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The Metapoetics of Liberty Horace's Bacchic Ship in Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi*

While Bacchus is unsurprisingly well represented in Seneca's tragic corpus,¹ the same god of wine, tragedy, and the irrational makes a poor fit with the rationalising Stoicism of his philosophical prose work. Indeed, to examine Bacchus in the *De Tranquillitate Animi* (Dial. 9) is to examine Bacchus in philosophical Seneca *tout court*, since the last chapter of the dialogue (9.17) is the only prose passage in which Seneca mentions Bacchus explicitly. But this is not the only reason why Dial. 9.17 is a *unicum*. This highly debated chapter has often appeared inconsistent with Seneca's precepts, not least those preached in the very same dialogue, because it invites Seneca's interlocutor Serenus to enter into an elated state of mind, that of Platonic-Democritean *enthousiasmos*² and frenzied poetic sublimity, which scarcely seems to sit with the previously proposed notion of *tranquillitas*. These inconsistencies can be unravelled from a philosophical perspective once we analyse them in light of the dialogue's context and sources; similarly, two later passages in the epistles to Lucilius (Ep. 28 and 108), which feature Bacchus by association and have been at the heart of the same controversy over whether or not Seneca admits the poetic sublime, help shed light on the importance of contextualising these passages before interpreting Seneca's views.³ Yet this necessary emphasis on contextualisation ends up relativising Seneca's injunctions, and it seems to indicate that Seneca plays a double game with the sublime, which unrolls around a set of oppositions (listed in the Appendix to this chapter) and allows him to avoid taking a firm stance when it comes to accepting it.

¹ Bacchus appears in relation to Thebes (Her. F. 134, 1286; Phoen. 602), revelry (Ag. 724, Phaed. 445, Thy. 467, Her. O. 701), as a point of comparison (Her. F. 16–17, 66, 472–5; Her. O. 94), and mostly as wine (Her. F. 697, Ag. 886, Thy. 65, 687, 701, 900, 915, 973, 983, 987). He is present throughout the *Oedipus*, where he is the subject of an Ode (Oed. 403–508) that has been closely compared to Horace's Carm. 2.19 by Stevens 1999. On Bacchus in Roman drama see now Schiesaro 2016, although it does not cover Seneca's tragedies.

² Mazzoli 1970, 47–48; see Democr. D-K B18 and B21; Pl. Ap. 22b–c, Phdr. 245a, Ion 534b, Lg. 682a, 719c; cf. the pair in Cic. Div. 1.80 and de Orat. 2.194. On *enthousiasmos* in the Presocratics see Delatte 1934; on the hypothesis that the whole concept of poetic *enthousiasmos* is Plato's legacy, Tigerstedt 1970; on the relationship between Democritus's fragments and Plato, Mansfeld 2004.

³ On the *querelle* between Mazzoli and Setaioli see Del Giovane 2015, 11 with bibliography. Michel 1969 suggests that the sublimity of *magnitudo animi* expressed in Ep. 41, 94, and 120 and depicted in the tragedies is also indebted to Longinus's definition of the *hypsos* as μεγαλοφροσύνης ἀπήχημα, 'the echo of a noble mind' (Longin. 9.2); on the Senecan sublime and Stoic *megalopsuchia* see also Mazzoli 1970, 46–59 and 1991, 180–183; on Seneca's *De Tranquillitate* and Longinus see Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 53–59 and Staley 2010, 42–47.

This double game is more easily understood if we accept that a strict philosophical perspective does not exhaust the complex message of the *De Tranquillitate*: a strong poetic and specifically metapoetic vein runs through the dialogue alongside its more explicit philosophical content. If we may read the addressee as a double for the speaker, Serenus's restlessness is mirrored by Seneca's inconstant attitude towards literary sublimity and by his inability – or rather conscious refusal – to reconcile the contradictory aspects of poetry and philosophy in a coherent whole. This is perhaps not only a feature of intellectually honest philosophers, but more specifically of the inherent 'negative capability' of literary geniuses.⁴ The same fickleness and inconsistency displayed by Serenus and Seneca are shared by Horace, whose erased presence throughout the dialogue, and particularly at Dial. 9.17, brings out the literary character of the *De Tranquillitate* and its metapoetic vein.⁵ When considered under this Horatian lens, even the main metaphor of the dialogue, the sea voyage of Serenus's distressed mind, ends up entangled in implications of the poetic sublime, and Dial. 9.17, with Bacchus as its patron deity and Horace as its main model, turns into a metapoetic reflection on both Serenus's and Seneca's literary and poetic ambitions.

1. A foreword on Ep. 28 and 108

Seneca's Ep. 28 and 108 show explicitly how inappropriate *enthousiasmos* is to the development of the *proficiens*, but just as clearly these negative connotations are bound within the specific context of the letters, and as such are liable to disappear once rid of their framework. Ep. 28 starts by discouraging Lucilius from using travel as a means to get rid of 'his sadness and heaviness of mind' (Ep. 28.1 *tristitiam gravitatemque mentis*).⁶ To do that, Lucilius 'must lay aside the burden of his soul' (Ep. 28.2 *onus animi deponendum est*), an *insidens pondus* similar to the one that Virgil's Sibyl tries to shake from her heart:

⁴ Negative capability describes the artistic ability to contemplate the world without feeling the need to reconcile its contradictions in a coherent system; the concept was coined by John Keats (in a letter dated 22 December 1817) with reference to Shakespeare: '*Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.'

⁵ On Horace's absent presence see n.68.

⁶ Seneca's text is from Reynolds's OCT unless otherwise indicated. Translations are freely adapted from Gummere's Loeb for the *Epistles* and Basore's Loeb for the *Dialogues*.

talem nunc esse habitum tuum cogita qualem Vergilius noster vatis inducit iam concitatae et instigatae multumque habentis in se spiritus non sui:

 bacchatur vates, magnum si pectore possit
 excussisse deum.

vadis huc illuc, ut excutias insidens pondus...

Think that your behaviour is like that of the seer – as our Virgil described her – excited and spurred, having in herself much inspiration that is not her own:

 The seer raves like a Bacchante, if perchance she may shake
 the great god from her heart.

You wander here and there, to rid yourself of the burden that lies within you...

(Sen. Ep. 28.3 [Verg. A. 6.78–79])

The verb *bacchari* here is the only reference to Bacchus in the *Epistles*, and it is indirect at that, since the *magnus deus* who occupied the Sibyl's heart was actually Apollo, as specified in the line that preceded Seneca's quotation (Verg. A. 6.77) and which Seneca has here omitted. It could be argued that the erasure of Apollo helps to present *enthousiasmos* in negative terms as a direct consequence of Bacchus's influence,⁷ as much as the parallel involvement of Bacchus and Apollo in *enthousiasmos* is unsurprising.⁸ Such alteration and decontextualisation of Virgil's text also seems to highlight our need to interpret the Sibyl's *enthousiasmos* in the light of the letter's prescriptions. The passage provides no direct refutation of Bacchic *enthousiasmos*, just as the context does not advise against travel *a priori*, but uses the image of the raving Sibyl as a necessary step to shake off the restlessness of one's soul before starting to travel. 'Any change of place,' as Seneca himself claims later in the same epistle, 'will

⁷ Already Heraclitus apparently accepted the Apolline *enthousiasmos* of the Sibyl (D-K B92 *apud* Plu., *Moralia* 397A) and condemned frenzy inspired by Dionysus, a god comparable to Hades (D-K B15 *apud* Clem.Al. *Protr.* 22); on the interaction between the two passages see Delatte 1934, 6–21. In contrast to Apolline *enthousiasmos*, Dionysiac frenzy was not initially poetic, see Tigerstedt 1970, 176–177.

⁸ In the first line of the *Oedipus*'s so-called 'Bacchus Ode,' Bacchus, appearing in a positive light, is introduced with the phrase *lucidum caeli decus*, 'bright ornament of heaven' (Oed. 405), a phrase that Horace famously uses for Apollo and Diana in the second line of the *Carmen Saeculare*. The description echoes a similar phrase applied to Apollo by Oedipus (Oed. 250 *o sereni maximum mundi decus*, 'greatest ornament of the clear world,' also used at Her. F. 592), see Boyle 2011, 210–211. Cf. also the famous line from Ovid's *Medea*, fr.2 Ribbeck *feror huc illuc, vae, plena deo*, 'I am carried hither and thither, alas, full of the god,' with Gowers 2016, 567 asking: 'Bacchus, or Apollo?'

become pleasurable once that evil is removed' (Ep. 28.4 *at cum istuc exemeris malum, omnis mutatio loci iucunda fiet*).⁹

Something similar happens in Ep. 108, which equates pupils enchanted by the phrases of the philosophers with the ecstatic worshippers of Cybele:

quidam veniunt ut audiant, non ut discant, sicut in theatrum voluptatis causa ad delectandas aures oratione vel voce vel fabulis ducimur. magnam hanc auditorum partem videbis cui philosophi schola deversorium otii sit. non id agunt ut aliqua illo vitia deponant, ut aliquam legem vitae accipiant qua mores suos exigant, sed ut oblectamento aurium perfruantur. aliqui tamen et cum pugillaribus veniunt, non ut res excipiant, sed ut verba, quae tam sine profectu alieno dicant quam sine suo audiunt. quidam ad magnificas voces excitantur et transeunt in adfectum dicentium alacres vultu et animo, nec aliter concitantur quam solent Phrygii tibicinis sono semiviri et ex imperio furentes. rapit illos instigatque rerum pulchritudo, non verborum inanium sonitus.

Some come to hear and not to learn, just as we are led to the theatre for the pleasure of delighting our ears, whether by speech, or by song, or by the plays. You will see that a large part of the listeners regard the philosopher's lecture room as a lounging-place for their leisure. They do not set about to lay aside any faults there, or to receive a life's rule by which they may test their habits; they merely wish to have full enjoyment of the delights of the ears. And yet some even arrive with notebooks, to note down not the subject matter, but only the words, so that they may repeat them to someone else with as little profit to the others as they themselves received when they heard them. Some are stirred at the magnificent phrases, and they adapt themselves, with enthusiasm in their face and in their soul, to the emotion expressed by the speakers, just like the emasculated Phrygian priests are used to being roused by the sound of the flute and go mad by command. They are enchanted and excited by the beauty of the subject matter, not by the jingle of empty words. (Sen. Ep. 108.6–7)

I agree with Setaioli that the comparison with the 'emasculated Phrygian priests' appears far from dignifying,¹⁰ not because the Corybantes also have contemptible connotations elsewhere in Seneca,¹¹ but because these pupils are described immediately after another group which is here equally

⁹ The motif is already in Democr. D-K 247.

¹⁰ See Setaioli 1985, 804–805; 2000, 145–146 and Gunderson 2015, 20; Mazzoli 1970, 130 reads the simile, and the whole last group of pupils, as unambiguously positive, and in opposition to the previous ones, even though Seneca inserts no adversative conjunction to highlight this change; similarly Mazzoli 1991, 192–194; Schiesaro 1997, 100 and 2003, 23–24; and, more cautiously, Del Giovane 2015, 11–12.

¹¹ Sen. Dial. 7.26.8; cf. Quint. Inst. 5.15.22 with Setaioli 2000, 145–146.

condemned: those who note down the teacher's empty words (*verba*), without grasping the meaning of the teaching (*res*). However, the sentence directly following the comparison sheds doubt on these negative connotations: it specifies that if there is a problem with this last group of pupils, then it is not *enthousiasmos* in itself, but the fact that they do not understand that this is aroused not by the 'jingle of empty words' (*verborum inanium sonitus*) but rather by 'the beauty of the subject matter' (*rerum pulchritudo*).¹² Similarly, the problem with the previous group of pupils was not that they took notes (arguably a commendable activity), but the fact that their aim was to note down the *verba* rather than the *res*. As in Ep. 28, *enthousiasmos* is neither negative nor positive – its connotation depends on the context. When Seneca tells us that it is the *rerum pulchritudo* of the philosophical doctrines and its high moral *telos* that has stirred the pupils, even the apparently negative comparison with the Corybantes may be reinterpreted in a positive light.¹³ As confirmation of this, the *magnificae voces* of the philosophers reappear positively as long as they can quickly be translated into the *res* itself (Ep. 108.35 *magnificas voces et animosas, quae mox in rem transferantur*, 'magnificent utterances, full of spirit, which may at once be turned into facts'). Still in the same letter, Seneca claims that in order to follow Attalus's teachings, and to demonstrate that he is capable of abstinence, he keeps his 'stomach unacquainted with wine' (Ep. 108.16 *vino carens stomachus*); and yet, shortly afterwards, he corrects himself by recommending moderate abstinence, which is even more difficult to practice (Ep. 108.16 *modum servem et quidem abstinentiae proximior, nescio an difficilior*, 'I have observed a limit which is indeed close to abstinence, and possibly even more difficult'). Both total abstinence and moderate abstinence are to be interpreted as different exercises in wisdom. Only the context and the grade of one's learning will determine which of the two is recommended for one's practice at a specific point in time.

The same connections of Bacchus with travel, *enthousiasmos*, and wine that we have seen in the *Epistles* reappear in the *De Tranquillitate* with similar inconsistencies. In addition, Bacchus here also figures as an image for literary or poetic aspirations and as a possible metaphor for freedom of speech

¹² To put it with Mazzoli 1991, 195, the good pupil should be able to read 'oltre la superficie dei *verba*, la filigrana delle *res*.' Cf. Gunderson 2015, 21: 'they have things half-right, these half-men (*semiviri*).' On Seneca's condemnation of aesthetic hedonism see Mazzoli 1970, 26–28, 74–76.

¹³ On the positive connotations of both *enthousiasmos* and the simile, see Mazzoli 1991, 192–194 and Del Giovane 2015, 11–12. Comparison with Plato (Del Giovane 2015, 10, 12–14) is instructive, since Plato's Corybantes have been subject to a similar debate: see Wasmuth 2015 for the argument that they are used as an image of Socratic philosophical activity, a 'remedy for unhealthy souls,' and a preparatory stage for philosophical learning.

in Neronian political discourse. More than anything, the *Epistles* show us the importance of interpreting these aspects of the god as grounded within the precise context of Seneca's prescriptions. The Phrygian priests are presented in negative terms if we think that the pupils are stirred by the *verba* and not by the *res*, but they also become an image of the irrational, sublime excitement aroused by philosophy if the same *enthousiasmos* is stirred by the philosophical themes rather than the philosopher's words. A similar double tension is present in the *De Tranquillitate*, and it underscores the difference between Seneca's preaching of philosophical practice and the literary aspirations of both Seneca and his interlocutor Serenus.

2. The Contradictions of the *De Tranquillitate*

The *De Tranquillitate* opens with a far-from-serene Serenus¹⁴ presenting his mysterious distress to Seneca as if he were speaking to a physician of the soul and asking for a diagnosis.¹⁵ Serenus is not sick, but he is not in good health either;¹⁶ he is certain that his malady, whatever it is, cannot be cured by the mere passing of time, which in his case may implant the sickness even more.¹⁷ Serenus divides his symptoms into three spheres: style of life, public life, and 'studies' (*studia*),¹⁸ and in all three cases he starts by demonstrating to Seneca that he has been following Stoic precepts, but has not managed to stick to them.

He starts by defending himself preemptively, giving a long account of his frugal ways of life (Dial. 9.1.5–7), only to admit that the sight of luxury and opulence 'dazzles his mind' (Dial. 9.1.8 *praestringit animum*):¹⁹ after his frugality, this splendour surrounds him and entices him almost like a magic spell (Dial. 9.1.9 *circumfudit me ex longo frugalitatis situ venientem multo splendore luxuria et undique*

¹⁴ Motto / Clark 1993, 141: 'a rather ironic and disquieting cognomen.'

¹⁵ Dial. 9.1.2 *quare enim non verum ut medico fatear?*, 'why should I not confess the truth to you as to a physician?'; 9.1.4 *dicam quae accidant mihi, tu morbo nomen invenies*, 'I shall tell you what befalls me – you will find a name for my malady.'

¹⁶ Dial. 9.1.2 *nec aegroto nec valeo*, 'I am neither sick nor well.'

¹⁷ Dial. 9.1.3 *vereor ne consuetudo... hoc vitium mihi altius figat*, 'I fear that habit... may cause this fault of mine to become more deeply implanted.'

¹⁸ Lotito 2001, 29 recognises these spheres as 'the world of objects / material life,' of 'community and society,' and 'of words and writing, of the communication and objectification of ideas.'

¹⁹ Cf. Dial. 9.1.9 *paulum titubat acies, facilius adversus illam animum quam oculos attollo*, 'my sight falters a little, for I can lift up my heart towards it more easily than my eyes.'

circumsonuit, ‘coming from a long abandonment to thrift, luxury has poured around me the wealth of its splendour, and echoed around me on every side’).²⁰ This sight does not make him morally worse (*peior*), but it does make him *tristior* (Dial. 9.1.9 *recedo itaque non peior, sed tristior*, ‘and so I come back, not worse, but sadder’), pointing to the vocabulary of melancholic depression (*tristitia*) that the physician Seneca will recognise more explicitly in his diagnosis.²¹ A similar structure applies to Serenus’s description of his symptoms as regards to public life (Dial. 9.1.10–12): he claims that he has been following Stoic precepts when he repeats to himself that he should ‘let no one rob him of one single day’ and ‘enjoy the tranquillity that is remote from public and private concerns’ (Dial. 9.1.11 *nemo ullum auferat diem... ametur expers publicae privataeque curae tranquillitas*).²² And yet, he is easily persuaded to ‘rush back’ into public life by the earthly ambition to follow and surpass noble *exempla* found in the literature (Dial. 9.1.12 *sed ubi lectio fortior erexit animum et aculeos subdiderunt exempla nobilia, prosilire libet in forum*, ‘but when my mind has been aroused by reading of great bravery, and noble examples have applied the spur, I want to rush into the forum’). Mention of Serenus’s readings takes him to describe the third category of symptoms, *studia*. Unlike the Corybantic pupils, Serenus knows that he must prefer *res* to *verba*, subject matter to words:

in studiis puto mehercules melius esse res ipsas intueri et harum causa loqui, ceterum verba rebus permittere, ut qua duxerint hac inelaborata sequatur oratio: ‘quid opus est saeculis duratura componere? vis tu non id agere ne te posteritaceant? morti natus es, minus molestiarum habet funus tacitum. itaque occupandi temporis causa in usum tuum, non in praeconium aliquid simplici stilo scribe: minore labore opus est studentibus in diem.’

And in my studies I think that it is – by Hercules! – better to fix my eyes on the theme itself and to speak for it, entrusting the words to the theme so that unstudied language may follow wherever the theme may lead. I say: ‘What need is there to compose something that will last for centuries? Will you not give up striving to keep posterity from being silent about you? You were born for death; a silent funeral is less troublesome! And so, to pass the time, write something in simple style, for your own use, not for publication; those who study for the day have less need for labour.’

(Sen. Dial. 9.1.13)

²⁰ As Lotito 2001, 31 notes, since he aspired to become senator (Dial. 9.1.10), luxury must have been difficult to avoid for the well-to-do historical Serenus.

²¹ See Kazantzidis 2011, 160–180, and below.

²² Serenus seems to have read the *De Brevitate Vitae*, see Cavalca Schirotoli 1981, 56.

As in the previous cases, there are already a number of elements here that point to the implicit subversion of the Stoically inflected precepts that Serenus seems to know all too well: the interjection *mehercules*, the swift and abrupt reduplication of Serenus as the actor and addressee in his own *prosopopeia*, the hurried direct questions, the dramatic oxymoron *morti natus es*, which turns the sentence into an exclamation, and even a likely allusion to Horace's *carpe diem*.²³ All these elements end up transforming what should be an *inelaborata oratio* into precisely the opposite, the *oratio sollicita*, 'agitated style,' that, according to Seneca, 'does not suit the philosopher' (Ep. 100.5 *oratio sollicita philosophum non decet*).²⁴ They emphasise the restlessness of Serenus's soul – a restlessness that keeps him from being the sober-minded writer, philosopher, or orator that he wishes to be. Indeed, in the next paragraph, the soul is uplifted to *megalophrosune* (*cogitationum magnitudine*) and the *oratio*, no longer *inelaborata* – and, like that of Virgil's Sibyl,²⁵ no longer Serenus's own – takes him to the sublime:

rursus ubi se animus cogitationum magnitudine levavit, ambitiosus in verba est altiusque ut spirare ita eloqui gestit et ad dignitatem rerum exit oratio; oblitus tum legis pressiorisque iudicii sublimius feror et ore iam non meo.

Then again, when my mind has been uplifted by the greatness of its thoughts, it becomes ambitious of words, and with higher aspirations it desires higher expression, and language issues forth to match the dignity of the theme; forgetful then of my rule and of my more restrained judgement, I am swept to loftier heights by an utterance that is no longer my own.

(Sen. Dial. 9.1.14)

Serenus finally explains that his malady is grounded in 'a frailty of good intention' (Dial. 9.1.15 *bonae mentis infirmitas*) which does not allow him to stick to the Stoic precepts in the three aforementioned cases. Introducing us to the sea-journey metaphor that will permeate the dialogue, he claims to be 'distressed not by a tempest, but by seasickness,' *ναῦς-εα* (Dial. 9.1.17 *non tempestate*

²³ Cavalca Schirotoli 1981, 58.

²⁴ See Cavalca Schirotoli 1981, 57; cf. Ep. 75 with Mazzoli 1991, 183–187 on the opposition between *oratio inelaborata* and *sollicita*, of which the latter is here accepted as far as it is useful, but perhaps with slightly more indulgence than expected.

²⁵ Cf. *ore iam non meo* and Verg. A. 6.49–50 *maiorque videri | nec mortale sonans*, 'she seemed bigger, and did not sound mortal,' with Cavalca Schirotoli 1981, 58.

vexor sed nausea); therefore, he asks Seneca to provide him with ‘a remedy that may put this fluctuation to rest,’ (Dial. 9.1.17 *remedium quo hanc fluctuationem meam sistas*), and to ‘deem him worthy of being indebted to Seneca for tranquillity’ (Dial. 9.1.17 *dignum me putes qui tibi tranquillitatem debeam*).

If we were looking for consistency in Seneca’s work, we would expect Seneca’s reply to Serenus to be in line with the precepts of Ep. 108, a recommendation to prefer the *res* to the *verba*, philosophical subject-matter to (literary) style. However, that line of thought is here championed by Serenus rather than by Seneca, whose response to the third category of Serenus’s symptoms is quite surprising. Seneca does not provide an actual diagnosis for Serenus’s malady: at Dial. 9.2.10 he refers to the symptoms as *taedium* (‘boredom’), *displicentia sui* (‘dissatisfaction with one’s self’), and *otii sui tristis atque aegra patientia* (‘sad and languid endurance of one’s leisure’). He speak of the malady as *maeror marcorque* (‘mourning and melancholy’), a choice of words that seems to imply an identification of Serenus’s illness with Aristotelian melancholy, *tristitia*.²⁶ However, Seneca lingers instead on the opposite state of mind, and on how to achieve it. Just as Serenus had equated his malady with seasickness, Seneca establishes a firm parallel between *tranquillitas*, which the Greeks called *euthumia*, like Democritus in his treatise *peri euthumiēs* (Dial. 9.2.3), and *galēnē, tranquillitas maris* (Dial. 9.2.1 *tranquilli maris*, ‘tranquil sea’).²⁷ This state of mind consists of a sort of *ataraxia* (Dial. 9.2.3 *non concuti*, ‘to be unshaken’)²⁸ and a ‘peaceful state,’ a sort of golden mean, ‘never uplifted nor ever cast down’ (Dial. 9.2.4 *placido statu... nec attollens se umquam nec deprimens*).

Seneca’s answer to Serenus with regard to the *studia* at the end of the dialogue also starts by reiterating this rhetoric of the *modus*, and then states that in order to achieve *tranquillitas* ‘the mind must be diverted to amusements’ (Dial. 9.17.4 *mens est... ad iocos devocanda*). As authoritative examples, he mentions Cato’s drinking and Scipio’s dancing, and in both cases he reiterates the practice of moderation, all of which is in line with the previous precepts (Dial. 9.17.4–7). The real inconsistencies start between Dial. 9.17.8 and the end of the work: Dial. 9.17.8 already strikes the

²⁶ On the term see Cael.Aur. de Morb. Chron. 1.180 *melancholici semper tristes ac nulla paene hilaritate laxati esse videantur*, ‘those suffering from melancholy are always sad and are practically never cheerful and relaxed.’ On Seneca’s diagnosis of Serenus’s malady as *dusthumia* and *tristitia*, see the whole discussion in Kazantzidis 2011, 161–179.

²⁷ On the not entirely accurate translation of *euthumia* as *tranquillitas*, see Setaioli 1988, 105–106; Lotito 2001, 11–12; Cic. Fin. 5.23 translates it as *securitas*. On the sea metaphor, which is shared by Plutarch’s *On Tranquillity Of Mind* and probably betrays a diatribic substratum, see Donini / Gianotti 1979, 107–109; Cavalca Schiroli 1981, 60–61; Lotito 2001, 15–20.

²⁸ On *tranquillitas* and *ataraxia* see Striker 1996, 183–195.

reader because of its inconsistency with Dial. 9.2.13–15, where Seneca, as in Ep. 28, had rejected *mutatio loci* as a remedy to cure Serenus’s distress. Now, however, he recommends it:

et in ambulationibus apertis vagandum, ut caelo libero et multo spiritu augeat attollatque se animus; aliquando vectatio iterque et mutata regio vigorem dabunt convictusque et liberalior potio. non numquam et usque ad ebrietatem veniendum, non ut mergat nos, sed ut deprimat; eluit enim curas et ab imo animum movet et ut morbis quibusdam ita tristitiae medetur; Liberque non ob licentiam linguae dictus est inventor vini, sed quia liberat servitio curarum animum et adserit vegetatque et audaciorem in omnis conatus facit.

And, too, we ought to take walks out-of-doors in order that the mind may be enlarged and uplifted by the open air and much breathing; sometimes it will get new vigour from a journey by carriage and a change of place and festive company and generous drinking. At times we ought to reach the point even of intoxication, not drowning ourselves in drink, yet succumbing to it; for it washes away troubles, and stirs the mind from its very depths and heals its sorrow just as it does certain ills of the body; and the inventor of wine is not called the Releaser on account of the licence it gives to the tongue, but because it frees the mind from bondage to cares and emancipates it and gives it new life and makes it bolder in all that it attempts.

(Sen. Dial. 9.17.8)

In addition to the abrupt about-face on the subject of *mutatio loci*, inconsistency with the beginning of the dialogue is also shown by an acceptance of lofty excesses which seems to run contrary to the moderation required by *tranquillitas*, in particular the notion that an ‘augmentation’ and uplifting of the soul (*augeat attollatque se animus*) could be useful in achieving tranquillity. The emphasis on the adjective *liber* in the first two lines (*caelo libero* and *liberalior potio*) anticipates the praise for *Liber* / Bacchus, the god of wine who ‘liberates from worries’. This is the climax of the paragraph, where Seneca accepts the use of wine not just in moderation, but actually to the point of intoxication (*ebrietas*),²⁹ so that it may even ‘draw us down,’ *ut deprimat* – precisely the same verb used, at Dial. 9.2.4, to describe what *euthumia* should *not* do.³⁰ At Dial. 9.17.9, the acceptance of Bacchus / wine,

²⁹ Cavalca Schirotoli 1981, 137–138 thinks instead that this is not the unrestrained *ebrietas* that Seneca condemns elsewhere (on which see Motto / Clark 1993, 155–161), but *methē* regulated by *metriotēs*.

³⁰ Berger 1960, 351 notes that we would expect here a verb with precisely the opposite sense (*attollat* vel sim.); Cavalca Schirotoli 1981, 138 explains the verb away by noting that it is a milder corrective of *mergere*, but the inconsistency with Dial. 9.2.4 remains.

and of the liberation (*libertatem*) it provides, is highlighted again, to the point where sobriety is even defined as *tristis*, precisely the adjective that seems to point to the diagnosis of Serenus's malady.³¹

sed ut libertatis ita vini salubris moderatio est... sed nec saepe faciendum est, ne animus malam consuetudinem ducat, et aliquando tamen in exultationem libertatemque extrahendus tristisque sobrietas removenda paulisper.

But, as in freedom, so in wine there is a wholesome moderation... Yet we ought not to do this often, for fear that the mind may contract an evil habit, but there are times when it must be drawn into rejoicing and freedom, and gloomy sobriety must be banished for a while.

(Sen. Dial. 9.17.9)

Finally, Seneca moves from equating intoxication from wine and poetic inspiration to accepting precisely that frenzy that Serenus had identified as one of the symptoms of his distress. Dial. 9.17.10 contains three quotations – from ‘a Greek poet,’³² Plato,³³ and Aristotle³⁴ – that accept the excesses of a frenzied *melancholia* in the case of poets and artistic geniuses. Subsequently, Seneca re-proposes Serenus's description of poetic *enthousiasmos*, making its connection to Virgil's Sibyl even more explicit:³⁵

nam sive Graeco poetae credimus ‘aliquando et insanire iucundum est,’ sive Platoni ‘frustra poeticas fores compos sui pepulit,’ sive Aristoteli ‘nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit’: non potest grande aliquid et super ceteros loqui nisi mota mens. [11] cum vulgaria et solita contempsit instinctuque sacro surrexit excelsior, tunc demum aliquid cecinit grandius ore mortali. non potest sublime quicquam et in arduo

³¹ Cf. Sen. Dial. 3.1.13 with Mazzoli 1970, 56.

³² Anacreon (D'Agostino 1929, 65); Menander (Mazzoli 1970, 178–179); or perhaps Alcaeus (see Cavalca Schioli 1981, 139). Setaioli 1988, 61–63, 108 n.427 suggests that Seneca's gnomology listed it as anonymous, but anonymity may also serve to emphasise the Horatian paternity of the Latin version, see below.

³³ Cf. Pl. Phdr. 245a.

³⁴ Cf. the pseudo-Aristotelian **Pr. XXXi** (on which more below), with Kazantzidis 2011, 176–179.

³⁵ Cf. Verg. A. 6.49–50 *maiorque videri | nec mortale sonans*, ‘she seems bigger, and does not sound mortal’ and Dial. 9.17.11 *grandius ore mortali*, with Mazzoli 1970 n.94; see also Dial. 10.2.2 *more oraculi*, ‘like an oracle,’ with Schiesaro 1997, 100; 2003, 24. The passage is reminiscent of Pl. Ion 534b, while the imagery of the horse is taken again from the *Phaedrus*; see Cavalca Schioli 1981, 140.

positum contingere, quam diu apud se est; desciscat oportet a solito et efferatur et mordeat frenos et rectorem rapiat suum eoque ferat, quo per se timuisset escendere.

For whether we believe with the Greek poet that ‘sometimes it is a pleasure also to rave,’ or with Plato that ‘the sane mind knocks in vain at the door of poetry,’ or with Aristotle that ‘no great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness’ – be that as it may, the lofty utterance that rises above the attempts of others is impossible unless the mind is excited. When it has scorned the vulgar and the commonplace, and has soared far aloft fired by divine inspiration, then alone it chants a strain too lofty for mortal lips. So long as it is left to itself, it is impossible for it to reach any sublime and difficult height; it must forsake the common track and be driven to frenzy and champ the bit and run away with its rider and rush to a height that it would have feared to climb by itself.

(Sen. Dial. 9.17.10–11)

It is hard to resist the temptation to interpret this passage as an endorsement of the poetic sublime, so much so that Seneca’s words almost invite us to revisit our view of the Corybantes in Ep. 108. However, as in the *Epistles*, this endorsement can also be explained away through contextualisation. I find it difficult to endorse Setaioli’s opinion that the passage is not a direct response to Serenus,³⁶ but it is true that Seneca here is ambiguously shifting the genre of this sublime flight. Here Seneca clearly refers to poetry, as the Platonic quotation testifies, and we are going to see shortly how specifically the poetry of Horace is present *sous rature* in this passage, in which Seneca possibly finds it more authoritative to attribute the first quotation (*aliquando et insanire iucundum est*, ‘sometimes it is a pleasure also to rave’) to an anonymous Greek poet rather than his probable Latin source (the phrase is very close to Hor. Carm. 3.19.18 *insanire iuvat*, ‘it is a pleasure to rave,’ or Carm. 4.12.28 *dulce est desipere in loco*, ‘it is delightful to play the fool occasionally’).³⁷ Conversely, it is not at all clear what category of *studia* Serenus was referring to in the description of his symptoms at the beginning of the dialogue. While the term *oratio* (‘style,’ Dial. 9.1.13 and 1.14) is applicable to both prose and poetry,³⁸

³⁶ Setaioli 2000, 149–155, where he also considers Dial. 9.17 as an isolated episode, ‘incidental and accessory... almost a footnote.’

³⁷ Cf. also Hor. Ep. 1.19.2–3 *nulla placere diu nec vivere carmina possunt, | quae scribuntur aquae potoribus*, ‘no poems can please long, nor live, which are written by water-drinkers.’

³⁸ See TLL s.v. *oratio* 2a. Technically prose is referred to as *oratio soluta* and poetry as *oratio numerosa*, but prose is often referred to simply as *oratio* (OLD s.v. *oratio* 3b; TLL s.v. *oratio* 2c); on *oratio* for poetry see the example from Quint. Inst. 10.5.4, quoted below.

and is used by Serenus simply to refer to the choice and order of the *verba*, the comparison with Ep. 108 may suggest that we were dealing there with philosophical prose.³⁹ However, since Serenus is a public figure with certain political aspirations for his *cursus honorum* (Dial. 9.1.10) and has previously expressed concern about his behaviour in public life, the emphasis on speech and the repetition of *oratio* may indicate his involvement in public speeches, and his possible tendency to adorn them with poetic licence.

The idea that Serenus is indeed referring to his use of poetry in public speeches may gain credence by comparison with two passages from Quintilian's *Institutio* 10 regarding the use and abuse of poetic licence. At Inst. 10.1.27–8, Quintilian specifies that the orator, by reading poetry, may well receive 'inspiration in thought' (*in rebus spiritus*) and 'sublimity in language' (*in verbis sublimitas*), but he should be careful 'not to follow the poets in everything' (*non per omnia poetas esse oratori sequendos*), especially not in their 'freedom of vocabulary' (*libertas verborum*) or 'licence in developing tropes' (*licentia figurarum*). Similarly, at Inst. 10.5.4 he claims that 'the lofty spirit of poetry can help in raising the tone of oratory' (*sublimis spiritus attollere orationem potest*) and yet 'the bolder use of words permitted by poetic licence' (*verba poetica libertate audaciora*) 'does not exhaust beforehand the more desirable possibility of saying the same things in ordinary terms' (*non praesumunt*⁴⁰ *eadem proprie dicendi facultatem*). It is interesting to note that these passages equate poetry with *libertas* and *licentia*, and specify that this freedom can only be granted to the orator in moderation. This is paralleled by Seneca's reply to Serenus, in which he also tries to put a limit to Bacchus's *licentia*, but he does so rather in passing. According to Dial. 9.17.8, we can abandon ourselves to 'Liber, who is said to be the inventor of wine not because he can give us *licentia linguae*, but because he helps us in liberating our soul from bondage to cares' (Dial. 9.17.8 *Liber non ob licentiam linguae dictus est inventor vini, sed quia liberat servitio curarum animum*). And yet Seneca's denial of *licentia linguae* is puzzling, since Liber 'emancipates our soul and makes it stronger' (17.8 *adserit vegetatque*) and 'bolder in all its attempts' (17.8 *audaciorum in omnes conatus*). It is possible that such attempts also pertain to the writing of philosophy or oratory, in which *poetica libertas*, according to Quintilian, makes words *audaciora*.

Bearing in mind that the specification that Liber makes the soul bolder 'in all its attempts' complicates the matter, we can conclude that on the face of it Seneca's praise of Bacchus does not invite Serenus to feel free to say whatever he likes in whatever genres he likes; rather, it allows him to

³⁹ Lotito 2001, 33–34; Setaioli 2000, 150.

⁴⁰ I follow Peterson 1891, 155 and do not accept Watt's conjecture *praecedunt*.

indulge in poetry to cure his soul from worries, as long as the *studia* refer to poetry, and not to oratory or philosophical prose, as it seemed instead from Serenus's request. This limitation of the precepts to the poetic sphere may also explain the surprising acceptance of *mutatio loci* at Dial. 9.17.8. Indeed, while Quintilian, at Inst. 10.3.22–3, denies the utility of 'the freedom of the open air' (*caeli libertas*) and the 'charm of the landscape' (*amoenitas locorum*) for inducing 'sublime thoughts and richer inspiration' in the orator (*sublime animum et beatiorem spiritum*), searching for solitude is what poets do, according to Tacitus (Dial. 9), or the incipit poem of Horace's *Odes* (Carm. 1.1.30–32).⁴¹ This kind of freedom / *libertas*, which is allowed to poets, mirrors the licence / *licentia* that is allowed to poetry, and poetry only. And yet in the imperial age it would seem that poetic licence has turned into something slightly more dangerous: in her subtle reading of Horace's *Ars Poetica* 9–13, Lowrie has recently argued that from the Augustan age onwards it is no longer the case that poets are allowed to dare whatever they please; rather, they must ask and be granted permission and indulgence (*Ars* 11 *hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim*, 'we have asked and granted this licence in turn [i.e. to dare what one wishes in poetry]'). As Lowrie puts it, 'this correction regards... the social authorization of the limitation itself'; it is 'a movement... from republican *potestas* to imperial *venia*.'⁴² Already by the time of Horace, and more so in the Neronian period, liberty, even in the realm of poetry, has been transformed into indulgence.

3. From the Philosophical to the Poetical Sublime

If we omit Liber's role in making the soul bolder 'in all its attempts,' we have seen how Seneca's acceptance of the sublime becomes less troublesome if we limit it to poetry and avoid applying it to philosophical prose or oratory. However, indulgence in poetic *enthousiasmos*, and in intoxication from wine, still appears somewhat surprising at the end of a Stoic treatise on *tranquillitas animi*. If poetry was not part of Serenus's *studia* from the start, it is far from clear why Seneca would bring it up in the dialogue, especially in the last section, which should respond structurally to Serenus's requests. On the other hand, even if we allow poetry to be part of Serenus's *studia*, it still remains to explain why Seneca would allow Serenus's melancholic affliction to expand into the poetic realm.

⁴¹ Also note, with Montiglio 2006, 568, that Seneca's bee simile for the poets in Ep. 84 conveys the importance of poetic wandering, albeit at the metaliterary level of reading.

⁴² Lowrie 2014, 130.

To start with, since it is clear that Seneca's melancholy can only be accepted if it pertains to poetic inspiration, one may wonder whether Seneca draws, from ps.-Aristotle's *Problemata* XXXi, a distinction between depressive melancholy, caused by an excess of cold black bile in the body, and the frenzied, creative melancholy of the genius / artist, which is instead caused by an excess of hot black bile.⁴³ A melancholic type, as someone who possesses black bile in excess, is naturally prone to both types. Interestingly, however, already in Aristotle's text, the excess of hot black bile is said to produce precisely *euthumia*, in the sense of 'cheerfulness' or 'euphoria,' rather than 'tranquillity':

καὶ ἡ χολὴ δὲ ἡ μέλαινα φύσει ψυχρὰ καὶ οὐκ ἐπιπολαίως οὔσα, ὅταν μὲν οὕτως ἔχη ὡς εἴρηται, ἐὰν ὑπερβάλλῃ ἐν τῷ σώματι, ἀποπληξίας ἢ νάρκας ἢ ἀθυμίας ποιεῖ ἢ φόβους, ἐὰν δὲ ὑπερθερμανθῇ, τὰς μετ' ᾧδῆς εὐθυμίας καὶ ἐκστάσεις καὶ ἐκζέσεις ἐλκῶν καὶ ἄλλα τοιαῦτα.

Now black bile, which is naturally cold and does not reside on the surface when it is in the condition described, if it is in excessive quantity in the body, produces apoplexy or numbness, or despondency or fear; but if it becomes overheated, it produces cheerfulness with song, and madness, and the breaking out of sores and so forth.

(Ps.-Arist. Pr. XXXi 954a 21–27)

The problem therefore resides in a correct understanding and translation of Greek *euthumia*: surely *tranquillitas*, but also euphoria, like the *euthumia* used again by Aristotle to describe the state of cheerfulness induced by wine (Ps.-Arist. Pr. XXXi 955a 1–2 ποιεῖ εὐθύμους, 'it makes them euphoric').⁴⁴ Hence, the two different types of melancholy – cold and hot, or depression and frenzy (the second of which can actually have positive effects) – correspond to two different types of *euthumia*: *tranquillitas* and cheerfulness / euphoria, the second of which is actually compatible with the hot melancholic type.⁴⁵ From a medical point of view, the drinking and dancing described by Seneca with regard to Cato and Scipio undoubtedly heat the soul, the body, and the black bile – a necessary

⁴³ On the interactions between melancholic depression, madness, and poetic inspiration from Aristotle into Greek and Latin literature I have learnt a great deal from Kazantzidis 2011, which I hope will soon appear as a monograph. See Kazantzidis 2011, 176–179 for a fuller account on the connections between ps.-Aristotle's melancholy and the *De Tranquillitate*.

⁴⁴ See Mazzoli 1970, 55–56. Diogenes Laertius (D.L. 9.45) testifies to the existence of a tradition that interpreted Democritus's *euthumia* in hedonistic terms; see Lotito 2001, 12 n.1.

⁴⁵ See the Appendix.

condition for a state of *enthousiasmos* or *mania*.⁴⁶ When *tranquillitas* is analysed under a Peripatetic lens, it accepts an enthusiastic and sublime state and transforms itself into Aristotelian *euthumia* / *euphoria*, but also divine inspiration⁴⁷ and philosophical *libertas*.⁴⁸

A second way to solve the problem from a medical perspective would be to turn to Celsus's remarks on melancholy.⁴⁹ In the *De Medicina*, Celsus claims that the melancholic should abstain from wine (Cels. 3.18.17), but he also recommends as therapy the type of entertainment to which the patient was attracted when sane (Cels. 3.18.18). Therefore, if Serenus is a poet, indulgence in poetry, even in compliance with his melancholic frenzy, is part of the cure for achieving *euthumia* in opposition to the *dusthumia* that he falls into when he is prey to an excess of cold black bile.⁵⁰ Seneca's treatment of Serenus in Dial. 9.17 is neatly 'homeopathic,'⁵¹ and poetry figures in the cure, to use Mazzoli's formulation, as a 'euthumic pharmakon,' a 'balsam for the passions.'⁵²

However, neither of these solutions explains the compatibility between the acceptance of frenzied poetical composition and Seneca's Stoic precepts.⁵³ In an influential but controversial study, Martha Nussbaum argues that what she calls the Stoic 'cognitive view of poetry' (championed by Chrysippus, probably Zeno, Seneca, and Epictetus) considers passions as modifications and judgements of the rational faculty of the soul.⁵⁴ Poetry, with its ability to stir passions, is accepted as long as the Stoic

⁴⁶ Cf. Nat. 4.b.13.5. On the importance of heat in Democritus's physiology of *enthousiasmos*, see Delatte 1934, 28–79.

⁴⁷ On which see Berger 1960, especially on the connections with Posidonius.

⁴⁸ As in Ep. 75.18 *expectant nos, si ex hac aliquando faece in illud evadimus sublime et excelsum, tranquillitas animi et expulsis erroribus absoluta libertas*, 'there await us, if we escape from these low dregs to that sublime and lofty height, peace of mind and, when all error has been driven out, absolute liberty.' Also note that the 'Bacchic frenzy of philosophy' is Platonic (Smp. 218b3–4), see Casadesús Bordoy 2013. See Mazzoli 1970, 59 and Lotito 2001, 38 on the equivalence between euphoria, absolute liberty, and *autarkeia*. Schiesaro 1997, 99 and 101 suggests that 'the same state of enthusiastic lack of control' is shared by both philosophical excitement and artistic creation.

⁴⁹ On Celsus and the *De Tranquillitate*, see Kazantzidis 2011, 169–171.

⁵⁰ Cf. Dial. 9.6.4–6 on the apparently Democritean idea that *ars* must adapt to the *vis ingenii*, with Mazzoli 1970, 61–62.

⁵¹ Berger 1960.

⁵² Mazzoli 1970, 73.

⁵³ On Stoicism and poetry, see especially DeLacy 1948; on Seneca and poetry, Mazzoli 1970.

⁵⁴ Nussbaum 1993, 100; in contrast, the 'non-cognitive view' (held by Posidonius and probably Diogenes of Babylon) accepted the Platonic tripartition of the soul and considered passions as movements of the irrational part of the soul, which cannot be modified by a modification of judgements. On the Stoics' rejection of the existence of the irrational part of the soul and their view of affections of the soul as affections, motions, and judgements of reason, see Frede 1986. On passions and the Stoics, see also Inwood 1985, 127–181 and Graver 2007.

philosopher drives his listeners, readers, or spectators through it by means of a constant ‘critical detachment’ towards the passions, characters, and actions therein presented.⁵⁵ From this point of view, a passage of Plutarch’s *How The Young Man Should Study Poetry* is especially relevant, and it expresses this view with the same ship metaphor found in the *De Tranquillitate*: here, Plutarch claims that philosophers should not avoid poetry and steer clear of it, but rather should ‘stand their pupils up against some upright standard of reason, and bind them there securely, straighten and watch over their judgement, so that they will not be carried away by pleasure towards that which will harm them.’⁵⁶ If we consider the *De Tranquillitate* to be Serenus’s sea voyage with Seneca as moral and philosophical guide, then we may distinguish between what Seneca suggests to Serenus at the beginning of the dialogue and his prescriptions at the end of it. In other words, if Serenus has learnt something throughout the dialogue, and thus has managed to overcome the depressive side of his melancholy, then at that point, and at that point only, he could be encouraged to achieve, under the guidance of his Stoic helmsman, the poetic aspirations that he dreaded at the end of his request.

This is one way of solving the matter through a Stoic acceptance of poetic inspiration, but the best solution is to turn to Democritus, who wrote the lost treatise on *euthumia*.⁵⁷ We know that for Democritus, as for Seneca, *euthumia* is a product of *metriotēs*, moderation.⁵⁸ A perhaps perverse way to interpret this is to suppose that towards the end of the dialogue Seneca follows the precept of moderation so closely that he comes to imply that not only the teaching of *tranquillitas*, but also his instruction for moderation, requires itself a moderate application.⁵⁹ Therefore one is allowed, contrary to Celsus’s judgement, to indulge in wine, or to avoid following too strictly Seneca’s previous suggestions concerning *mutatio loci*. The injunction to indulge in entertainment as a relaxation of the

⁵⁵ The observation leads Nussbaum 1993, 148 to argue that Senecan drama ‘actively impedes sympathetic identification, promoting critical spectatorship and critical reflection about the passions’; this specific point is challenged by Schiesaro 1997 and 2003, but see in response Staley 2010, 32–34 and 43–45.

⁵⁶ Plu. *Moralia* 15D, see Nussbaum 1993, 131. This sounds specifically like Odysseus and the Sirens, the topic which opens Seneca’s Ep. 31: it is notable that it is Seneca’s letter itself that helps Lucilius to be deaf to the allurements.

⁵⁷ See especially Berger 1960, 361–366. Panaetius and Athenodorus of Tarsus also wrote treatises on *euthumia*; see D’Agostino 1929, 66–67; Cavalca Schiroti 1981, 15–16; André 1989, 1742–1744, 1768; Mutschler 2014, 158. On Panaetius as an almost certain intermediary see Barigazzi 1962; Mazzoli 1970, 51; Setaioli 1988, 98–107 (certain that Seneca did not read Democritus directly); Gill 1994, 4609–4624; Lotito 2001, 12–13; on the possible influence of Posidonius, see Berger 1960 and Mazzoli 1970, 54–55.

⁵⁸ Democr. D-K B191, see Laurenti 1980, 547–548 and Lotito 2001, 58–59.

⁵⁹ Conversely, *metriotēs* may contain *megalopsuchia*, see Mazzoli 1970, 54–55.

soul would be in line with Seneca's portrait of Democritus as the laughing philosopher both in the *De Tranquillitate* (Dial. 9.15.2) and the *De Ira* (Dial. 3.2.10.5).⁶⁰ Moreover, Seneca also provides us with a description of Democritus as apparently mad, or frenzied (Ep. 79.14 *quamdiu videbatur furere Democritus!*, 'how long did men believe Democritus to be mad!'). All this ties in well with the recognition that Democritus apparently denied the possibility of being a good poet without being mad.⁶¹ This view is found, among other places, in Cicero⁶² and in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, in which the poets, according to Democritus, are not just insane (*vesani*), but should also be fled by the philosopher (*qui sapit*):⁶³

ingenium misera quia fortunatius arte
credit et excludit sanos Helicone poetas
Democritus

Because Democritus believes that native talent is a greater boon than wretched art, and shuts out from Helicon poets in their sober senses.
(Hor. Ars 295–297)

ut mala quem scabies aut morbus regius urget
aut fanaticus error et iracunda Diana,
vesanum tetigisse timent fugiuntque poetam
qui sapiunt...

As when the accursed itch plagues a man, or the disease of kings, or a fit of frenzy and Diana's wrath, so men of sense fear to touch a crazy poet and run away...
(Hor. Ars 453–456)

This contradiction between philosophy and poetry, *tranquillitas* and poetic madness, will have been at the very heart of Democritus's philosophical teachings, whatever his lost treatise on *euthumia* may

⁶⁰ See D'Agostino 1929, 69.

⁶¹ Democr. D-K B18. See Delatte 1934, 28–79.

⁶² Cic. Div. 1.80 and de Orat. 2.194.

⁶³ Horace's text is from Klingner's Teubner unless otherwise indicated. Translations are taken or adapted from Fairclough's Loeb for the *Ars*, *Satires*, and *Epistles*, and Bennet's Loeb for the *Odes* and *Epodes*.

have preached. Serenus can cure his cold melancholy in his private and public life, but there is no way that he can be a good poet without keeping that excess of black bile in his body. What is interesting, however, is that Serenus himself sees a way out that Seneca does not allow: to give up his poetic ambitions as *supervacua* and start writing for himself, without the aspiration to achieve immortality through poetry and writing. This option, according to the philosopher and tragedian Seneca, can only be utopian, and the end of the dialogue metapoetically turns the same question onto Seneca himself: is the *De Tranquillitate*, like all the rest of Seneca's philosophical and poetic production, really written *in usum sui*, or *in usum Sereni*?⁶⁴ Or does it rather envisage, and eventually also desire, the literary immortality that Seneca will no doubt achieve?⁶⁵

4. Horace's Bacchic Ship

Poetry, especially Horace's poetry, provides a clue to understanding how the inconsistency of the *De Tranquillitate*, when analysed through both a Democritean and a poetic lens, ends up turning the end of the dialogue into a metapoetic commentary on Seneca's own aspirations. The paradox of the dialogue closely recalls a similar paradox in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, apparently a treatise on how to write poetry, which ends up reminding us of Democritus's mad poet and subtly implies that, no matter what, good poetry cannot be taught.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the *Ars Poetica* also contains, in Kazantzidis's words, a clear friction between Horace's need to ridicule the mad poet, and appear as 'a sober-minded critic,' and his confession of 'a strong attraction to it, almost to the point of identification.'⁶⁷ Horace himself has been fluctuating throughout all his career between the more sensible, technical side of his poetry and its Bacchic, sublime afflatus: in the *Ars Poetica*, on the one hand, he tries to purge himself of his bile (*Ars* 301–302 *o ego laevus, | qui purgor bilem*, 'fool that I am, purging myself of my bile!'), but on the other he implicitly equates himself with Democritus's mad poet, the exceptional genius, when he claims that if he had not purged himself, he would have been superior to any other poet (*Ars* 303 *non alius faceret meliora poemata*, 'no one else would compose better poems'). A reading of the *De Tranquillitate* through the lens of Horatian allusions brings out precisely this trajectory from sensible,

⁶⁴ On the hypothesis that Seneca writes *Dial.* 9.17 away from public life, see D'Agostino 1929, 77; Lefèvre 2003, 165.

⁶⁵ See Lefèvre 2003, 157–158.

⁶⁶ See especially Oliensis 2009, 452.

⁶⁷ Kazantzidis 2011, 191; see the whole treatment of Horace as a melancholic genius at 190–222.

philosophical doctrine to the sublime heights of lyric inspiration, a trajectory which is an integral part both of Horace's literary career and of Seneca's dialogue.

In the first part of the dialogue, Seneca makes ample, though not explicit, use of Horace's hexametric poems in order to bolster his philosophical points. And yet these models already contain the inconsistencies between philosophical and poetic life. A prime example of this is Seneca's use of the topos of *mutatio loci* at Dial. 9.2.13 in relation to Horace's S. 2.7 and Ep. 1.11 and 1.14:

inde peregrinationes suscipiuntur vagae et in via litora pererrantur et modo mari se modo terra experitur
semper praesentibus infesta levitas...

Hence men undertake wide-ranging travel, and wander over remote shores, and their fickleness, always discontented with the present, gives proof of itself on land and now on sea...

(Sen. Dial. 9.2.13)

In S. 2.7, in which Horace's slave Davus criticises his master on the basis of his 'fickleness,' the figure of Horace comes close to Serenus, in terms of knowing the correct precepts but being unable to follow them. Among such precepts, we also find the notion that a constant wish to change place is the sign of a fickle soul (cf. *levis*, 'fickle,' at S. 2.7.29 and the *infesta levitas* of Dial. 9.2.13), and of one that cannot bear to be with itself (S. 2.7.111–113; cf. Dial. 9.2.15). Davus's precepts are presented as desirable, but Horace the poet, in his bad temper, is in Davus's words 'either mad or verse-making' (S. 2.7.117 *aut insanit... aut versus facit*). Ep. 1.11, closing with the recommendation to keep an *aequus animus* (Ep. 1.11.29–30) that seems to correspond with Seneca's *tranquillitas*, shows Horace preaching again against *mutatio loci* (Ep. 1.11.27 *caelum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt*, 'those who rush across the sea change their clime, not their mind');⁶⁸ and yet lines 8–10 still betray Horace's inner desire to seclude himself from the world and be forgotten (Ep. 1.11.9 *oblitusque meorum, obliviscendus et illis*, 'forgetting my friends, and by them forgotten'). Similarly, in Ep. 1.14 Horace reverses S. 2.7, in so far as he now speaks to a slave and seems to have learned from Davus's teachings: he lives a life of

⁶⁸ Clearly alluded to by Seneca at Ep. 28.1 *animum debes mutare, non caelum*, 'you must change your mind, not the clime,' but passed over in silence in favour of an explicit quotation from Virgil; similarly, at Dial. 9.2.14, Seneca explicitly quotes Lucretius, **hiding his Horatian debt**: see Mazzoli 1970, 236; Cavalca Schioli 1981, 67; and the present volume, especially the Introduction, and the contributions by Berno (with further bibliography at n.2), Tischer (cf. esp. n.72), Vogt-Spira at n.7 (also with further bibliography), and Edwards at n.15. Mindt's chapter is also relevant for its discussion of a similarly allusive approach in Martial to both Horace and Seneca.

frugality in the countryside, in contrast to the leisure that he used to enjoy in the city, and now knows that not the place, but rather ‘the mind is at fault, since it never escapes from itself’ (Ep. 1.14.13 *in culpa est animus, qui se non effugit umquam*). And yet inconsistencies taint the epistle from the beginning, when Horace first claims that he considers happy the man who dwells in the countryside (Ep. 1.14.10 *rure ego viventem, tu dicis in urbe beatum*, ‘I call him happy who lives in the country; you him who dwells in the city’) and then goes on to argue that the *locus* actually makes no difference in terms of happiness. Shortly after, although he claims that he is finally ‘consistent with himself’ (Ep. 1.14.16 *me constare mihi*), he continues to be ‘dragged to Rome by hateful business’ (Ep. 1.14.17 *trahunt invisae negotia Romam*); and when this happens, he is again as *tristis* as Serenus (Ep. 1.14.16 *discedere tristem*, ‘I depart in gloom’).

If we read the inconsistency on the topos of *mutatio loci* in Dial. 9.2 and 9.17 under the lens of Horatian intertextuality, we see a clear continuity between Horace’s fickleness in the *Satire* and the two *Epistles* and the inconsistencies expressed by Seneca once he brings the philosophical teachings of his dialogue to encompass poetic creativity and literary ambition. As Montiglio has argued with regard to Seneca’s stigmatisation of and yet fascination for travel in Ep. 104, in Dial. 9.17.8 the philosopher is also ‘himself transported by the distracting activity he censures’:⁶⁹ travel, to start with, and poetry to follow. This acceptance of *mutatio loci* signals a diversion in the journey of Serenus’s ship, and the entrance into the realm of Horatian poetry: this is divinely inspired poetry, *mania* caused by an excess of hot black bile, in which one cannot apply the same teachings preached in the case of Serenus’s excess of cold black bile in the spheres of both personal and public life. *Mutatio loci* takes us directly to Bacchus / Liber, not just in his guise as god of wine, as Seneca would have us believe, but as Horace’s sublime metapoetic metaphor *par excellence*, the primary symbol of the flight of the inspired poetic mind; and it also takes us further to the Sibylline *enthousiasmos* driven by Apollo. Indeed, the metapoetic coupling of Bacchus and Apollo as an image of divine, and sublime, poetic inspiration, reminds us closely of the famous pair of *Odes* on Horace’s Bacchic / Apolline flight, Carm. 2.19 and 2.20.⁷⁰ If we consider them together, Bacchus’s inspiration in Carm. 2.19, which produces a cheerfulness (Carm. 2.19.1–7 *mens... laetatur*, ‘my mind... rejoices’) comparable to *euthymia* /

⁶⁹ Montiglio 2006, 566. See Montiglio 2006, 568–569 for her analysis of the links between travel and poetic composition in Ep. 79. Cf. also Seneca’s practical behaviour at the end of Ep. 56 (Ep. 56.15), where he chooses to leave his noisy quarters, even though the *locus* does not matter.

⁷⁰ On Seneca’s reception of Carm. 2.19 in the *Oedipus* see Stevens 1999. On Horace’s ‘Bacchic poetics’ in these poems, see Silk 1969, Batinsky 1990–1991, and Schiesaro 2009.

euphoria, causes Horace in Carm. 2.20 to be uplifted like Serenus (cf. Carm. 2.20.1 *ferar*, ‘I shall be uplifted,’ and Dial. 9.1.14 *sublimius feror*, ‘I am swept to loftier heights’) to the status of ‘two-formed poet’ (Carm. 2.20.2–3 *biformis... vates*) and transformed into Apollo’s bird, the swan. The two poems also retain Horace’s poetic need for *mutatio loci* in distancing himself from the world (cf. Carm. 2.19.1 *in remotis rupibus*, ‘on distant crags’ and Carm. 2.20.3 *neque in terris morabor*, ‘nor will I linger on earth’ with Dial. 9.17.11 *desciscat oportet a solito*, ‘it must forsake the common track’).

Moreover, the Bacchic image also reminds us of another, earlier, poem which I have argued elsewhere must be considered the first instance of Horace’s Dionysiac poetics of inebriation: Horace’s Epod. 9.⁷¹ The reference is strengthened by Seneca’s pun, at Dial. 9.17.8, on Liber who ‘liberates the mind from bondage to cares’ (*Liber... quia liberat*), which may echo the last line of the *Epode*, where the fear for the battle of Actium is similarly ‘loosened by Lyaeus’ (Epod. 9.38 *Lyaeo solvere*).⁷² The connection between Dionysiac inebriation and the musical / poetic frenzy that allows Horace to compose a Bacchic song fits well with Horace’s use of Bacchus as a metapoetic figure later in the *Odes*, and with Seneca’s similar mixture of Bacchus, frenzy, and poetic aspirations. Moreover, the dialogue and the *Epode* are also brought together by the metaphor of the ship, and of wine / Bacchus as the *remedium* sought by Horace to placate his ‘seasickness,’ *nausea* (Epod. 9.34–5 *vel quod fluentem nauseam coerceat | metire nobis Caecubum*, ‘pour for us Caecuban, so that it may dam our flowing nausea’). Serenus, at Dial. 9.1.17, had asked Seneca to offer him precisely a *remedium* that would placate his *nausea* or *fluctuatio*; it is an interesting coincidence that Seneca ends up suggesting precisely the *remedium* that Horace asks for himself in Epod. 9: Bacchic inebriation, and poetic inspiration. *Nausea* of course means ‘seasickness,’ and is used as a powerful metaphor for describing Serenus’s melancholic distress, but it is also the term used to describe the nausea caused by excessive drinking.⁷³ Therefore, *nausea* is as two-faced as melancholy and *euthumia*.⁷⁴ on the one hand, in private and public life, we find cold black bile, depressive melancholy, *nausea* as seasickness, which have their opposite in *euthumia / tranquillitas*; on the other, when melancholy refers to the poetic realm, we find hot black bile, frenzied / mad melancholy, *nausea* as *ebrietas* and *euthumia* as euphoria, or even poetic inspiration.

⁷¹ See Giusti 2016.

⁷² A clear bilingual pun on the etymology of Lyaeus from λύειν = *solvere*.

⁷³ See Giusti 2016, 135 n.27, with bibliography.

⁷⁴ See Appendix.

Just like melancholy and *euthumia*, and like the whole of the *De Tranquillitate*, Seneca's metaphor of the ship is also *biformis*, or two-faced: on the one hand, this is the ship of philosophy, found in Plutarch's *How The Young Man Should Study Poetry*, and the sea of *tranquillitas* may appear similar to the 'life without waves' (βίος ἀκύμων) of Plutarch's *Tranquillity Of Mind*.⁷⁵ Moreover, until the very last chapter, this is also the ship of Horace's ode on the 'golden mean' (Carm. 2.10), which advises Licinius to think about storms before setting out for a sea voyage (Carm. 2.10.2–3 *dum procellas | cautus horrescis*, 'while cautiously fearing the storms') and to shorten his sails when encountering a favourable wind (Carm. 2.10.22–24 *sapienter... contrahes vento nimium secundo | turgida vela*, 'wisely reef your sails when they are swollen by too fair a breeze!'), passages comparable to Dial. 9.11.7, with its injunction to start a voyage with the possibility of a storm in mind (*magna pars hominum est, quae navigatura de tempestate non cogitat*, 'a great number of men will plan a voyage without thinking of storms') or Dial. 9.4.7, where virtue 'is forced to draw in her sails' (*cogitur in vela contrahere*).⁷⁶ However, when it is time for literary aspirations to be under the spotlight, the ship turns itself into the Bacchic ship of Horace's sea-symposium in Epod. 9, and into the Dionysiac ship of the Tyrrhenian pirates as described by Philostratus: 'embowered with vine ivy, with clusters of grapes swinging above it, indeed a *thauma*' (Im. 1.19.4). In this context, the laughter of Dionysus from the prow of the ship (Im. 1.19.6) superimposes itself on the laughter of Democritus, the frenzied philosopher.

For both Horace and Seneca it holds true that, as in Dial. 9.5.4, *non est... servare se obruere*, 'saving oneself does not mean burying oneself' – at least in water. But the final movement of the *De Tranquillitate*, as in Horace's Bacchic lyrics, allows the ship to be weighed down, if not submerged, by wine (Dial. 9.17.8 *non ut mergat nos, sed ut deprimas*, 'not drowning ourselves in drink, yet succumbing to it'), which 'washes away troubles' (Dial. 9.17.8 *eluit enim curas*). This also allows the acceptance of insanity / frenzied melancholy, through a quotation which, as we have noted, Seneca presents as deriving from a Greek poet, but which in fact alludes quite openly to Horatian lyric (Dial. 9.17.10 *aliquando et insanire iucundum est*, 'sometimes it is a pleasure also to rave,' cf. Carm. 3.19.18 and 4.12.27–28).⁷⁷ When it comes to literary ambition, Serenus's ship takes a direct turn and points *in*

⁷⁵ *Moralia* 465 A8–9, although this refers to *alupia* rather than *euthumia*.

⁷⁶ Cf. also Dial. 9.5.6 *in periculosa navigatione subinde portum petas*, 'just as if you were making a perilous voyage, put into harbour from time to time' with Horace's injunction to his 'state ship' at Carm. 1.14.2–3 *fortiter occupa | portum!*, 'one final effort now, make port!'

⁷⁷ See above and n.32. It is precisely the similarity to Horace's passages that have made some scholars incline towards Alcaeus: see Setaioli 1988, 62–63.

altum,⁷⁸ mirroring the ship of Horace's Bacchic flight in Epod. 9 and anticipating the inspired drive of Carm. 2.19 and 2.20. Within these images, a bond is established between the two philosophers, Seneca and Serenus, and the poet Horace. We have a Roman group that matches the three Greek authorities presented at Dial. 9.17.10: Plato, Aristotle, and the anonymous Greek poet. This bond ties Horace, Serenus, and Seneca together in their euphoric acceptance of the frenzied melancholy of geniuses, and in their ambition to achieve sublime literary heights and immortality through fame.

Conclusion

Both in Epod. 9 and in the *De Tranquillitate* Liber's / Lyaeus's role is to liberate the mind from worries, possibly in both cases political worries: it liberates Horace from the 'fear and worry for / of Caesar's situation' (Epod. 9.37 *curam metumque Caesaris rerum*),⁷⁹ and it lets Serenus, prefect of the watch under Nero and a front man for Nero's amorous intrigues (Tac. Ann. 13.12–13), take a break from his public duties and indulge in relaxing and pleasurable activities, such as poetry induced by wine.⁸⁰ In imperial times, as Lowrie notes, Liber cannot permit complete *licentia* to either Horace's or Serenus's tongue, especially in oratory or in philosophical / political writing, but he can transfer that licence to the realm of *carmina* and their allegorical language.

And yet the same allegorical language also ends up encompassing the mysteries of this treatise. On the one hand, to contextualise Seneca's endorsement of intoxication from poetry and wine within this Democritean and possibly Peripatetic treatise means to exonerate the philosopher from taking responsibility for the applicability of his own words to any situation (Dial. 9.17.8 *in omnis conatus*). On the other, the freedom provided by Liber also allows us to use the *De Tranquillitate* as Seneca used *Aeneid* 6 in Ep. 28: to excise Apollo and keep Bacchus, to shake off the rest of the dialogue and apply Dial. 9.17 to Seneca's aspiration in his literary prose or to the sublime flight of his own *carmina*, the

⁷⁸ On the 'elative' aspect of the Senecan sublime, see Mazzoli 1991, 179.

⁷⁹ Mankin 1995, 181: 'a vague and perhaps deliberately ambiguous phrase.'

⁸⁰ On the historical Serenus see Cavalca Schirotti 1981, 9–11; Motto / Clark 1993, 133–134; Lotito 2001, 20–24. On Serenus as Seneca's *alter ego* and on the dialogue's possible reflection of Seneca's situation at around 61 CE, see Motto / Clark 1993, 148–149; Lefèvre 2003, 156–159; 164–165: 'se... Sereno, su richiesta di Seneca, fa da prestanome a Nerone, a maggior ragione sarà disposto in futuro a prestare il proprio nome per l'amico.' On the dating of the dialogue see D'Agostino 1929, 76–77; Cavalca Schirotti 1981, 16–18.

tragedies. But to treat the world of poetry, as the *De Tranquillitate* itself teaches us, would be an altogether different story.⁸¹

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Appendix: the oppositions of the *De Tranquillitate*

spheres of symptoms	private and public life	<i>studia</i>
Seneca's response	Dial. 9.2–16	Dial. 9.17
genre	philosophy; oratory	poetry
bile	cold black bile	hot black bile
melancholy	depressive melancholy	frenzied melancholy
opposite state	<i>euthumia / tranquillitas</i>	<i>euthumia / euphoria</i>
symptom	<i>nausea</i> as seasickness	<i>nausea</i> as intoxication from wine
metaphor	the ship of philosophy	Horace's Bacchic ship
<i>mutatio loci</i>	rejected	accepted
sublime <i>enthousiasmos</i>	rejected	accepted

⁸¹ For that, see the work of Alessandro Schiesaro 1997 and 2003. I dedicate this chapter to him, in gratitude for always prioritising *rerum pulchritudo* in his lectures without dismissing the jingle of my empty words. I am especially grateful to the editors, Martin Stöckinger, Kathrin Winter, and Tom Zanker, for their patience and valuable criticism; to Emily Gowers, Philip Hardie, John Henderson, and Fiachra Mac Góráin for their comments; to Barbara Del Giovane and Francesca Romana Berno for their Senecan advice, and to George Kazantzidis for showing me his DPhil dissertation.