected onto

the maternal *exemplum*: instead, it seeps out between the lines of Seneca's disjointed, 'sand-without-lime' prose (Suetonius, *Cal.*53), and into the paradox of the very project of Senecan consolation, which promises to heal the wound (*liberalia studia ... sanabunt uulnus*, 17.3) by entering *into* the porous mind-body (*in animum tuum intrauerint*, 17.5; *altius praecepta descendunt*, 18.8, cf. *ex omnibus quae umquam in corpus tuum descenderunt recens uulnus*, 3.1). At the same time, the persistent focus on how to treat wounds in medical texts (from the Hippocratic works on head wounds, ulcers and *fistulae* to Celsus' discussion of wounds in *de medicina* V and VI) might be seen to inform Seneca's play on the pharmacological doubleness of wounds and on the parallels between consolation and medicine as *artes temporis* (as he writes in *ad Helu.*1.2, 'nothing is more dangerous than untimely medicine, *inmatura medicina*).^{xxxv} While Celsus, for example, reminds us that in the case of surgery 'the doctor makes the wound rather than finds it' (*uulnus facit medicus, non accipit*, 7.1.5), Seneca – after Cicero - adapts medical-philosophical debates on whether and when wounds should themselves be further opened or 'excised' to his contrarian philosophical practice (*plerumque contrariis curari*, 2.2), while getting us to think about how consolation responds to debates on tragic/medical catharsis as 'purgation', menstruation, or as the cleaning out of wounds (*corpora exsaniari, ad Helu.* 3.1).^{xxxvi} The *ad Heluiam* makes bodily rupture the icon for an opening to the other, and for a counter-cultural temporality in which mourning is potentially incessant, or circular, rather than strictly delimited by the powers that be in linear time.^{xxxvii}

To expand, therefore, on my introductory remarks, this discussion will also gesture towards the limits of Foucault's thesis, best represented in *The Care of the Self*, according to which imperial philosophy, rhetoric and medicine tell a homologous story about bodily and psychic regulation, a story that we can implicitly dissect from the messier, literary immersions in vulnerability that we may admit finding in tragedy or erotic elegy.^{xxxviii} On the

contrary, I suggest, the *ad Heluiam* points towards many tensions and contrasts (as well as overlaps) between medical, literary, rhetorical and philosophical discourses in first-century Rome, and enacts for us what is distinctive about the hybridic space Senecan dialogue creates for the phenomenological experience of woundedness.

II. Mutual vulnerability: *ad Helv.1*

Let us immerse ourselves, then, in the opening chapters, where Seneca first offers a meta-discourse on (this) consolation, which is presented as emerging from a period of anxious self-questioning. The scene in ch.1 is an excited, exciting one of mutual woundedness, intensified by military metaphors and a high, tragi-epic poetics of excess, with touches of the elegiac. It is difficult to follow, and its affective exuberance and revelation of vulnerability are striking, even when set against Seneca's identification with the flawed, 'sick' *proficiens* elsewhere. Consider the first two sentences:

Saepe iam, mater optima, impetum cepi consolandi te, saepe continui. Vt auderem multa me inpellebant.

ad Heluiam 1.1

Dearest mother, I have often felt the urge to console you and often restrained it. Many things were pushing me to dare to do it.^{xxxix}

Seneca describes the impulse he has often felt to console his mother as an *impetus*, which previously he managed to contain, and to which he now, implicitly, yields. The agency or control implied in the first person *cepi* (I had, I took) is followed by a passive position: many things 'pushed me', *me inpellebant*. The verb *inpello* echoes the loaded noun *impetus*, which

like its Greek equivalent *hormē*, is conventionally opposed to *logos/ ratio* in Stoic thought and is a keyword in Stoic theory of the passions (e.g. Cicero, *Off.* 1.101; 2.18).^{xl} This is the term used for irrational instinct and dangerous erotic desire in Ovid *Remedia* 10 (*et, quod nunc ratio, impetus ante fuit*). It is shorthand for the wave of grief in Seneca's *Phoenissae* (*mitte uiolentum impetum / doloris*, 347-8), encoding tragedy's investment in unrestrained mourning (e.g. *effuso fletu*, in *Troades*, 410-11); and it is used to describe the 'attack' of a disease at its most acute stage in medical texts (e.g. *in ipso acuti morbi impetus*, Celsus 2.4.11).^{xli} Seneca's position here is more akin to that of the patient rather than the expert doctor, a move familiar to readers of his *Letters*. At *Ep.* 78.2, for example, the phrase *impetum cepi* describes Seneca's longing to end his life when in the midst of chronic catarrhal seizures (*saepe impetum cepi abrumpendae uitae*; cf. *Ep.* 70.12, Suet. *Otho* 9.3), which he only curtailed by reflecting on how his father would not be able to bear the pain (78.2). Most crucially, *impetus* connects Seneca's emotional distress with Helvia's, in this text's wounded frame (*et ipsa quiete impetum ad saeuendum colligit*, 17.2).

Seneca then reflects on how he considered various possibilities and outcomes, alternating imperfect tenses which indicate an ongoing period of struggle (*inpellebant ... non dubitabam ... timebam ... conabar ... sciebam ... expectabam*, etc.) with future participles (*depositurus... habiturum... occurrendum*) and a string of (unfulfilled?) conditions (*si suppressere non potuissem, interim certe abstersissem ... si prior ipse consurrexissem*). These shifts in perspective and uncertain projections towards the future leave ambiguous the extent to which he really has (in the meantime) 'risen up', whether Helvia's grief really has 'lost its force' by now, and whether what he says he was thinking of doing in the period *before* penning this *consolatio* is the same thing he is intending to do, or already actually doing, *here*. In this way, Seneca allows us to enter into an indeterminate process of grief leading up to the making of this text in which he and his mother are emotionally inter-dependent

(consoling her is a means of making himself feel less troubled, yet his power to console is also predicated, perhaps, on healing himself first), and into a temporality in which many emotions and possible futures are being experienced simultaneously or in close succession. Grief itself is parsed as a kind of waiting or atypical experience of time: things delayed him and held him back (*rursus ... retardarent*, 1.2); the long-lasting recent-ness of grief is agonising (*dum recens saeuiret*, 1.2); he was waiting for the right time (*expectabam*) and for delay to have a mitigating effect ([sc. *dolor*] *mora mitigatus*, 1.2).^{xlii} Crucially, the son's pain is conceived as inseparable from that of the mother: Seneca recalls previous attempts to staunch his own cut while crawling, animal-like, or infant-like, towards Helvia to bind her wounds (*itaque utcumque conabar manu super plagam meam inposita ad obliganda uulnera uestra reptare*, 1.1), although *conabar* ('I was trying'/'I used to try') does not confirm he managed this, or to what extent he is still making this attempt now.

The first paragraph of the text appears to strive towards proper masculine rectitude (*si ... consurrexissem*, 1.1) and towards the subject position of the dispassionate doctor: thus Seneca alludes to ancient medical discussion of timing in treating disease (*nihil est perniciosus quam inmatura medicina*, 1.2) and refers to applying *remedia* and to touching and handling a patient in pain (*tangi se ac tractari pateretur*, 1.2). Yet this struggle is, overtly, incomplete, marred not only by regression to primitive/infantile crawling (*reptare*, 1.1), in the manner of Philoctetes with his agonising, incurable wound (cf. Sophocles, *Phil.*205-7),^{xliii} but also by fear and uncertainty (*timebam*, 1.1; *haesitabam uerebarque*, 1.2). Imperfect tenses (*expectabam*) make us linger on the possibility or hope that Helvia's grief will have softened. Seneca also affirms that grief is stubborn (*contumax*, 1.4) and stops short of stating that in the 'meantime' of grief (*praeterea*), his own cut or blow (*plaga*) has healed. And while we may read *remedia* in 1.2 as a medical-philosophical term (it is used elsewhere by Seneca in reference to consolation^{xliiv}), the juxtaposition with *mora* (*ad sustinenda remedia*

mora) is also highly evocative of Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*, which draws extensively on consolatory literature and follows the sequence of consolation outlined in Cicero *Tusc.* 4.35.^{xlv} Like Ovid, who in the *Remedia* regularly compares the suffering male lover to a mother who has lost a son, and promises to wait until his/her spirit is 'treatable' (*tractabilis*, 123) and her wounds ready to be touched (*uulnera tangi*, 125), Seneca will wait for his own mother to allow him to touch and handle her pain (*tangi se ac tractari pateretur*, 1.2).^{xlvi} Yet Ovid also emphasizes, notoriously, the role of *mora* in producing (its anagram) *amor* and in perpetuating rather than mitigating suffering. In *Rem.* 95, as scholars have discussed, Ovid showcases this idea by getting us to visualise and hear the re-production or circulation of *amor* through delay in the phrase *amor reperitque alimenta morando*,^{xlvii} a ploy we may hear echoed now in Seneca's *ad sustinenda remedia mora mitigatus*. Seneca's subtle engagement with the *Remedia Amoris*, a text which in continually catalysing the rebirth of desire also risks re-wounding rather than consoling lovers, hints at a different kind of consolation invested precisely in reflecting on what may be experienced anew within the uncanny temporality of mourning.^{xlviii} Grief is itself a kind of longing (*desiderium*, *ad Helu.* 1.4, cf. 18.3), even an (erotic) pleasure-pain, a *uoluptas* (cf. *Ep.* 63.4-5, 99.25-9) or elegiac *uulnus*.^{xlix}

A backdrop of Ovidian commentary on medicalised-erotic *mora* (as both necessary to cure the lover's suffering and a stimulus to *amor*) always already encompasses medical-philosophical debates about how long to wait before treating wounds in *ad Helu.* 1-4. In our surviving medical texts, the logical principle is almost always to treat physical wounds *before* they become inflamed and *not* to wait (see e.g. Celsus 7.7.4, Galen *de methodo medendi* 5.368K, cf. Ovid *Rem.* 101-2¹), a principle to which Seneca refers at *ad Marciam* 1.8.^{li} Yet the metaphor of the emotional as physical wound in non-medical works often involves acting *after* a delay. For example, as Cicero puts it in a passage evoked here, while laying claim to a (dubious) equivalence between medical and psychotherapeutic *artes temporis*, 'timely

medicine' should avoid rushing and thereby 'aggravating a wound' (*non adgravescent uulnus*, *Tusc.* 3.76, cf. *ne...ipsa solacia inritarent, ad Helu.* 1.2), a line he offers as a loose translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* 382.^{lii} Virgil's Turnus becomes a case-study for the principle that too early an intervention can worsen a wound at the beginning of *Aeneid* 12, when Latinus' attempt to calm him down backfires, precisely because Turnus is (still) inflamed with anger (*implacabilis ardet*, *Aen.* 12.3), like a frenzied, wounded lion (*saucius ... uulnere pectus /... leo*, *Aen.* 12.5-6). In what suggests itself as a proto-Ovidian play on words (*nulla mora in Turno*, *Aen.* 12.11), Turnus is raging to meet Aeneas now, yet instead of waiting, Latinus confronts him immediately, with the result that Turnus 'is inflamed by the healing' (*aegrescit medendo*, 12.46). In his passion, he confuses wounding his enemy Aeneas with self-harm: *et nostro sequitur de uulnere sanguis* ('and from me [sc.: 'inflicted by me'], too, blood flows from a [his] wound' 12.51).^{liii} I mention this not to insist that there is any specific verbal allusion to *Aeneid* 12 in *ad Heluiam* 1, but to highlight the density and complexity of Roman literary thinking about wounds on which Seneca is drawing here, and in which the bodily and the psychological, the scientific and the poetic are already closely intertwined. On one hand, Seneca's mingling of elegiac, tragi-epic, philosophical and medical discourses has the effect of blurring the differences between psychological and physical wounds (grief *physically* hurts). On the other, this mingling points to significant tensions between the subjective experience of wounds as it can be explored in the imaginative domain of literary texts, and the clinical objectification of the patient's body which must be treated quickly despite the agony this might cause, in medical works.

Just as Seneca seems to be getting a grip on *dolor* and moving (therefore) to a place where he can envisage consoling his mother, referring authoritatively to the careful background research undertaken for this project (*omnia clarissimorum ingeniorum monumenta ... euoluerem*, 1.2), he infers that he is like a man trying to lift his head from his

own funeral pyre to console his relatives (*homini ad consolandos suos ex ipso rogo caput adleuanti*). He seems to acknowledge that, as Derrida puts it, ‘one cannot hold a discourse on the “work of mourning” without taking part in it, without announcing or partaking [se faire part de] death, and first of all in one’s own death’ (2001, 142). As Abel observes – a point taken up but not developed by Degl’Innocenti Pierini – Seneca’s image is reminiscent of the famous scene in which dying Dido struggles to lift her head from the pyre after plunging Aeneas’ sword into her chest, at Virgil *Aeneid* 4.688-90 (*illa, grauis oculos conata attollere, rursus / deficit; infixum stridit sub pectore uulnus. / ter sese attollens cubitoque adnexa leuauit*).^{liv} Earlier, Dido had spoken her last words (*nouissima uerba*, 4.650), and asked for the ultimate consolation, or release from care, in death (*exsoluite curas*, 4.652), whereas Seneca, on his ‘deathbed’, reflects on the need to find ‘new words’ (*nouis uerbis*), not ‘ordinary ones’ (*nec ex uulgari et cotidiana*, 1.3), but the kind of uncommon diction used, perhaps, in epic and tragic poetry. We may decide to interpret this as the dispassionate, self-reflexive play of a writer negotiating his authority within literary traditions, and note emphasis on a male figure (*homini*). In one sense, Seneca is no fallen queen. Yet the particular way the text puts this on display also turns male *consolator* into (female) victim, and allows the spectre of his wound (*plaga*, 1.1) to bleed through this vulnerable opening chapter in a way that blurs a distinction between self-inflicted wound and a wound caused by fate. For a brief moment, Seneca can play the man playing a heroic yet pitiful widow, and his mother’s *uulnera* can feel like his own (self-)harm, as he consoles himself in her.

Whereas Seneca tries to speak, or to write a silent letter, Dido can only lift her eyes while her wound ‘hisses’ (*stridit*), as inhuman and uncanny a sound as Fama’s screech at the start of book four (*stridens*, *Aen.* 4.185). Yet as if to respond to the violent curtailing of Dido’s voice, Seneca then implies that his own excessive grief is stifling his ability to express himself at all:

Omnis autem magnitudo doloris modum excedentis necesse est dilectum uerborum eripiat, cum saepe uocem quoque ipsam intercludat.

ad Heluam 1.3

But every great and overpowering grief must take away the capacity to choose words since it often stifles the voice itself.^{lv}

This sentence registers Seneca's own boundless *dolor* (the same word used of Helvia's grief, which he shares: *dolori tuo*, 1.2; *dolorem tuum*, 2.1), and points towards its relative cultural unspeakability, for a man (*homini*, 1.3).^{lvi} In a forceful double metaphor, grief is seen forcibly to snatch away, or murder (*eripiat*)^{lvii} the process of choosing words that is implicitly Seneca's in writing this text, or, if we think in military terms, the process of 'recruiting' words (*dilectum*).^{lviii} It is simply not the case that, as Fantham's discussion has been taken to infer, Seneca's grief is totally displaced onto Helvia. Instead, in what is presented as a timeless generalisation which nevertheless describes the present situation, this grief (in the tragic mode) exceeds all limit (*modum excedentis*), running roughshod over the very limit (or cultural norm) Seneca hopes his mother will allow him to place on her grief in the final phrase of ch.1 (*ut desiderio tuo uelis a me modum statui*, 1.4).

III Re-opening wounds: *ad Helv.2-4*

In ch.2, however, there is a marked change of tone, as if to retreat from the excess of the opening chapter. Seneca now launches into a series of military and medical metaphors, and announces his counter-intuitive strategy to expose and re-open all the wounds from traumatic events in his mother's past that have already healed (*omnia proferam et rescindam quae iam*

obducta sunt, 2.1).^{lix} He will not run into battle with her pain straight away (*ne statim cum eo concurrat*), but first amplify it. This will not be a gentle healing path, but involve cautery and the knife (*hoc erit non molli uia mederi, sed urere ac secare*, 2.2), as if the philosopher is about to perform surgery, after Ovid *Remedia* 229 (*ferrum patieris et ignes*). Surgical intervention to ‘excise’ wounds or ulcers, and the need to dry out and cauterise wounds to prevent gangrene, is frequently mentioned in ancient (quasi-)medical discussions of wound treatment in humans and animals.^{lx} Cutting the flesh is also used elsewhere by Seneca (often figuratively) to describe the paternal disciplining of children or other family members (cf. *de Prov.* 4.11, *de Brev. Vit.* 4.5; *de Clem.* 14.3). Seneca imagines his mother as a body so full of scars (*corpore tam cicatricoso*, 2.2) that she will be ashamed (*pudeat*) to worry about one more wound, whether that *uulnus* refers to the pain of losing her son, to the new ‘wound’ Seneca will ‘cut’, or both. Here he alludes not only to a wider Stoic discourse of bearing wounds honorably and courageously that runs through his prose texts, but also to what Van Lommel (2015) explores as an unstable set of associations in Roman Republican and imperial thought around physical wounds and scars, which potentially signalled military valour and success, but could also elicit ridicule and pity, especially if they were disfiguring.^{lxi} Seneca then states that he has piled up all Helvia’s misfortunes before her (*omnia coaceruata ante te posui*, 3.2). This latest blow, he writes, is not superficial but has cut deep inside her and split her breast and innards (*pectus et uiscera ipsa diuisit*, 3.1): here the verb *diuisit* not only figures psycho-physical trauma, but also evokes medical constructions of the wounded body as divided or as lacking unity.^{lxii} Helvia must be like a veteran soldier, stiff of lip as she allows her wounds to be cleaned out (*exsaniari*, 3.1) by the military doctor, channelling the *miles bonus* of Roman moralising discourse (and of the Roman Stoic imaginary), who in Seneca’s *de Vita Beata* is a figure for Virtue herself, submitting to wounds, and counting her scars (15.5).^{lxiii} This quasi-sexual or eroticized violation (*uiscera* may signify female

reproductive organs as well as ‘guts’^{lxiv}) is revived in ch.15, where blood is imagined to flow from Helvia’s non-intact, non-virginal body (*non ex intacto corpore tuo sanguis hic fluxit*, 15.4) and through the scar of an old wound (*per ipsas cicatrices percussa es*, 15.4).^{lxv} There, Helvia is no longer the wounded veteran soldier on the battlefield, but rather the medically healthy *gunē* of the Hippocratic texts, whose *desiderium* is channelled into reproduction and care and whose opened body bleeds at regular intervals.^{lxvi} The same metaphor of penetration is used throughout of grief, explicitly at 18.9 (*quotiens te inmodica uis doloris inuaserit*).

In summary, in the first half of ch.2 and in ch.3, Seneca seems symbolically to lift himself off the funeral pyre, and to assert his disembodied position of power, qua medic, over his mother’s grief. He converts Helvia from a fellow sufferer into patient, and from mourning mother into heroic *mulier uirilis*, drawing both on a medical-philosophical imaginary and on an epic-elegiac discourse of wound-based pain. He and his mother are now co-combatants in a heroic battle to suppress *muliebris dolor*.

Yet there is more going on here than a straightforward reiteration of the heroic wound topos.^{lxvii} Seneca’s language and imagery are hyperbolic, almost cartoonish, as if to ‘laugh at pain’ (*dolorem deridere*, *Ep.* 78.19), so that the affective surplus of the opening chapter is not so much overcome as transmuted. In particular, the plan to re-open his mother’s wounds sustains the physical closeness between mother and son evoked in ch.1, and seems designed to realise the fear expressed in 1.2 that this consolation might turn into an untimely *exulceratio*, all the more so if we compare this strategy to the harsh treatment of Marullus’ grief in *Ep.*99: although in this letter Seneca echoes the *ad Heluam* by developing the idea of treating wounds harshly (e.g. *seuerius ista plaga curanda est*, 99.29), he also associates the temptation to ‘pile up offences’ (*incommode ... cumulare*, 99.14) with the un-Stoic victim rather than with the philosopher-doctor (cf. *omnia coaceruata*, *ad Helv.*3.2), and perhaps recalls Cicero’s reflection on how he was motivated to pile up all consolatory techniques into

his consolation precisely *because* his soul was in turmoil (*erat enim in tumore animus, Tusc.* 3.76). Indeed it is the acervation of trauma, as Degl’Innocenti Pierini observes, which connects Helvia with Hecuba, the tragic heroine who in Seneca’s *Troades*, in particular, is weighed down by ‘the disasters of all’ (*omnium clades, 1061*).^{lxviii}

Similarly, the motif of *rescindere uulnera* (2.1) plays here not only to medical texts, and to epic scenes of battlefield surgery to remove weapons embedded in flesh that seem themselves to be informed by medical knowledge (e.g. Virgil *Aen.* 12.389-90), but also to Senecan scenes of torture and self-harm. See for example *Ep.* 78.19:

plus est flamma et eculeus et lammina et uulneribus ipsis intumescentibus quod illa renouaret et altius urgeret inpressum.

But worse than these are the fire, the rack, the red-hot plates, and the instrument that reopens wounds while they are still swollen and drives their imprint deeper still.

Here, Seneca is reminding Lucilius that any physical pain can be overcome, even the worst torture. Yet this is the same letter in which he recounts how he consoled himself in the midst of painful illness by thinking not of his mother but his father, and he has just told Lucilius – again by remembering (the notion of remembering) trauma in Virgil’s *Aeneid*^{lxix} – that there is *no benefit* in ‘re-handling past pain’ (*praeteritos dolores retractare, 78.14*) and that the key thing to be ‘cut out’ (*circumcidenda*) is the ‘recollection of past suffering’ (*ueteris incommodi memoria, 78.14*). Nevertheless, this is exactly what he has just done, in order to transmit empathy with Lucilius, who also suffers from catarrh and attacks of fever (78.1). He has already made the same ‘mistake’ here in the *ad Heluiam*.

Ovid, who is Seneca's key predecessor in writing (self-)consoling letters from exile as the 'living dead', makes a similar point about psychological wounds. Just as Helvia is a body so wounded that one more wound makes no difference (2.2), so Ovid in *Tristia* 2.105-6, and *Ex Ponto* 2.7.42/4.16.52 compares himself to Actaeon, who in *Metamorphoses* 3 was torn apart by his own hounds (a kind of figurative self-harm) to the extent that there were 'no spaces left for wounds' (*iam loca uulneribus desunt*, 3.237).^{lxx} In *Tristia* 3.11, Ovid explores the humiliating (rather than heroic) suffering caused when an enemy 'handles anew' his 'raw wounds (*et tamen est aliquis, qui uulnera cruda retractet*, 19; *rescindere crimina noli, / deque graui duras uolnere tolle manus*, 63-4), evoking Nestor's complaint at *Met.* 12.542-3 (*quid... / cogis et obductos annis rescindere luctus?*), as well as the scene in which *he* played doctor at *Remedia* 123-5 (discussed above). Even in *ad Marciam* 1.5, where Seneca again approaches a woman's grief after losing her son as a *uulnus* and aims to 'battle' with it, the emphasis is not on cutting open an old scar, but merely on drawing attention to it so that it might heal (*antiqua mala in memoriam reduxi et, ut scires hanc quoque plagam esse sanandam, ostendi tibi aequae magni uulneris cicatricem*). By contrast, to promise to make more wounds, as Seneca does in *ad Heluiam* 2-3, is to plunge into what is visualised as trauma, and to risk confusing identification with intent to harm, or self-harm.

In context, therefore, Seneca's strategy here - in what has been construed as a zero-sum game of who gets to be the wounded body and who gets to transcend it - is not straightforwardly (self-)heroizing. Instead, it summons mixed messages which risk putting Hippocratic-Stoic physician in the position of co-patient or passionate aggressor. Chapters 2-3 of the *ad Heluiam* seem to blend the near-caricature of the Stoic hero smiling under torture or while committing suicide (Cato is the paradigm here: e.g. *Ep.* 24.6-8, 67.13, cf. Petronius at *Tac. Ann.* 16.19), with the 'unhelpful' or pathological tendency to reopen

emotional wounds that belong to the past, to drown in grief rather than suppressing it. Cato may have been ‘heroic’ in ‘wounding his own wounds’ (*uulnera uulnerat sua, Tranq.* 16.4), yet the objective in his case was to die, not to console or heal. This cross-fertilisation of subject positions and of present/past is perhaps best figured by Seneca’s response to Ovidian exilic poetry, through which we might imagine Seneca taking up the perverse role of Ovid’s arch-enemy back in Rome, ‘re-handling’ the exile’s wounds, which have now become his own mother’s *uulnera*.

In other words, the dynamic of ‘displacement’ observed by Fantham in the *ad Heluian* is developed into a much more complex role-swapping and multiplication of subject positions. The disturbance of grief underpins an experiment in stepping into others’ frames of reference, in realising – as Seneca puts it in *Ep.* 78.4 – that the underlying consolation offered by consolatory literature is *amicorum adfectus* (the affection of friends), or the idea that we should continue to live not with others, but *for* and *through* them (*putabam, inquam, me uicturum non cum illis, sed per illos*). As Seneca states at the end of this epistle, the space of the (consolatory) letter itself creates the conditions for an exchange which is also a meeting – or joining/mixing – of minds and souls in anticipation of a reunion:

His te cogitationibus recrea et interim epistulis nostris uaca. Ueniet aliquando tempus,
quod nos iterum iungat ac misceat; quantulumlibet sit illud, longum faciet scientia
utendi.

Ep. 78.28

Refresh yourself with thoughts as these, and meanwhile reserve some hours for our letters. There will come a time when we shall be united again and brought together; however short this time may be, we shall make it long by knowing how to use it.

Here, and in the *ad Heluam*, the consolatory text is an affectively charged dimension which allows ‘participants’ to stay with the experience of shared vulnerability. Indeed, Seneca hints at the role literature plays in not only distracting from the pain of a cut, exposed body, but also in productively accompanying or even prolonging woundedness. Earlier in *Ep.* 78, for example, Lucilius is advised to think of the man who continued to read his book as he had his varicose veins excised, a version of the motif of Cato reading Plato’s *Phaedo* before having his veins cut and then rebandaged by doctors (78.18, cf. *Ep.* 24.7-8), which is developed by Tacitus in the famous scenes of Seneca’s and Petronius’ suicide: Seneca dictates a text to his secretaries while racked with pain from severed arteries, and Petronius has his veins cut, bandaged, and opened again, while listening not to philosophical speeches but to ‘light songs and frivolous verses’ (*Ann.* 15.63-4, 16.19). The *ad Heluam* varies this theme in the image of Helvia reading this very text as she experiences her wounds and as she is encouraged to read books that, in entering into her mind (*animum tuum intrauerint*), will substitute the invasive power of grief (*numquam amplius intrabit dolor*, 17.5).

The keeping open or re-opening of wounds in the *ad Heluam* sustains a pile-up (*omnia coaceruata*, 3.2) of contradictory perspectives and experiences that are not reducible simply to Seneca’s vicarious display of military virtue through the body of his masculinised mother, or to a performance of domination over the mother as matter. While Ovidian exile is staged as an oedipal drama of separation from the *patria* and from parricidal poetry which results in the fictional loss of his mother-tongue,^{lxxi} Seneca’s exile from his *optima mater* refuses the separation of son from mother and recasts it as ambivalent emotional and physical

intimacy in a traumatic present. Thus Helvia's wound is still 'fresh' as Seneca writes (*grauissimum est ... recens uulnus*, 3.1), just as it was in the past, a time her son was waiting to be over *before* writing to her (*dolori tuo, dum recens saeuiret, sciebam occurrendum non esse*, 1.2). And while her fortune 'totally depends' on his (*tota ex mea pendet*, 4.1), Helvia's *corpus non intactum* is, overtly, the condition of possibility for Seneca's existence. The more he lays figurative hands to her body-in-pain, and envisages her *uiscera* split open, the more he hints at the trauma of childbirth and at the cultural connections between childbirth and grief developed in the final chapters of the text (where attention is drawn to Helvia's virtuous fertility and the exemplarity of women like Cornelia, who lost ten of the twelve children she bore), and the more he reminds his audience that he was born from his mother's body. Just as a doctor's physical closeness to his patients is highlighted in ch.3, so a Greco-Roman medical imaginary of the female adult body as constituted by an opening that never stops bleeding (especially in childbirth) underwrites Seneca's metaphor of maternal grief as physical wound.^{lxxii} We might recall the famous simile at *Iliad* 11.267-72, in which the pain suffered by wounded Agamemnon is likened to the agony of a woman in labour, and compare the image of pains, which come upon or make their way into (*dýnon*) Agamemnon's strong body like an arrow (*bélos*) in 11.268-9, with Seneca's description of Helvia as a soldier transfixed (implicitly, by a weapon), as well as with the uncanny image of wounds 'piercing' or 'going down into' her flesh (*descenderunt*), at *ad Helu.* 3.1.^{lxxiii} In his *Moralia*, Plutarch assumes that in order to write about this kind of pain, Homer must have experienced it, or even have been in the midst of it: 'These lines, women say, were written not by Homer but by a Homerid, having given birth or while she was still in the throes of it and had the pain of labour, bitter and sharp, in her entrails.' (*Mor.*496d). As if to enter into the spirit of Plutarch's reading, Seneca makes his mother's maternal *dolor* inseparable from his own, and shows that the very experience of woundedness unconceals a permeability between self and other: as he puts it at

17.1, grief ‘is born’ (*nascitur*), just as Helvia’s giving birth (to him) is the origin of (the conjoining of) physical and emotional suffering in this text.

IV. Grief and time: measuring excess

The contradictory texture of the opening chapters, which both acknowledge the extent to which all great grief exceeds spatial and temporal limits (*omnis ... magnitudo doloris modum excedentis*, 1.3) and also assert the need to fix a limit on it (*ut desiderio tuo uelis a me modum statui*, 1.4), ushers in a nexus of structuring paradoxes, or near-paradoxes, in the more sober central section of this dialogue (chs.5-14), to which we now turn. The motif of setting a *modus* on (Helvia’s) grief while also, as we have seen, dwelling on its productive excess (indeed Seneca acknowledges at 16.1 that female grief is legitimately *inmoderatum*, or *paene*, ‘almost’) is developed in ch.11 as the Stoic principle of respecting nature’s boundaries. Thus ‘the person who restrains himself within the bounds of nature (*intra naturalem modum*) will not notice poverty, and whoever exceeds these bounds (*qui naturalem modum excedet*) will be pursued by poverty however rich they are’ (11.4). Yet Seneca’s consolation of his mother in her grief appeals *both* to the male aristocratic dignity upheld by keeping within a conventional limit or by maintaining bodily-moral integrity *and* to the freedom felt in realising that the (Stoic, but also Roman imperial) mind obeys no *modus*, in that it transcends geographical boundaries and earthly time. This freedom now finds its provocative echo, I suggest, in Helvia’s overwhelming ‘female’ grief and in Seneca’s participation in, opening up and sharing of her wounds in the opening chapters of this text.

Setting an (ethical) *modus* on grief is a spatio-temporal metaphor: the limit makes things stand still, and upright (the verb, as we saw above, is *statuo*, 1.4), preventing the subject from continuing to lie horizontal in a living death (*ipso rogo*, 1.3), from crouching or crawling (*reptare*, 1.1) and from giving in to the endless movement, or imperfect tense, of

grief.^{lxxiv} At the same time, nature, of which the human *animus* - in Stoic terms – is a part, is itself continually moving, in ‘perpetual agitation’ (*perpetua agitatio*, 6.7): divine nature ‘delights and even finds preservation in continual and very rapid movement’ (*dei natura adsidua et citatissima commutatione uel delectet uel conseruet*, 6.8). In chapters 6 and 7, Seneca famously makes the point that human migration – whether voluntary or involuntary (as in exile) – is normal and natural. Rome itself was founded by an exile, and is now a city packed with immigrants, as is Corsica, which ‘has more foreigners than locals’ (6.4). Some have even suggested, he notes, that the human spirit is innately restless and always wants to change location, delighting in novelty, all of which is to say that exile is not painful in the least. Yet crucially, the term Seneca uses to describe the flighty, restless human mind, made of the same stuff as divine spirit, is irritation (*inritationem animis*, 6.6). In other words, the emotional incitements or *exulceratio* of the opening chapters subtly underwrite the politically provocative notion that there is no such thing as exile (*nullum exilium*, 8.5): psychic ‘irritation’ is now recast, therapeutically, as a generative quality, and is used to celebrate cosmopolitanism.

Seneca goes on to qualify his investment in imperial movement by separating out ‘natural’ conquest (‘wherever the Roman conquers, he lives’, 7.7) from a corrupt empire which promotes an effeminising loss of control over appetites that should be bounded (*ad Helu*. 8, 10): the expansive, disquieted mind (*inquieta mens*) is not to be identified with uncontrolled, small bodies (*parua ... corpora*, 10.6). Yet later on, in 14.3, he again draws on the figure of maternity to test the boundaries of a law that sets limits, praising his mother for ‘always setting a limit’ (*inposuisti modum*) on the generosity of her sons, while *not* limiting her own (*cum tuae non inponeres*). The perpetual force of the mother’s grief *and* love, the expansiveness of the wounded mother who has nurtured her son inside her own body and thereby embodies the Stoic principle that as spirit *we are all one*, now suggests a model for

reflecting on and experiencing unboundedness in nature and the cosmos. This unboundedness and borderlessness (of grief, the wounded body, the intellectually ambitious mind, nature herself) is made distinct from corrupt human drives towards exceeding *modi*. In this way, Seneca cleaves a space for a virtuous male grief by offering a way to resist always collapsing that grief into a tragic, female lack of integrity, both bodily and moral. As Seneca writes at 10.10, *puta pecuniae modum ad rem pertinere, non animi*: it is the ‘measure’ of the mind, our mental horizons, which we should seek to expand, not our coffers, which should be kept within modest limits. It is this very meditation on expansive connectedness which affords the possibility of consoling the inconsolable mother, and also of turning this consolatory letter from exile into a new kind of *consolatio ad se*. Helvia will be comforted not by having her grief removed, in the conventional modern understanding of consolation’s function (it will persist, and is persisting as we read), but by immersing herself in unboundedness: in the domestic sphere, this is felt not only as a rupture of bodily integrity, but as intimacy and unconditional love (embodied in the mother), while the domestic also offers a template for understanding a larger, borderless reality. In this way, *omnia maxima ac minima* (8.3) are brought together, the exile’s alienation is reconfigured, and mother and son are united under the same vast sky (8.6, 20.2).

In the central chapters of the *ad Helviam*, and as Seneca again turns towards his mother (after 14.1, *mater carissima*), we see him toy with the ethical ambiguity of (female) grief, which can be more or less *inmoderatum*, but not *inmensum* (16.1), an adjective he uses several times elsewhere to indicate morally corrupt, uncontrolled appetites (*inmensis epulis; inmensum ... arbitrium*, 10.10). He sustains this tension between expressiveness/expansiveness and moral limit in 16.1, where we are asked to recall the cap of ten months placed by the *maiores* on women mourning lost husbands, a time span that in Roman terms matches that of pregnancy:^{lxxv}

et ideo maiores decem mensum spatium lugentibus uiros dederunt ut cum pertinacia muliebris maeroris publica constitutione deciderent. Non prohibuerunt luctus sed finierunt; nam et infinito dolore, cum aliquem ex carissimis amiseris, adfici stulta indulgentia est, et nullo inhumana duritia: optimum inter pietatem et rationem temperamentum est et sentire desiderium et opprimere.

ad Heluiam 16.1

For this reason our ancestors allotted a space of ten months' mourning for women who had lost their husbands, thus settling the violence of a woman's grief by public decree. They did not forbid them to mourn, but they set limits to their grief: for while it is a foolish weakness to give way to endless grief when you lose one of those dearest to you, yet it shows an unnatural hardness of heart to express no grief at all: the best middle course between affection and hard common sense is both to feel the longing of grief and to restrain it.

Having just drawn attention to her non-intact body at the end of ch.15, it is notable that Seneca makes direct reference to Helvia's pregnancies in the same chapter, praising her for not hiding her swelling belly (just as he is not hiding it here), and for not ending her children's lives prematurely by abortion (*nec intra uiscera tua conceptas spes liberorum elisisti*, 16.3). Curiously, in thinking about the female experience of time in mourning and about the male determination to impose an end on what it wants to see as a trackable linear process, Seneca imagines himself going back in time to witness his own pregnant mother's behaviour (he does not mention whether he is referring to her gestation of him, but the lack of detail allows this uncanniness to linger). Meanwhile, the rejected possibility of abortion,

raised only to be repressed (Helvia chose not to inflict wounds on her own *uiscera* in order to avoid the burden of Seneca/children, and the agony of losing them/him later) recalls the striking scene of Helvia's grief cutting into *uiscera ipsa* at 3.1, and Seneca's promise to use his philosophical knife on *her* (*rescindam*, 2.1; *secare*, 2.2).

Crucially, having reminded Helvia what their ancestors believed, in the distant past, Seneca also mentions that she knows women who *never* stopped mourning their lost sons (16.2). In grief, as in pregnancy, each ending is a possible new beginning: the new-born child, as all tragic and consolatory literature knows, is both a great joy and the potential for unimaginable pain. Moreover, Seneca does not say what the limit for his mother's grief is or should be *now*, only that infinite mourning is self-indulgent. Again, the text poses that *modus* as a provocation that is haunted by the open wounds of the mother's fertile, birthing body, and is challenged throughout by competing, non-linear temporalities of mourning. The irritation is nailed down at 16.1 in the sententious phrase *sentire desiderium et opprimere*, where the conjunction *et* can indicate both a sequence (first feel, then stop feeling) and an upsetting simultaneity (feel and repress at the same time, let it out and be numb, *ad infinitum*). It reverberates, too, in the sententious concluding statement of Seneca's paragraph on Helvia's sister, in whom Helvia will find *either* an end to her suffering, *or* a companion for it, as if the latter is just as good as the former, despite it implying that her pain may well carry on (*apud illam inuenies uel finem doloris tui uel comitem*, 19.3). The final chapters of the text are punctuated by thoughts of repeated or continuing pain (*Quotiens te inmodica uis doloris inuaserit*, 18.9; *cogitationes tamen tuas subinde ad me recurrere*, 20.1), and of a comfort that is always deferred to the future (*dum in illum portum ... peruenis*, 18.1).

Similarly, in 17.1, having made his strongest statement, again in militaristic terms, that Helvia should control and conquer her sorrow, Seneca then states: 'I know that this is not

something which is in our power (*in nostra potestate*), and that no strong feeling is under our control, least of all that which arises from sorrow, for it is ferocious (*ferox*) and stubborn (*contumax*) in the face of any remedy.’ The adjective *contumax*, echoing *licet omnis maeror contumax sit* in 1.4, reverberates with all the trauma of the consolation’s agitated beginning. The *impetus* of ch.1 is again revived when Seneca admits at 17.2 that the pain of grief tends to ‘regain its force to savage us’ (*impetum ad saeuendum colligit*) by the very fact of having been made to withdraw (*ipsa quiete*), another nod towards the idea explored in *Aeneid* 12, where Turnus’ anger is inflamed by healing (*aegrescitque medendo*, *Aen.*12.46). Grief returns (*resurgit*) and undermines us (*subruit*). It must be conquered, once and for all, Seneca counters, by *ratio* and by liberal studies, but this argument again leads us back to the past, to loss, and to familial ties: if only Helvia’s husband had been less devoted to the cultural norms of the *maiores*, who thought women should not be exposed to philosophy, she might have acquired resources useful for managing her grief now (17.4).

In reminding Helvia of her absent husband (the penultimate *uulnus* in 2.4), Seneca’s reflection on how traditional Roman rigidity (the *consuetudo maiorum*) limited his mother’s life risks undermining the exemplarity of the *maiores* who dictated for how long women mourned their husbands at 16.1, and gestures again towards the need to transgress rather than respect *modi*. Those limits, he hints, are not absolute but cultural. They are context-specific, and shift over time.^{lxxvi} Seneca comes close to usurping (or to going back in time and rewriting) the role of his own father when he urges his mother to study philosophy, or in other words to do what her husband disapproved of, thereby suggesting that *he* would have been the better partner, more attentive to her talents.^{lxxvii} Just as Seneca turns his gaze onto his mother’s (lost) past with her husband/his father, so Helvia is to ‘turn back to’ or ‘fall back on’^{lxxviii} her studies (*nunc ad illas reuertere*, 17.4): the verb *reuerto* resonates not only with her missed opportunities or longing for what is lost yet may again be found, but also with the

exile's desire to return, not least to his mother.^{lxxix} Seneca intervenes in his own father's disciplinary authority, acting at once as the substitute father *and* as the anti-father determined to identify with Helvia and thus to subvert the Oedipal drama by which the patriarch forcibly detaches son from mother.

V. Entanglements

I would like, in this final section, to address the last part of the consolation (18-20), which - as many scholars emphasize - offers comfort to Helvia by mapping out for her the network of loved-ones who, unlike Seneca, can be near her. This *solacium* takes shape not only in the literal content of Seneca's prose, but also - more intensively - in its poetics. Thus Helvia should lean on Seneca's brothers, her sons, whose inmost feelings (*intimos adfectus*) Seneca knows and who bend their lives around their mother's (*tibi ... tibi ... tibi*, 18.1-2). Her devotion to her two other sons will take the place of her longing for the absent one (*unius desiderium ... supplebitur*, 18.3), where *desiderium* echoes the consolation's passionate beginning, as discussed in **section II**.^{lxxx} She will be cheered by the playfulness and humour of her grandson Marcus (18.4), and is urged to embrace Novatilla (18.7), her granddaughter by adoption, and finally her sister (19). Yet at every step, this softer consolation serves not to distract Helvia from Seneca's absence, but to emphasize the extent to which they are emotionally and biologically intertwined. Indeed, already in ch.2, Seneca begins to chart the extent to which his mother's experience is woven into his own, and vice versa. He begins by reminding her that she (and the implication is, she *too*) lost her mother (*amisisti matrem*, 2.4), and was an abandoned child, the first of a chain of events that saw the loss of her uncle, her husband, and finally the death of three grandchildren, including Seneca's son. This final loss merges grandmother and son in shared grief. In 2.5, Helvia 'received back the bones of three grandchildren' (*ossa trium nepotum recepisti*) to the same 'lap/womb' (*sinus*) from which she

had let them go, an image which again places the focus on the mother's generative/loving body, and conjures up elegiac scenes of poet-lovers who have relegated themselves to foreign lands, and who wonder – from a very different perspective - whether their *own* bones will be recovered by their mother, or their lover. See for example Tibullus 1.3.5-6, and Propertius 1.17.11-12:

*non hic mihi mater
quae legat in maestos ossa perusta sinus.*

Tib. 1.3.5-6

No mother have I here
to gather the burned bones to her grieving bosom.

*an poteris siccis mea fata reposcere ocellis,
ossaque nulla tuo nostra tenere sinu?*

Prop. 1.17.11-12

Will you be able to ask about my death dry-eyed,
and never hold my bones to your breast?

Through Roman erotic elegy, Helvia's sorrows ring with echoes of the male exile's *desiderium*. The final blow, which comes in the news that her son has been sent into exile, is expressed by Seneca as follows: *raptum me audisti* (2.5). As well as evoking unspeakable tearing (cf. *dilectum verborum eripiat*, 1.3), the word *raptum* allows the mother's grief to materialise as a perspective on Seneca's page, by suggesting not the exile of an adult man, but rather the premature death of a young boy (cf. *aetate prima raptum*, *Ep.* 99.31), a child torn from the refuge of its mother's body, or a young boy violated like a girl, whose *puerilis*

hilaritas, boyish glee, Seneca imagines his mother thinking about, at chapter 15.1; the same word, *hilaritas*, is then used in 18.5 to describe the joyful humour of a small child, Helvia's grandson Marcus. *Raptum* stands out, because when it is used of persons the past participle of *rapiō* is almost always in the feminine in classical Latin, and is applied to elegiac girls, the Sabine women, Briseis, Proserpina, and so on, except when it is used of raped boys, like Ganymede.^{lxxxix} Thus having used hyperbolic force to gain new intimacy with his mother's *uulnera*, Seneca now writes himself into his text, in unspoken flashes, through his grieving mother's eyes, as a young boy, and as a passive victim of male violence. The only similar use of *raptus* referring to an adult citizen male in Latin literature comes at Ovid, *Tr.* 3.3.52 (*non tibi nunc primum, lux mea, raptus ero* / 'not now for the first time, light of mine, shall I have been torn from you'), where Ovid addresses his wife, again perhaps with the same empathetic importing of a 'female' experience of grief.

In chapter 19, the intertwining of subjects constituted by relationality intensifies further. Helvia is to seek out the embrace of Novatilla, who like both Seneca and Helvia has lost her mother, and whose role as Seneca's adopted daughter sets Seneca and Helvia in parallel: he is a father to her; Helvia will be not a grandmother but a mother to her, acting *for* Seneca (*pro me*, 18.7), and a great grandmother to future children. Even this duty is a substitution (*officium pro remedio erit*, 18.8). In the next thought, Helvia's father would be a great comfort to her if only he were not absent (*nisi abesset*, 18.9), a sentence which reads as a barely veiled displacement of Seneca's own (paternalistic? Oedipal?) desire to console his mother, especially as her father (unlike Seneca's father, Helvia's husband) is absent but still alive (*illo uiuo*, 18.9), just like the exiled son. Helvia should preserve herself for her father rather than sacrifice or 'deplete' herself for Seneca (*iustus sit te illi seruari quam mihi inpendi*, 18.9), because the happiness of his old age depends on her (*in te uertitur*, 18.9), just

as in turn, Helvia's fortune was said to hang on that of her son in chapter 4 (*tota ex mea pendet*, 4.1).

Finally, she should 'join herself', emotionally and physically, to her sister or step-sister, who was a mother to Seneca during his long illness, who like Helvia has lost a husband (also lost as an uncle to Seneca) and whose combined grief for both Helvia and exiled Seneca conjoins consoler and consoled in a different way again. The sister not only grieves *for* Helvia, or in her place (*non tantum pro te dolet*, 19.2), but also incarnates what is by now a familiar dynamic of substitution in this text: she *was* his mother, acted *as* his mother, when she gave him her maternal care (*maternoque nutricao*) through long illness (19.2), and conquered shyness for his sake (*pro me uicit*, 19.2) when supporting him for the quaestorship. Thus the wounded Seneca of the opening chapters of the consolation returns here, writing again from the position of *aeger* rather than *medicus*; illness, moreover, is seen as the catalyst for mutual transformation. The sister's role as Stoic exemplum also involves importing, once more, a tragic modality of mourning: while Helvia was made to channel Hecuba, her trauma piled up before her, the sister – it is implied – has the talent to play Alcestis, whom poets celebrate as the 'woman who offered to die in her husband's place' (*nobilitatur carminibus omnium quae se pro coniuge uicariam dedit*, 19.5).^{lxxxii} In other words, the very system of virtuous substitution promoted in this text as a source of consolation must also generate and regurgitate trauma, not least because it reminds Helvia here of the loss of her own husband (*uirum ... extulisti*, 2.4), while shrouding that loss, through Alcestis, in survivors' guilt. Yet that return to and residing in sorrow, the experience of the *maerentes*, can spur a sharing (*tu ad illam te...confer*, 19.3) and bring a comfort that does not consist necessarily, in the lessening or removal of grief.

Meanwhile Seneca now wants not only to reconfigure Helvia's pain, but also to take it on, as another tragic figure, the Oedipal scapegoat (*quidquid matri dolendum fuit, in me*

transierit, quidquid auiaae, in me. ‘whatever you were destined to suffer as a mother and a grandmother, may it pass to me’; ... *fuero tantum nihil amplius doliturae domus piammentum.* / ‘[I will not complain]...if only I prove to be the scapegoat for a family that will suffer no more.’ 18.6). The stylistic register of this passage and in particular the triple anaphora of *in me*, as Degli’Innocenti Pierini notes, is typical of high tragic drama.^{lxxxiii} Yet the scene of a tragic hero declaring themselves the vessel for everyone else’s pain recalls not just Seneca’s Oedipus (*mortifera mecum uitia terrarium extraho./ ... mecum ite, mecum, Oed.* 1058-61) but also his Jocasta, who in the *Phoenissae*, tells her warring sons *in me arma et ignes uertite, in me omnis ruat* (443).^{lxxxiv} Seneca is Hecuba, Alcestis, Jocasta, a mother and grandmother, a sick, Oedipal son at the centre of a cursed house held together by grief and love. Stoic communality is not just a consoling theoretical concept, it is implied, but an ethical orientation and perpetual struggle in which each family member is exposed to the pain of the other, even to the point of tragic (self-)sacrifice. What Williams (2006, 169) calls ‘the warmth of group comfort’ is fraught, in Senecan poetics, by ambivalence, conflicted emotions, and ethical responsibilities that are difficult to heed.

V. Conclusions.

I have argued that what might look like a dynamic of displacement in the *ad Heluiam* amounts to an intricate pattern of substitution in which Seneca both identifies with and distinguishes himself from his mother while immersing himself in a living circuit of real and imagined ethical relations. In this networked yet unique poetic experiment in Stoic ethics, Seneca is interested in the violent challenge to singular subjectivity that the maternal might represent, as a point of departure for ethical responsibility itself, and as a modality of political resistance. The *ad Heluiam* does not just do the work of self-fashioning, or extend *cura sui* to, as Foucault puts it, ‘the attention one devotes to care that others should take of

themselves'.^{lxxxv} Its literary excess and affective intensity disrupt self-coherence and linear time in ways that perform the experience of mourning in empathy with the perpetually wounded mother, and reveal what is missing in Foucault's tendentious account of imperial Stoicism as a quasi-medical regimen and as a social practice. This is a text that presents the *vulnera* of grief and loss as productive or therapeutic, even joyful, and at the same time as perverse, a frightening intimacy that lays open the fortress of male Stoic identity to desire, submission, the 'tragic' trauma of dependency. It is in proximity to the mother's wounded body that the philosophical-medical subject is torn. In other words, Seneca's porous, dramatic writing allows us to experience what is at stake - both positively and negatively - in rejecting a care of the self that is a model for governing rather than relating to others, and whose goal is to engage 'without desire and without disturbance' (Foucault 1986, 68). We must still situate the *ad Helviam* within an androcentric philosophical tradition which uses maternity and the maternal body as models for alterity and as figures for (male) ethical relation, in ways that have been the focus of much feminist critique.^{lxxxvi} At the same time, in addressing not just a mother but *the* mother, in a text which displays its wounds as *remedia*, Seneca makes space for thinking about 'what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself'.^{lxxxvii} It is in the playful parallel dimension of literature, he shows, that we can imagine ways of being-for-the-other while tolerating, momentarily, the conflicts it elicits. In this ever-expandable now, exile can only provide the conditions for resisting separation, and for re-asserting attachment.

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Endnotes:

ⁱ See McAuley (2016, 169) for summary discussion of ancient works, letters and speeches possibly addressed to the authors' wives and to (other men's) mothers.

ⁱⁱ On the hybridic form of Greco-Roman consolation generally, see Kassel 1958, Baltussen 2013, Scourfield 2013, Kaufman 2014; on the constellation of Senecan consolatory works, see especially Wilson 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nussbaum 1994, 395. Nussbaum's striking lack of interest in Seneca's consolations and consolatory *Letters* is indicative here. The marginalisation of these texts, despite the boom in Senecan studies in recent decades, continues to be a significant feature of scholarship on Seneca and on Roman Stoicism: it is reflected, for example, in the *Cambridge Companion to*

Seneca (Bartsch-Schiesaro 2015), which includes no chapter on consolation and not a single reference to consolation as a mode or theme in its index; a similar picture emerges from Bartsch-Wray's landmark *Seneca and the Self* (2009).

^{iv} Henderson 2002, Ker 2009, Gunderson 2015, Dressler 2012 and 2016, with Rimell 2015, 113-98. Cf. Schafer 2011, Wilson 2013, 109.

^v Inwood 2005, e.g. 89-91. Cf. Wildberger 2018.

^{vi} Wilson 2013. We can go some way to thinking through Seneca's interest in grief through what McIvor 2012 observes as a 'split orientation of mourning' in the more recent work of Judith Butler: see Butler 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2009, where she begins to see mourning as a resource for democratic politics and for critiquing normativity.

^{vii} Foucault 1986, 2005; Hadot 1995; cf. e.g. Nussbaum 1994, 13-14.

^{viii} Although length prohibits me from exploring it in detail here, the substantial body of interdisciplinary work which explores the creative or productive potential of dwelling on loss, in response to Freud's evolving thinking on mourning and melancholy (esp. Freud 1917, 1923), offers stimulus to understanding the conflicts and paradoxes I am drawing out in Seneca. See e.g. essays (including Butler's, cf. n.6, in Eng and Kazanjian 2003), Barthes 2011, Michaelson 2015.

^{ix} Holmes 2010, e.g. 5. Cf. King 2018, esp. 26-30.

^x See especially Kristeva's essay *stabat mater* in Kristeva 1987, with Söderbäck 2011.

^{xi} In opposition to the ideal moral-as-physical integrity of the free Roman male: cf. Walters 1997. On the (rhetoric of) the display of 'good' wounds in Rome, and on ambiguous attitudes to wounded Roman veterans, see Leigh 1995, Van Lommel 2015.

^{xii} Cf. Gloyn 2014 e.g. 452 on the *ad Polybium* as a 'multifaceted text'.

^{xiii} E.g. Wilson 2013 sees 'abstention from philosophy' as the most striking characteristic of the *ad Helviam* (cf. Graver 2009, 235: 'The consolatory letters and treatises of antiquity are

not, on the whole, philosophically ambitious’) whereas for the editor of Hadot 1987 (=1995), consolation is the ‘ideal genre in which to practice philosophy’.

^{xiv} E.g. for Ferrill 1966 the consolation is addressed to the emperor. Cf. Abel (1967, 48ff.), Griffin (1976, 21-2, 60-1), André 1995, Fantham 2007.

^{xv} Williams 2006, 148, cf. Ker 2009, 97-100, Hinds 2011, 57-8.

^{xvi} E.g. Reydams-Schils 2005, Gloyn 2017. Cf. Nussbaum 1994, 359-401 on ‘extirpation of the passions’ in Stoic thought. Curry 2018 emphasizes a drive towards ideal ‘wholeness’ in the *ad Heluam*.

^{xvii} E.g. Wilcox 2006, Wilson 2013. The idea of self-consolation echoes Cicero, who describes his (lost) *Consolatio ad se* in *ad Att.* 12.14.3. See Ker 2009, 88-9 on ‘the exiled Seneca’s novel role of *departed* consoler’, vis à vis Cicero.

^{xviii} Cf. Fantham 2007, 175 n.11, McAuley 2016, 170. On the charge of adultery see Griffin 1976, 59-62.

^{xix} Williams 2006, 149.

^{xx} Foucault 1986, 52-3, cf. Hadot 1995, 22-3, Foucault 2005, Scourfield 2013.

^{xxi} E.g. Williams 2014, 152. For a summary of approaches, see Sauer 2014.

^{xxii} McAuley 2016, 201.

^{xxiii} On debates around Stoic ‘proto-feminism’ (*not* a claim I am making for Seneca here), see Asmis 1996, Aikin and McGill-Rutherford 2014, with further bibliography.

^{xxiv} I have used Reynolds’ Oxford Classical Text (1977, reprinted 1983) throughout.

^{xxv} Curry 2018 defuses the issue by suggesting that Seneca’s ‘likening of himself to a corpse and his description of his own sense of being wounded demonstrate how great his need for rebuilding a healthy self-esteem as an exile is.’ (49).

^{xxvi} Cf. Salazar 2000, 223, for whom the simile in *ad Helu.* 3.1 ‘gives one a general idea of the prevailing attitude towards courage and the contempt for those who lack it’.

^{xxvii} Irigaray 1985.

^{xxviii} Reydams-Schils 2005, 139; Gloyn 2017, 28; cf. Berges 2015, 42, 159-60, Wildberger 2018.

^{xxix} Gloyn 2017, 33-47, cf. Williams 2006, 168-70.

^{xxx} Cf. Ker 2009, 96, taking *ad Marciam* 14.3 as a spur, on the unsettling alliance between the (violent) conqueror and the consoler who sets out to ‘conquer’ grief. As he puts it, ‘Senecan consolation is cognizant of its own acceptance of, even complicity in, the moral violence required for the social reintegration of the bereaved’. The *ad Heluiam* dwells on that violence yet also makes it inseparable from the experience of (shared) grief.

^{xxxi} Inwood 2005, e.g. 1-2, 31-2 on ‘distorting’ metaphor in Seneca.

^{xxxii} Gilligan 1982, Irigaray 1985, Kittay 1999, Held 2006. Fuller bibliography on feminist care ethics (which affirms the moral significance of the fundamental elements of relationships and dependencies in human life) is too expansive to cite here, but see esp. Noddings 1984, Cavarero 1997, Murphy 2011 and Whitney 2011 in Bergoffen and Weiss 2011, LaChance Adams 2014.

^{xxxiii} Cf. again Inwood 2005, 89-91 on Seneca’s ‘two-level mode of discourse’.

^{xxxiv} On (literal and metaphorical) *uulnera* as a condition of human life, and on the question of what they mean or stand for, and how to respond to, tolerate and heal them in Seneca, see *de Prov.* 4.4, 4.7, 5.3, 5.9, *de Const.Sap.* 6.3, 16.2, 19.3, *Ira* 1.16.7, *ad Marc.* 1.8, 9.3, 22.3, *de Vit.Beat.* 15.5, *de Tranq.* 16.4, *ad Pol.* 6.2, 12.4, 14.1, *Ep.* 59.12, 65.12, 67.6, 67.7, 78.19, 85.29, 95.15, 95.83, 96.1, 99.1, 99.29, 104.12.

^{xxxv} Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.76. Developments in philosophy and medicine (which began, says Seneca, with thinking about how to treat wounds), and the move towards ‘complicated variety’ (*multiplex uarietas*) in both fields, are seen as analogous in *Ep.* 95.15.

^{xxxvi} Interesting recent discussion of tragic catharsis as medical purging in Critchley 2019, 187-195.

^{xxxvii} Cf. Butler 2004, 21-2: ‘Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever...maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are’. See also n.6 and n.8.

^{xxxviii} Foucault 1986, e.g. 101 (care of the self ‘implied a medical perception of the world’) *et passim*.

^{xxxix} Trans. my own (*et passim*, unless stated otherwise).

^{xl} Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.111, Ovid, *Met.* 7.10f., Sen. *Ben.* 2.14.1. *OLD* s.v. *impetus* 5, 7.

^{xli} Cf. *OLD* s.v. *impetus* 3b; *Thes.* VII.1.608, 36ff., 51ff.

^{xlii} Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.76, with Sen. *Ep.* 99.1 (*adflicto enim et magnum uulnus male ferenti paulisper cedendum est*).

^{xliii} βάλλει βάλλει μ' ἐτύμα / φθογγά του στίβον κατ' ἀνάγκαν / ἔρποντος

^{xliv} E.g. *ad Pol.* 14.1, *Ep.* 78.4, 99.32.

^{xlv} The aim as outlined in *Tusc.* 4.35 is to make the consoled person disinterested in his object of desire, by convincing him how insignificant it is, how easily it can be secured from elsewhere, or put out of mind. He can be distracted by diversions or a change of scene, and many also think an old love can be driven out by a new one. Ovid offers precisely these cures in the same order in the *Rem.*

^{xlvi} Seneca's gerundives in 1.2 (*ad sustinenda remedia ... ad compescendos moderandosque luctus*) also pick up Ovid's *ille dolor uerbis emoderandus erit* at *Rem.* 130. On the (absent) mother in the *Remedia*, see Rimell forthcoming and Starnone forthcoming. Cf. Seneca in *Ep.* 99's letter within a letter, in which he told Marullus *nec putauit leniter illum debere tractari* (99.1).

^{xlvii} Houghton 2013, cf. Ov. *Rem.* 81 (*opprime...mala semina morbi*), and *Ars* 1.89-90, 2.717-18, 3.752.

^{xlviii} On Seneca's often overt engagement with Ovid, see Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1990, Hinds 2011, Michalopoulos 2020.

^{xlix} Cf. Pichon 1991, 302.

^l *uidi ego, quod fuerat primo sanabile, uulnus / dilatam longae damna tulisse morae*. Cf. Pinotti 1988 *ad loc.*

^{li} *Cupissem itaque primis temporibus ad istam curationem accedere*.

^{lii} 381-2: ἐάν τις ἐν καιρῷ γε μαλθάσση κέαρ / καὶ μὴ σφριγῶντα θυμὸν ἰσχυαίνῃ βία. Cf. Ovid *Rem.* 133-4 (*quin etaim accedes uitia irritesque uetando, / temporibus si non aggrediare suis*).

^{liii} See Tarrant 2012 *ad loc.*: 'An unintended reference to T.'s being wounded is hard to avoid'. Servius: '*dubie est locutus*'.

^{liv} Abel (1967) 53; Degli'Innocenti Pierini 1997, 111, n.13. At *Ep.* 12.9, Seneca uses Dido's lament in *Aen.* 4.653 (*uix et quam dederat cursum fortuna peregi*) in an ambiguous and potentially ironic way to promote an acceptance of death, in the context of his portrait of perverse Pacuvius, who like Petronius' Trimalchio has his own burial performed daily: Papaioannou 2020, 123 suggests that both Dido and Pacuvius are negative foils in *Ep.* 12, and we might speculate that similar connotations are operative in the evocation of Dido in *ad Helu.* 1. Cf. Mann 2006, Berno 2014. On citations of and allusions to Virgil in Senecan prose, cf. also Setaioli 1965, Mazzoli 1982, 215-32, André 1982, 219-33, Ker 2015.

^{lv} Trans. Costa 1994, 132.

^{lvi} Cf. Helvia, who has been 'virtually given the right to indulge in tears excessively, though not endlessly' (16.1). On Roman cultural expectations for mourning, which generally emphasize setting a limit (*modus*) to grief and define prolonged mourning or displays of

mourning as indulgent and unmanly/feminine, see Hope 2007, 173-210, Konstan 2006, 244-58, cf. Sen. *ad Marc.* 7.3, *Ep.* 63.2, 63.12-13, *Ep.* 99. Notably, Seneca admits in *Ep.* 63.14 that he himself should be included among examples of men who have been conquered by grief (*quos dolor uincit*). For the trope of limitless grief in Senecan tragedy see e.g. *Ag.* 691-2 (*non est lacrimis, Cassandra, modus, / quia quae patimur uicere modum*).

^{lvii} Cf. Ovid, *Met.* 6.539-40 (Philomela): *quin animam hanc, ne quod facinus tibi, perfide, restet, / eripis?*

^{lviii} *OLD* s.v. *dilectus* 1.

^{lix} For this use of *obducere* see *OLD* s.v.6c, with Costa 1994, 208.

^{lx} E.g. *sal... his [sc. uulneribus]... medicamentum est ... exsaniat enim*, Celsus 5.27.1B; Columella *De re rust.* 6.11.1; Galen *De methodo medendi* 5.307K. Cf. *tunc et uruntur et in altum reuocantur, ad Marc.* 1.8. On excising chronic wounds also cf. Ovid on Philoctetes (*partem Poeantius heros / certa debuerat praesequuisse manu, Rem.* 111-12).

^{lxi} The tendency of veteran soldiers to boast about their ‘virtuous’ wounds/scars is also mocked in Roman new comedy (the *locus classicus* is Terence *Eun.* 482-3, cf. Petronius 1.1). Discussion in Leigh 1995, Van Lommel 2015.

^{lxii} Galen *De methodo medendi* 3.160K, 6.384-385K (ulcers represent a dissolution of bodily unity). Wounds heal when flesh ‘fills’ the hole made by the wound, making the flesh whole again (e.g. Celsus 7.9.5: *uulnus impleat*).

^{lxiii} Cf. Sen. *De Prov.* 4.4 (*militares uiri gloriantur uulneribus...*), 4.7 (*audacter ueteranus cruorem suum spectat*); *de Const. Sap.* 16.2, 19.3, *Ep.* 67.6, and the exemplum of Cato at *de Tranq.* 16.4, *Ep.* 67.7, 67.13, 71.17, 95.72.

^{lxiv} *OLD* s.v. *uiscera*. Cf. Adams 1982, 95 and 116, with Ovid, *Am.* 2.14.27, Juvenal 9.43.

^{lxv} cf. *omnis alia cupiditas intactum praeteribit*, 13.3 (man to man).

^{lxvi} Cf. King 1998, 75-98, Loraux 1995, 111-15.

^{lxvii} Cf. Salazar 2000, who reads wounds in literary texts as straightforward opportunities for soldiers to prove their valour and masculinity by the public toleration of pain, quoting *ad Heluam* 3.1 as an example of the trope (2000, 223). For a more nuanced and ambivalent version of this argument in relation to Seneca, cf. Edwards 2000. Berkins-McCoy 2013 pushes in the opposite direction, arguing (through Aristotle) that Greek thought often extols the recognition and acceptance of vulnerability.

^{lxviii} Degl’Innocenti Pierini 1997, 112-13.

^{lxix} At 78.15 Seneca quotes *Aen.* 1.203 (*forsan et haec olim meminisse iuuabit*).

^{lxx} *uixque habet in nobis iam noua plaga locum* (*Ex P.* 4.7.42); *non habet in nobis iam noua plaga locum* (*Ex P.* 4.16.52), with Rimell 2015, 286-7.

^{lxxi} Ovid’s Oedipal poetic offspring are parricides at *Tr.* 1.1.111-114.

^{lxxii} Cf. King 1998, 75-98, Loraux 1995, 111-15.

^{lxxiii} Discussion in Holmes 2007, 72-4. Cf. *ad Helu.* 18.8 (*praecepta descendunt*).

^{lxxiv} Cf. Rimell 2017.

^{lxxv} Pregnancy was thought to span ten lunar months: see Virgil, *Ecl.* 4.61 (*matri longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses*), cf. Prop. 2.3.28, Gell. 3.16. Elsewhere, Seneca reports that the *maiores* set a limit of one year on female mourning (*Ep.* 63.13). A Roman funerary law (*FIRA* 2, pp.334, 335) cited by Paulus (*Opinions* 1.21.2-5, 8-14: see Shelton 1988, 126) states that ‘parents and children over six years can be mourned for a year, children under six for a month. A husband can be mourned for ten months, close blood relations for eight months. Whoever acts contrary to these distinctions is placed in public disgrace’. Cf. Hope 2007, 173-210, Konstan 2006, 244-58.

^{lxxvi} In line with the Stoic principle of not giving fixed *decreta* or *praecepta*, and of making ethical decisions based on precise circumstances. See Inwood 2005, 95-131.

^{lxxvii} Cf. *Ep.* 108.22, with Costa 1994, 216.

^{lxxviii} *OLD reuertor* 4a.

^{lxxix} Cf. Ovid, *Ex P.* 1.7.47 (*nec uitam ne copes nec ademit posse reuerti*); *Ex P.* 3.5.57 (*unde ego si fato nitor prohibente reuerti*). Ker 2009, 98 emphasizes only the relation between father and son, suggesting that Seneca echoes voices from his father's declamations (e.g. *Contr.* 2.7.9 on *pudicitia*, at *ad Helu.* 16.3), despite acknowledging what he calls 'a gentle criticism of the father'.

^{lxxx} As Ker observes (2009, 98) Seneca here subtly reconfigures the preface to the second book of Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae*: now he, rather than Mela, is promoted to a 'privileged position' in that he is set apart from the other two brothers.

^{lxxxix} Cf. *rapti uirgines, pueros* (*Sal. Cat.* 51.9); *iuuentus Romana ad rapiendas uirgines discurrit* (*Liv.* 1.9.10); *raptas...Sabinas* (*Virg. Aen.* 8.635); *Ganymeden...raptum* (*Cic. Tusc.* 1.65.7), *rapti Ganymedis honores* (*Virg. Aen.* 1.28), *rapto Ganymede* (*Ov. Fasti* 6.43) etc.

^{lxxxii} Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1997, 113 notes this vague allusion to Alcestis.

^{lxxxiii} Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1997, 117 with La Penna 1994.

^{lxxxiv} Degl'Innocenti Perini 1997, 117-119.

^{lxxxv} Foucault 1986, 52-3.

^{lxxxvi} Cf. Parker (2012). As Barthes put it (1975, 37), 'The writer is someone who plays with his mother's body', whether to 'glorify' or 'dismember' it.

^{lxxxvii} I quote Butler 2004, 29.