

DECLAMATION,
PATERNITY, AND ROMAN
IDENTITY

Authority and the Rhetorical Self

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CHAPTER I

Recalling declamation

He who appeals to authority when there is a difference of opinion works with his memory rather than with his reason.

Leonardo da Vinci¹

The Elder Seneca opens his collection of reminiscences of declamation with a preface dedicated in large measure to the theme of memory itself. The prominence of memory in Seneca's preface has attracted a variety of commentary. Some marvel at the miracle (*miraculum*)² but then grow swiftly suspect. Others admire and defend. Most agree that Seneca is not to be taken literally at his word.³ Rather than seeing in memory the tool that excavates the trove of citations that Seneca shall shortly offer, let us take it instead as a theme of the text. If memory is a tool, it works as a trope, not as a simple mechanism for retrieving information. Seneca works with his memory and in so doing he makes an appeal to an authority now lost, but one that he hopes to recover. Seneca's text is thus not a necessarily a "reasonable" one, as Leonardo might have it, but it remains nevertheless a purposeful one: both the memory of rhetoric and the rhetoric of memory conspire to reproduce masculine authority.

Accordingly I wish to examine what is at stake in writing down Seneca's memories. We will not find a mere collection of random scraps, but instead an argument as to the proper economy of rhetoric. And this argument is specifically a declamatory argument. Seneca's appeals to memory are appeals to authority, and these rhetorical appeals to authority cannot be dissociated from the putative reasonableness of categories such as fatherhood and friendship. We need, then, to read Seneca's account of rhetoric as

¹ Quoted in Freud 1990b: 215. For the sentiment, compare Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.10.

² 1.pr.2.

³ Sussman summarizes the scholarship on the question and sides with the sceptics (Sussman 1978: 76 n.135). Fairweather revisits the question, offers roughly the same summary of scholarship, but defends the possibilities of memory even while acknowledging that one will never really know the answer to the "fact" of Seneca's memory (Fairweather 1981: 37–42).

itself a rhetorical construct. Specifically, how does this rhetoric of memory argue its case?⁴

Despite the consensus that memory is a theme of the text, it is not clear that Seneca has been given sufficient credit.⁵ Seneca's recollections of declamation and declaimers need to be explored via the ambiguities of the Latin word *memoria* itself: this word entails both simple recollection and also the object recalled. Memory is a process that produces its own product, which is again called memory; and memory as a thing or possession implies not just facts, but also collective memory, tradition, and memorialization.⁶ Thus as a possession or property memory always also looks towards the broader community, not just towards some lone owner. Moreover, the possessor of memory should never be radically segregated from the producer of memory. Such, at least, is the lesson one learns from reading Seneca, though the lesson is one more broadly applicable to Roman letters.

Memory, then, involves not just an individual, but also an entire social world. Memory implies a community even as it is involved in producing a community. And so to answer a question of the variety, "What sort of man was he?" one does not merely appeal to acts, deeds and sayings, but one also refers to the world that man lived in, and, significantly, this is a world inhabited by the one who himself does the remembering. Memory is thus always the act of an interested party. One of the specific points of modulation that will concern us here is the relationship between sexual, linguistic, and social economies as they relate to the project of recollection as a productive social activity engaged with the Roman present.

As a tool or an instrument memory reveals a great deal about the economy of signs within which it is put to use. Rhetoric in general and declamation in particular offer ideal sites for both the invocation and the deployment of memory. At the most basic level, of course, memory had long been one of the five technical aspects of oratory. One must recall in order to perform. But the expanding interest in the sociology of rhetoric ought to allow for a truly generalized reading of this last statement. The performance is never simply the text of the speech; it is always also a performance of an orator

⁴ Habinek has argued that memory and monuments, inscriptions and literary texts are all bound together in a complex web of mutual dependence (Habinek 1998: 109–14). The same play of saving the past while (re)producing the authorial persona in the present can be found in Seneca's "monumental" work.

⁵ Sussman offers a first sketch of a portrait I hope to round out more fully here (Sussman 1978: 67–69).

⁶ Hence one can compare to Latin's ambiguous semantic overlap the dispersion of the problem in the French lexicon: *un mémoire*, a memorial or even just a report, *une mémoire*, a recollection, and *des mémoires*, memoirs as we understand them in English. See the play between the senses of the terms in Derrida 1989.

within a specific milieu. A speaker recalls and records himself within and for this world. His speech does not merely make use of memory; ideally his speech makes him memorable, and it marks him out as a man worth remembering: a speaker seeks to produce the very sort of reminiscences that a Seneca will later recall and record.

Seneca himself, though, reminds us that rhetoric is the task allotted to the “good man experienced at speaking.”⁷ Significantly, this phrase is itself a recollection of a phrase of Cato the Elder. We should accordingly appreciate that this history of rhetoric also aspires to become a history of virtuous masculinity, remembrances of good men past. And, most importantly, such a history gives to these men the memories and memorials that they themselves sought to produce. Thus, recalling speech is a means of (re)producing an entire linguistic legacy that at every stage both uses and produces memory for past, present, and future ends. Seneca recalls Cato in order that a certain kind of man be invoked and then reproduced both in his own person and in the persons of his children, his ostensible addressees.

But how does declamation fit into this scheme? Declamation is traditionally marked out as a quintessentially hollow exercise, a form without content. Or, where the contents are specified, they are notoriously not “good.” The fantasy-land of declamation is filled with raped maidens and cruel tyrants. Thus it would appear to offer no “real” objects worth recording, nothing truly memorable. A history of declamation then runs the risk of itself being as insubstantial as the memory of a dream or else merely the recollection of men behaving badly. Put briefly, how can one make time for Seneca’s memories?

The world of declamation should not be so swiftly dismissed: in it one finds not just ravished damsels but also good men acting and speaking memorably. Declamation’s very dissociation from reality will prove to be one of its claims to being the most useful format for allowing memory to act in its productive capacity. The constitution of the recalled world of good men proceeds admirably in declamation’s “hot-house atmosphere.”⁸ Perhaps Seneca even reveals best the labor that subtends the sociology of rhetoric by depicting a rhetoric whose truth-contents matter least. Seneca works with his memory to crystallize, to distribute and to redistribute the goods of the memorable world of rhetoric.

Seneca’s text opens with a greeting addressed to his sons. This work, apparently, is the product of their requests (*exigitis*). They wish to hear about

⁷ 1.pr.9. ⁸ For the “Triebhausluft” metaphor, see Kroll 1940: 1120.

those speakers who lived before them. Seneca is going to gather such sayings of these men as have not yet slipped from his memory, and he intends to offer the resulting collection to his children so that their knowledge of these departed orators shall not be a matter of mere belief (*credatis*). Instead they will be able to judge each case for themselves (*iudicetis*).

The premise seems simple indeed: three young men wish to know more about a time that they cannot have seen from a father who was an eye witness. Yet this image of the motivation of the text and of its addressees cannot see us to the end of Seneca's preface. Ultimately this text will no longer be sent just to them, but it will be offered to Romans in general. Sussman argues that we are to take the text at its word: Seneca's sons really did ask for this work, and they are its first audience.⁹ While I do not feel that we can or even need to answer the question of the intention of this address – a father writing for sons is also a trope¹⁰ – it is useful to bear in mind that all of Seneca's readers become in some measure his sons. Moreover we are sons who want to pass judgement on the world of our father.

Seneca speaks of the pleasure of removing the injury of time from men who either are already or might soon be forgotten.¹¹ Seneca intends to right a wrong. He will be like an *advocatus* or perhaps even a *uir fortis* who champions the cause of his dead peers. Likewise his sons will become the judges of the cases of these dead orators.¹² In other words, this first sentence of the second paragraph hints at a Seneca who is already enfolding himself in the thematics of rhetoric and perhaps more specifically in the thematics of declamation. We should not then see the prefaces as dissociated from the snippets from declamations: instead they are active participants in the very rhetoric they purport to relate. Why should Seneca wish it otherwise, though? For herein he performs the very task that he sets himself: the living author reenacts the lost world he promises he is about to recover both in the body of the text and the prefatory passages that introduce the text's divisions.

Seneca's fight against the injuries of time has just been described as being like a forensic advocacy. Nothing is quite so definite yet. However the blending of Seneca the author into Seneca the character of his own text continues in the next lines. The injury of time has not only been done to the men he will recall, but time has also ravaged Seneca himself. His eyes are going; his hearing is bad; his strength is failing. And, in particular, old age

⁹ Sussman 1978: 53–54.

¹⁰ See Kaster for a long list of works of literary scholarship addressed by fathers to sons in late antiquity (Kaster 1988: 67 n.142).

¹¹ *destrahere temporum iniuriam*. 1.pr.2.

¹² This was already implied in *iudicetis* above.

assaults his memory (*incurrit*), the most delicate and fragile of the spirit's faculties.¹³ Once Seneca's memory was prodigious, now it lies fallow: "For some time I have asked nothing of it."¹⁴ Seneca shortly tells of how he has difficulty recalling more recent affairs even though items from his youth are readily remembered. I suppose one must concede that this state of affairs does largely correspond to what one believes of memory today, namely that with age one loses the ability to form new memories as readily. Yet neither commonplaces nor biology ought to blind us to the literary deployment of these notions here. Seneca said that he has asked nothing of his memory for a while. Clearly the ravages of time are one problem, but there is already another: he has given up on the present. As Seneca himself concludes, he can offer his sons nothing that they already know, only that which they cannot know. The father is of another era than his children; their days do not overlap.

Seneca appears to have put up a formidable gulf between the generations, but he at once proceeds to play with just such a notion. Rather than simply refusing the present in the name of the past, we will find that Seneca lives his own present in the name of the past. In other words, Seneca's life today consists of memories of yesterday. Most importantly, however, this "living in the past" constitutes the best and truest way of living as a rhetorician. Seneca offers a technique whereby both he and rhetoric can be healed today by way of an appeal made to yesterday. Similarly, the conjoint project of memory and memorialization upon which Seneca has embarked offers to his sons a technique whereby any and all orators might seek for themselves the honorable, good, and lasting name that they desire to win today and wish to last until tomorrow.¹⁵

Seneca's professed mode of exposition, though, is not always quite so grand and serious as the above might lead one to believe. He can often be playful and ironic rather than formal and severe. As he puts it, "Have it your way: let an old man be sent to school."¹⁶ Proceeding on from such a note, Seneca next says that he will not order his text methodically but rather that he will relate things as they occur to him.¹⁷ Or, to use his metaphors,

¹³ 1.pr.2. ¹⁴ *diu ab illa nihil repetui*. 1.pr.3.

¹⁵ Sussman summarizes Seneca's tone as follows: "[T]here is no mistaking the impression throughout the works of a *paterfamilias* deeply concerned about the moral enlightenment of his sons, their education, and their future careers." (Sussman 1978: 27)

¹⁶ *Fiat quod uultis: mittatur senex in scholas*. 1.pr.4.

¹⁷ Compare the snide remarks of Quintilian when he criticizes showy declaimers who reject the need for an *ars rhetorica* such as his own text provides. Such impassioned yet "artless" speech, he says, "is like the notebooks of schoolboys into which kids heap up things that were praised when others declaimed them (*similisque sit commentarii puerorum in quos ea quae aliis declamantibus laudata sunt regerunt*;

he will “wander” (*errem*) through his studies, and as he recalls things it will be in accordance with the pleasure of his own capricious memory.¹⁸ Such diction recalls more the scandalous outlook of a *senex amans* than the tones of a reputable old man: Seneca is letting himself be led by the nose wherever his beloved memories of an equally beloved oratory shall take him.

Is Seneca a wastrel, a man not unlike the sort of fellow he is soon to complain of in his own age? Does Seneca’s shady memory, a memory dedicated to pleasure and incapable of properly memorializing reveal a man more of this generation of Romans than the last one? Perhaps it does: Seneca’s memory should be questioned from every angle, even from this rather cynical and disruptive approach. On the other hand, Seneca does not intend that we read him quite so seriously at the moment. We will have to put such suspicions provisionally under the heading of the ambiguities of memory and return to the flow of Seneca’s thinking.

After his affable outburst about being an old schoolboy Seneca next launches into a tirade against the decline and fall of Roman intelligence, oratory, and morality. One needs models to imitate; today oratory is going to hell in a handbasket; the Ciceronian period saw the acme of Roman rhetoric; luxury has helped to ruin Roman wits since then; people now apply themselves to a variety of profitable but sordid ends.¹⁹ The outline of the complaint is familiar enough. There is nothing wrong with reading this more or less as it stands. And the general portrait has provoked sufficient comment.²⁰

The details, though, merit rereading: Seneca’s position is once again more complex and ambiguous than it may appear at first glance. Seneca tells his sons that they confront a problem of mimesis if they would improve themselves and their oratory:

Non est unus, quamuis praecipuus sit, imitandus, quia numquam par fit imitator auctori. haec rei natura est: semper citra ueritatem est similitudo.

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 2.11.7.” Ironically this portrait of failed rhetoric resembles Seneca’s own text: a compendium of great sound-bites (See *sententiis grandibus* as the reason the *auditorium* is packed in Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 2.11.3). But Seneca intends for his own notebooks to be an aged father’s gift to his grown sons. It is difficult, then, to see his text either as incoherent and dissolute, as Quintilian might have it, or as fundamentally juvenile.

¹⁸ *Necesse est ergo me ad delicias componam memoriae meae quae mihi iam olim precario paret.* 1.pr.5.

¹⁹ Compare Seneca, *Historiae* fr. 4 where Seneca compares the history of Rome to the ages of man. Its infancy was passed under king Romulus, and so on. See Johnson for age and decadence as two metaphors each using the plausibility of the other to promise its own truth (Johnson 1987: 124–27). Compare the remarks of Williams 1978: 7–9.

²⁰ See Sussman 1978: 67–69 and, for a fuller account, Fairweather 1981: 132–48. Johnson is right to spot a *topos* here (Johnson 1987: 11 n.13). And Sussman recognizes in this preface a thematic connection between memory’s decay and the decay of eloquence.

One must not imitate a single individual, no matter how distinguished he should be, because the imitator never becomes the equal of the original (*auctor*). Such is the nature of the matter: the likeness ever falls short of the truth. (Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.6)

The sentiment is both trite and profound, brilliant and naive. The commonplace gives way to the more intriguing so soon as one moves away from the banal message that the sons should find many good speakers to copy and considers instead the case of Seneca's text itself. This text consists of nothing but imitations by way of re-presentations of the words of a variety of speakers. The imitation of these words is not the same thing as their original utterance. The likeness of these declamations captured in Seneca's text is not the same thing as the truth of those same speeches. The dimensions of their truthfulness, though, are manifold: the original speeches showed genius, wit, charm, and they participated in the vibrant social world of speech in which they were embedded and for which they were destined. Seneca's repetitions of them for us dislodge them from that world and set them off to poorer effect against the far different backdrop of the word on the page. If we the children are supposed to choose for ourselves from these portraits a model or models to imitate, what are we to think of a project where we make ourselves a likeness unto a textual likeness?

Seneca the father imitates all rather than one: he tries to imitate endlessly in order to recapture one vital lost object: the good man experienced at speaking. Seneca seeks to recapture oratory as a whole, oratory as noble, oratory as the efflorescence of genius, and the social world that supported such a pursuit before luxury, gain, and perverse honors overwhelmed it. Seneca imitates in order to get back a world of which he was a part. Yet the means by which he will sustain this imitation is a memory that cannot be trusted. Specifically this memory is one to whose luxurious tastes (*deliciae*) Seneca must cater. In other words, the vehicle of the semblances Seneca offers is itself one suffering from the very defects of character that the likenesses are summoned to overcome.

This may already seem to be an over-reading, but I should like to go one step further. Seneca's imitations are themselves imitations of an imitation. Declamatory speeches are not "real" speeches. Instead declamations are speeches that merely pretend to be forensic speeches. Perhaps then it is fitting that Seneca should luxuriantly "fail" to recall declamation: there is no "truth" of declamation there to be recovered. This is only in keeping with what Cassius Severus will say of the genre as a whole: "What in declamation is not superfluous, when it is itself superfluous? (*in scholastica quid non*

superuacuum est, cum ipsa superuacua sit? 3.pr.12).” The word *superuacuum* is an evocative one: a somewhat fanciful translation for it might be, “empty, and then some.” As a vehicle for superabundant emptiness declamation is pregnant with (non)meaning.

To the extent that there is a substance to declamation, it is in the rehearsal of commonplaces, in the performance before peers, in the reproduction of the spirit of the declamatory venue itself. Thus Seneca may very well succeed in recovering declamation even as he seems to have lost both the declaimers and his memories of them: if he can reproduce their reproduction of commonplaces and if he can reinvokethe spirit of that community, then perhaps Seneca succeeds. Seneca’s imitations thus help him to become not just an author (*auctor*) but also the author of himself. They help him to recall himself for himself, for his sons, and for the broader community of his readers.

Seneca follows up his complaints about luxury by refining his reproaches: men’s wits have become dulled owing to sensualism.

Torpent ecce ingenia desidiosae iuuentutis nec in unius honestae rei labore uigilatur; somnus languorque ac somno et languore turpior malarum rerum industria inuasit animos: cantandi saltandique obscena studia effeminatos tenent, [et] capillum frangere et ad muliebres blanditias extenuare uocem, mollitia corporis certare cum feminis et inmundissimis se excolere munditiis nostrorum adulescentium specimen est. quis aequalium uestrorum quid dicam satis ingeniosus, satis studiosus, immo quis satis uir est? emolliti eneruesque quod nati sunt in uita manent, expugnatores alienae pudicitiae, neglegentes suae.

Look how the wits of an idle youth lie fallow, nor do they apply themselves to any honorable pursuit. Sleep, sloth, and a criminal resolve more foul than both have invaded their hearts: the vile study of singing and dancing preoccupies the pansies. Our model youth today curls his locks, thins his voice to the point of feminine charm, rivals women with the softness of his body, and cultivates his person with refinements most foul. Who of your generation can I say is clever enough, studious enough, – no, who is *man* enough? Gone soft and slack, they only live on because they happened to be born; they attack others’ chastity, they care nothing for their own.²¹ (Seneca, *Controversiae*, 1.pr.8–9)

²¹ The reading *in uita* is an emendation of either *inuiti* or *muti* in the manuscripts. Håkanson 1989 prints *inuiti* while Winterbottom 1974 accepts the emendation. Winterbottom translates as if the sense were, “Born soft, they remain soft.” This interpretation encounters two difficulties. First, *in uita manere*, is elsewhere used only of mere existence. See Cicero, *De Finibus* 3.60–61 and [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.51. That is, one does not qualify it and say “sluggardly existence” *uel sim*. Next, *quod nati sunt* can readily mean a terse, simple “because they were born” without any adjectival modification of the *nati*. See the younger Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 1.1.11 and also Quintilian, *Declamationes Minores* 330.5. The one citation is personally associated with our author, and the other is associated by genre. Let us then break the sentence into three insults: they are soft, they merely exist, they are sexually scandalous.

The elaborate play of words for sleep and wakefulness culminates in a portrait of a most scandalous boudoir: the rhetorical crisis is readily interpreted as a crisis wherein one now aspires both to indulge in passive homosexuality and to launch sexual assaults upon others. All of the words for good, hard work and study have become inverted: the only diligence to be found presently is one that strives after vice. Significantly Seneca has converted effeminacy and study into antonyms. The good speaker is hardworking and manly; the bad is idle, soft, and effeminate. Luxury and pleasure spell an end to oratory and to masculinity: one needs to recall and recover diligently the manly men of bygone days.²² So says a man whose memory was once prodigious but is now itself idle. Are we in the presence of a stern father or instead confronted with a nostalgia for virility voiced from a position that is itself “soft”? How manly is Seneca?

First, recall that Seneca begins his text by confessing to the pleasures of recollection: *Est, fateor, iucundum mihi redire in antiqua studia melioresque ad annos respicere, . . .* (1.pr.1). Seneca enjoys himself by recalling a time when the pleasures of oratory were not so wanton. His pleasure comes in recovering an economy of rhetoric that was not so sensual.²³ Clearly the critique of sensualism can never itself go uncriticized, for pleasure keeps returning to the very scene where it is branded a crime.

Next, it is important to note that the phrasing of the complaint is highly “declamatory.” That is, Seneca’s preface to his oral history of declamation is already itself declaiming. By describing this preface as declamatory I mean only to highlight the rhetorical artifices of a phrase such as *somnus languorque ac somno et languore turpior malarum rerum industria*. This phrase thunderously reiterates two of its terms of opprobrium in its third member as it verges towards its final and ironic noun “industry.” One notes as well the asyndeton that allows for the piling up of emphatic clauses in the next portion of the same sentence. Once again, that clause ends with a sort of surprise with the word “model” (*specimen*). A similar sarcastic flair is indulged in the phrase *quod nati sunt in uita manent* and its terse insistence that these lazy folk live only because they happen to have been born: they exist by mere force of inertia. Likewise notice the anaphora of *satis* with the dramatic reversal of flow and correction provided by *immo*. No trope is alien to any branch of oratory, but the choice of figures and the way in which they are piled up bespeak a man who did not merely attend declamations but also formed some of his own habits at the performances.

²² One can compare the sentiments of the elder Seneca’s son, Seneca the younger. See *Epistulae Morales* 114.9–11.

²³ Compare Freud on the pleasure of recollection (Freud 1993: 185).

Furthermore the standpoint from which these sentiments are uttered is itself one not unfamiliar from declamation. Something outrageous has happened: speak against it. Given the law, plead your case. What, though, is the implied law? The implied law states that oratory is a matter of manly authority in general, and of sexual continence in particular. Indeed the scenario of Seneca's whole preface is not wholly unlike that of a case presented in Book 5:

IMPUDICVS CONTIONE PROHIBETVR.

Adulescens speciosus sponsionem fecit, muliebri ueste se exiturum in publicum. processit; raptus est ab adolescentibus decem. accusauit illos de ui et damnauit. contione prohibitus a magistratu reum facit magistratum iniuriarum.

A PERVERT SHALL NOT BE ALLOWED AT A PUBLIC MEETING.

A good looking young man made a bet that he would go out in public dressed as a woman. He did it, and he was raped by ten youths. He prosecuted them on a charge of violence and won. He was kept from a meeting by a magistrate, and he brings a charge of wrongdoing against the latter. (Seneca, *Controuersiae*, 5.6)

Seneca's own voice emerges from the position of a defender of the declamatory law: he doesn't want to admit the sleazy youth of today to his rhetorical gathering. Notice, though, that declamatory laws need not be real laws, they only have to be laws that the community of speakers has agreed to treat as if they might be real.²⁴ Obviously in both the declamatory fiction and in the prefatory remarks everything hinges on how one interprets the term "pervert."²⁵ The stakes for the state of public speech are high.

Does acting a bit effeminate make a man a fairy? What if he were only flirting with the notion and not really intending to "go all the way"? And what if he did: is passive homosexuality really grounds for social and linguistic disqualification? Such a policy could significantly thin the ranks of oratory if one were to pry too closely. And, most provocatively: what about those ten rapists? First, the youth really was good looking (*speciosus*), so it was easy to be attracted to him, even if under false pretenses. Similarly, I doubt that by the end of the event all ten rapists remained "fooled" by the costume. Obviously one can only imagine that the full course of the sexual assault does not include the notion of attacking a woman – the habitual object of random rapes in declamation – but instead a man dressed as a

²⁴ See Bonner on declamatory laws (Bonner 1949: 84–132). See Bonner 1949: 105 for this particular case. There is no exact match for this law. See, then, the remarks of Winterbottom 1982: 65: the fictive character of these laws was seen as an asset, not a liability.

²⁵ *impudicus* often alludes specifically to homosexuality. Most generally it means any sort of shameless unchastity. It is a somewhat vague but decidedly harsh word.

woman; and he is assaulted precisely as a man. The young man's behavior may have been suspicious, but his attackers themselves showed a rather violent interest in him as a sex object.²⁶ The magistrate then himself seeks to inscribe as a permanent fact of the youth's character a transitory moment of costume and a consequent violent reaction to that costume.

Seneca himself occupies a homologous position. He does not wish to read rhetorical "transvestism" as one pose among many. Instead it is a truth of the man: he assaults anyone he sees so tricked out, he launches his own "manly" attack against him, and then Seneca seeks to ban him from ever participating in public speech again. Moreover the assault Seneca launches on rhetorical perversion is itself a sort of rape, a piece of sexual violence aroused at the sight of men in metaphorical drag. Does he too get turned on only to hate the very object that aroused him? If we brought a charge of *uis* against him, could we win the case?

Seneca makes his attack as a preliminary move on his way to describing the ideal manly speaker. The sole legitimate agent or *auctor* when it comes to speech is the "good man" or *uir bonus*. Elsewhere I have discussed the broad scope of this seemingly simple formulation as it pertains to the rhetorical tradition.²⁷ Seneca's own thinking, though, can stand on its own as an exemplary instance of the valorization of this figure who is a figure of speech in more than one sense of the phrase. As Seneca makes clear, the good man is the only legitimate orator; and, as I will shortly argue, he is also the object of the whole elaborate edifice of speech that Seneca has been constructing out of his memory.

Erratis, optimi iuuenes, nisi illam uocem non M. Catonis sed oraculi creditis. quid enim est oraculum? nempe uoluntas diuina hominis ore enuntiata; et quem tandem antistitem sanctiorem sibi inuenire diuinitas potuit quam M. Catonem per quem humano generi non praeciperet sed conuicium faceret? ille ergo uir quid ait? 'Orator est, Marce fili, uir bonus dicendi peritus.' ite nunc et in istis uulsis atque expolitis et nusquam nisi in libidine uiris quaerite oratores.

My fine young men, it is a mistake to think that utterance of Cato's to be anything but oracular. And what is an oracle? It is most assuredly the will of a god spoken from a human mouth; and, after all, what more holy champion could divinity find for itself than Cato in order not to instruct the human race, but rather to level a reproach at it? So what did that man say? "An orator is, Marcus my son, a good man experienced at speaking." Now go and look for orators in those

²⁶ Roman thinking is actually far more interested in the problem of passive homosexuality than it is in the active partner. Thus the youths might hope to escape being themselves slurred as a consequence of their act. See the remarks of Walters 1997b and Parker 1997.

²⁷ See Gunderson 2000.

plucked and polished fellows, men who are men nowhere but in their lusts. (Seneca, *Controuersiae*, 1.pr.9–10)

Cato's maxim had been used to browbeat aspiring orators for centuries and it still had centuries to go before it would be forgotten. Though not manifestly censorious, this phrase is nevertheless used to deliver yet another lashing from Cato the Censor. Seneca's version of Cato lays its emphasis on the term "man" and upon a sexualized notion of masculinity. By way of contrast one might note that technical rhetorical treatises tend to emphasize "skilled" and hence simultaneously to justify their own existence. Similarly the question of the "good" man preoccupies Quintilian in his twelfth and concluding book of the *Institutio*.²⁸ While a sexual subtext is everywhere to be found in rhetorical writings, Seneca has moved the assumption of virility to the foreground. For Seneca, Cato and Cato's oratory are not merely "good" versions of rhetoric, they are also sublime, divine even. When Cato lays down the law for oratory, he speaks as a man but a divine sanction lies behind his utterance: it is heaven's will that rhetoric be manly. There is also one last theme that should be noted: Cato's utterance is directed towards his son; and Seneca's text is addressed to his children. Seneca becomes a Cato speaking as a father to a son, as a god through a man, and as one man to all men. The model of authority follows a chain of associations that runs from god, to father, to virile manhood. This is a potent collocation in any number of senses: we find in it a virtual monopoly over titles that might make a claim to authority. Seneca's recollections are more than mere antiquarianism: they comprise, enact, and likewise seek to reproduce the most basic fundamental building blocks of public life.

Seneca routinely highlights the word man, and he is not content to merely cite a snippet of Cato containing the word. When describing Cato himself and not just his maxim, Seneca says *ille uir*, which translates as "that man." Yet just *ille* itself would produce the same English rendering. By adding the term *uir* Seneca insists upon the manliness of the author of this lesson on virility: a real man knows how to talk about real men. Yes, the

²⁸ Cato himself was perfectly capable of forging other associations for the good man on other occasions. See the opening of the *De Agricultura*: "When our ancestors praised a good man, they praised him by calling him a good farmer and a good settler. This was reckoned as the highest sort of praise." (*[maiores nostri] uirum bonum quom laudabant, ita laudabant: bonum agricolam bonumque colorem; amplissime laudari existimabatur qui ita laudabatur. pref. 1.2.*) Habinek 1998: 46–50 sees less a reflection of tradition here than a use of the notion of tradition to underwrite novel economic practices on the part of the elite. The only thing truly traditional about Roman goodness is the long-standing fight over its definition.

logic is circular; but so too is Seneca's whole project of making rhetoric a virile pursuit. Such a project is actually the product of a series of rhetorical claims of manliness rather than expressive of a virile ontology.²⁹ How does one know that others are poor speakers? The claim is that they are poor men: they depilate; their manliness extends no further than their abuse of their sexual organ. As goes the phallus, so goes oratory.

In selecting declamation as his preferred rhetoric Seneca becomes even more implicated in this citational model of masculinity where the actual presence of the thing itself is inferred from the endless iteration of citations as to its existence. The declaimers only perform representations of authority: they do not speak in a real, authorized context such as in the senate or the forum. Nevertheless we are meant to learn of the manliness of oratory and orators by way of the "proper" practice of this oratory that merely pretends to be judicial oratory.

Yet even in the case of "real oratory" we must not allow this manliness to establish itself as a real substance: as students of speech we should learn from our rhetorical masters how to read critically all rhetorical claims that legitimate rhetoric. There is less an ontology of authority than a series of citations of an authority presumed to actually exist but in fact sustained only by the network of its iterated citations. This stance by no means implies a denial of power or its effects, only a critique of authority's self-authorizing rhetoric.³⁰ Declamation's supposed weakness once again becomes its strength: the explicit fictiveness of the declamatory venue allows us to watch the process by which non-existent originals are recalled and manly originals are fetishized in a process that is generative of the very object that one might believe to have been "merely" cited. Put epigrammatically, the ancient orator becomes the self he performs.³¹ Declamation's recollections and its techniques of rhetorical authority are no different from that of so-called legitimate oratory. Think, for example, of the number of orators who affected archaism in their public speeches: they cited and recalled the authority of a departed past in order to sway the present. Accordingly Seneca's remembrances of orators past parallels an aspect of actual rhetorical practice. It is not itself merely a comment on rhetoric so much as it performs an ethics of rhetoric within the context of a description of rhetoric.

Seneca's tirade next turns away from sexual morality and back towards his original theme: memory. Or, rather, it unites the two as part of a larger crisis of rhetoric.

²⁹ See Butler 1993: 12–16.

³⁰ See again Butler 1993: 12–16 and her Derridean take on power.

³¹ Compare Gunderson 2000: 116–17 and 2000: 139.

Quis est qui memoriae studeat? quis est qui non dico magnis uirtutibus sed suis placeat? sententias a disertissimis uiris iactas facile in tanta hominum desidia pro suis dicunt, et sic sacerrimam eloquentiam, quam praestare non possunt, uiolare non desinunt.

Who cares (*studeat*) about memory? Who pleases not so much with great virtues but even with his own? Amidst the general idleness³² they speak as their own the *bons mots* (*sententiae*) uttered by the most eloquent. In this fashion they never cease violating a most sacred eloquence that they cannot themselves furnish. (Seneca, *Controversiae*, 1.pr.10)

The study of memory and a zeal for memory have been forgotten. Times have changed, and his contemporaries no longer care about this faculty central to Seneca's project. Seneca claims that he remembers when memory used to mean something, and his recollections are designed to make those memories meaningful again. Presently ignorance and idleness – and the latter is evocative of luxury and hence also of effeminacy – allow people to steal the clever sayings from days gone by and to fob them off as their own. To the extent that anyone recalls anything, then, it is only with an eye towards dispossession and with the hope of stealing one man's private property in a bid to make it his own. Men today are not eloquent; their eloquence has been pilfered; they are temple-robbers outraging the sanctuary of oratory. And the sanctity of oratory is a specifically virile sanctity. Thus the "violation" that the contemporary speakers commit should also be read as a sort of sexual violation. These passive perverts rape the good men who ought to be on top and doing the penetrating. These inverts have inverted the proper linguistic and sexual order. And whatever samples of vigorous oratory one might hear are instead so many specimens of perverse plunder: all of the real men today are fakes.

Seneca will be pleased, then, to offer that which he still possesses in his memory to the public. By making his personal property public, he intends to restore confidence in rhetorical currency in general. The counterfeiters are soon to be exposed. Accordingly he continues as follows:

Eo libentius quod exigitis faciam, et quaecumque a celeberrimis uiris facunde dicta teneo, ne ad quemquam priuatim pertineant, populo dedicabo. ipsis quoque multum praestaturus uideor, quibus obliuio inminet nisi aliquid quo memoria eorum producat posteris tradetur. fere enim aut nulli commentarii maximorum declamatorum extant aut, quod peius est, falsi. itaque ne aut ignoti sint aut aliter quam debent noti, summa cum fide suum cuique reddam.

³² Usener's emendation of *omnium* for *hominum* is tempting, and my translation verges towards this suggestion.

Thus I am all the more glad to do what you ask: whatever eloquent sayings of celebrated speakers I still retain in my memory I will dedicate to the public, lest they be anyone's private property. I believe that I will also make a significant offering to those men who are threatened with oblivion if something is not handed down by which their memory (*memoria*) might be extended into posterity. For there are either no extant notebooks by the greatest declaimers, or, what is worse, false ones. And so that they should neither go unknown nor be known other than as they should, I will faithfully restore to each his own. (Seneca, *Controversiae*, 1.pr.10–11)

Seneca recalls the place of each dead speaker in the house of rhetoric. And in giving to each his due Seneca both learns and transmits the importance of memory, place, and of the place of memory within a community. Seneca's position also becomes one of unique privilege. Private and public are confused in his person. We all have rhetoric back now, but it is still his. His words used to belong to scores of others, but now they are his alone. He leaves other's property as a legacy to his sons and then to everyone else. He offers oratory to this age that has no oratory to offer (*praestare*); and in so doing he also makes an offering (*praestaturus*) to the men whose words he recalls. In remembering their words he produces a memory of them for others as recollection verges into memorialization. Words are recalled; possessions are restored; and good faith (*fides*) becomes the order of the day and the means by which that order is obtained and sustained.

If one reads some other book filled with declamations, it may very well be false. But how "true" is Seneca's text? First and foremost, it is not a text by a declaimer, but only one that purports to contain the sort of items that might be found scattered in a number of individual works.³³ Seneca offers a sort of collection of items that might be found in a variety of such collections. More importantly, though, he includes portraits of the speakers themselves and also an illusion of a community of speech.³⁴ Similarly he offers commentary and criticism on individual points as he sees fit.

Still, one may justly ask the question as to the falsity of Seneca when thinking again of the thematics of memory. Seneca has to indulge his memory's wanton whims (*deliciae*). Old age has assaulted (*incurrit*) his memory and dispossessed it of its stores much as an industry for wickedness invaded (*inuasit*) the wanton speakers today, these speakers who themselves

³³ *commentarii* presumably represent relatively informal presentations but not ones that are mere collections thrown together randomly and disseminated just to get something out.

³⁴ As Bloomer notes, though, Seneca is clearly reporting under the same case snippets from a variety of occasions on which that same issue was handled (Bloomer 1997a: 204–05). That is, he is not offering a simple transcript of a single sitting. Bloomer also sees the pretense of a failing memory as useful for a man who wishes to avoid some sources and to compile his own selective version of declamatory history.

have plundered the shrine of rhetoric. Idleness (*desidia*) has sapped Seneca's memory; but so too has idleness provided the necessary condition for the pilfering of others' words. One takes the fine sayings of others and makes them one's own. But this act is on the one hand a crime of the effeminate youth and on the other the method by which Seneca's failing memory hopes to recover the virile world of rhetoric past. Is Seneca himself the hero of this drama or is he just an impotent old man? Or, worst of all, is Seneca yet another thief, but this time one seeking different sexual ends?

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The ostensible message of Seneca's text is clear. Yet underneath this text there lies a subtext whose key question is the very possibility of articulating a sentiment of the form taken by the main thrust of his preface. This subtext engages memory not as a solution, but as both problem and solution. Memory does not merely present or represent, instead it represents presentation and presents representation and opens up a whole host of questions regarding mimesis. Memory does not just solve a sexual crisis in oratory, it instead reposes the terms of that crisis anew.

The contradictions of Seneca's preface reach a fitting crescendo in the section on *Latro*, a man who preoccupies Seneca's own memories.³⁵ Seneca has just recounted how the history of declamation is virtually coincidental with his own personal interest in the genre. He has seen everyone but Cicero, a point of eternal return for the Latin rhetorical tradition and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, a figure firmly lodged within the declamatory tradition itself. Much as Seneca claims to know almost the whole of declamation, then, so too does he declare that he knew *Latro* throughout his life.³⁶

The life of *Latro*, Seneca's life, and Seneca's account of declamation in general are three tightly bound notions within this text. In fact the key theme of the section on *Latro* is once again *memoria*. Thus this is not simply a character sketch that opens the first book of the text and marks the boundary between the preface to the whole and a preface to a part. Instead this is a character sketch that rounds out the discussion of memory and that shows the extent to which its paradoxes inform Seneca's relationship both to the genre and to its practitioners, speech's good and experienced men.

Seneca's manifold uses of memory *à propos* *Latro* begin with the statement that Seneca can hardly help but remember the man. However fitful Seneca's

³⁵ Compare Leach 1993 on remembering lost friends in Cicero.

³⁶ *a prima pueritia usque ad ultimum eius diem*; Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.13.

memory may have seemed, this is one possession that has not fallen from its grasp, and he still retains the man he repeatedly calls “my Latro.” Seneca will even go on to remember what a great memory Latro had. In other words, Seneca recalls in his friend a man with numerous parallels to himself, parallels that extend well beyond a shared Spanish origin. Seneca introduces Latro thus:

In aliis autem an beneficium uobis daturus sim nescio, in uno accipio: Latronis enim Porcii, carissimi mihi sodalis, memoriam saepius cogar retractare, et a prima pueritia usque ad ultimum eius diem perductam familiarem amicitiam cum uoluptate maxima repetam.

I do not know how much of a favor I am doing you in the case of the rest, but in one instance I actually am receiving one. For I will be frequently compelled to go back over my memories of my dear friend Porcius Latro, and I will recall with keen pleasure an intimate friendship that extended from an early age all the way to his dying day. (Seneca, *Controversiae*, 1.pr. 13)

With Latro’s story we at once embark upon a compounded version of memory. Seneca handles anew his memories and he seeks again a friendship now departed. One notes the repetition of the iterative prefix *re-* in the two verbs that close each of his clauses, *retractare* and *repetam*. Seneca is glad to be compelled to repeat;³⁷ he looks forward to the pleasure that running through the course of another’s life will give him. This pleasure is not dissimilar to that felt at relating the whole of declamation. One might even characterize this pleasure as rather sensual, depending on what weight is given to *uoluptas*. In the case of Latro, Seneca expresses no hesitation over the question of memory. Instead he is confident that memory grounds the principle of his pleasure in the particular instance as contrasted to the universal case wherein his memory is perhaps wanting.

Latro the man embodies and overcomes many of the contradictions of declamation and of memory. In remembering Latro Seneca recovers an answer to the problems that beset both Seneca’s own memory and the shiftless rhetorical scene of the present day. First, Seneca recalls Latro’s relationship to idleness (*desidia*) as one that inverts the crisis of Seneca’s own memory. Latro used to throw himself into his pleasures. When Latro played, he played hard. But, Seneca notes, “when he would check himself and steal himself away from the blandishments of ease, he would so apply himself to his studies that he seemed not only to have lost nothing but

³⁷ That is, gloss *cogar retractare* with *Wiederholenzwang*.

even to have gained much from his idleness.”³⁸ Above an idle youth had become effeminate and had ruined oratory. Indeed the general idleness of men had resulted in the disappropriation of words from their authors. Similarly memory itself, or rather Seneca’s memory, had gone slack. Seneca was no longer the possessor of what was once his. Conversely *Latro* adds by subtracting, and he becomes more himself, more memorable, and a better man by withdrawing from the earnestness of oratory.

Thus we should ask ourselves similar questions of Seneca as well: to what extent has he gained by the idleness of his memory? Does he profit from violating any simple, direct tenets of oratory in favor of a broader project designed to cultivate manly authority in general? Does the “transgressive” quality of declamation itself instruct us as to the modes whereby even the violation of the norm may redound to the credit of the man skilled at speaking should he know how to plead his case properly?

These questions open out onto two new vistas: the fertility of memory and the relationship between self and memory when the latter is viewed as a productive rather than as a reproductive faculty. Seneca’s discussion of *Latro* at this point engages the issue of *Latro*’s own memory. *Latro* too had a prodigious memory; moreover, it was a good memory aided by training in memnotechniques.³⁹ *Latro*’s memory renders his relationship to written language unusual: he does not reread his own work. And, when he writes his speeches, he writes at virtually the pace at which he delivers them. That is, texts are figured more as an accompaniment than as a supplement to *Latro*’s efforts. Seneca relates that “he had rendered books superfluous to himself: as he put it, he wrote in his heart.”⁴⁰ There is an art of memory and it is accompanied by the existence of the text or codex both in a literal and in a metaphorical sense. Memory’s apotheosis is to write the text as an indelible possession in the soul.

Latro’s memory finds as its counterpart the text of Seneca itself. Seneca inscribes pages whose contents are to be laid up in the hearts of his readers as a store upon which they may draw not just as a personal possession but also as a collective, public offering and one that will allow the community of good men a sort of recuperative self-possession where each again has his own and good men give, receive, and maintain their due. It is an amusing

³⁸ *At cum sibi iniecerat manum et se blandienti otio abduxerat, tantis uiribus incumbebat in studium ut non tantum nihil perdidisse sed multum adquisisse desidia uideretur.* Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.14.

³⁹ Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.17.

⁴⁰ *Itaque superuacuos sibi fecerat codices; aiebat se in animo scribere.* Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.18. Compare, of course, Derrida on the “dangerous supplement” of writing (Derrida 1976: 141–64). *Latro* is not so much a counter-case as he is an example of the privileging of speech over writing even as writing comes to be a metaphor for speech.

irony that *Latro*, a man whose name means “mercenary” or “brigand”, should be the focus of Seneca’s efforts towards the legitimate distribution of cultural capital.

Let us note, then, that Seneca pauses in his account of *Latro*’s memory. Just before this break Seneca first gives as an example of *Latro*’s ability the fact that he knew Roman history superlatively. Thus memory is already becoming a question of the possession of others’ deeds as well as one’s own. In the interruption proper, though, Seneca asserts that perhaps his sons doubt that anyone could have such a good memory.⁴¹ On the contrary, Seneca avers, the art of memory is a simple one and can be mastered in a matter of days.⁴² Though Seneca defers transmitting the secret of the art of memory for now – one wonders too at the relationship between the art of memory and the quasi-biologism of memory’s decay earlier in the preface – his examples of some of the applications to which a good memory has been put are themselves highly illustrative. Just following *Latro*’s memory for history we find three more men with good memories. First a Greek on an embassy to Rome named *Cineas* learns in a day the names of all the senators and their clients. *Cineas* uses his knowledge to greet each by name on his second day in the city.⁴³ Next an unnamed man hears a poet deliver a new poem. This man then claims that, no, the poem is his, not the poet’s. By way of proof he at once rattles off the verses himself. The poem’s author could not do the same. Lastly, challenged to prove his memory, *Hortensius* attends an auction, and at the end of the day he lists all of the purchases and their buyers.

The objects of memory are by now familiar: memory is once again engaged in the repetition of the names of good men and so also in the assignation of ownership. In the case of the hapless poet his example recalls one of the problems of memory that has already haunted Seneca’s preface: does one really own what one remembers? Obviously this misrepresents the letter and perhaps even the spirit of the example. On the other hand such a question nevertheless brings us back to the question of the idle, luxurious, and effeminate speakers of contemporary Rome: using their memories they lay to heart the *sententiae* of other speakers and attempt to pass them off as their own. The study of memory has not wholly died out; the science

⁴¹ One should compare Seneca’s own claims for his youthful memory at the opening preface. And, amusingly, students of Seneca themselves today ask the very question that he imagines as preoccupying his sons: Can anyone’s memory really be that good?

⁴² Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.19.

⁴³ One assumes, then, that *Cineas* has learned at least hundreds of names in a single day. It all depends on how many people were attending the senators: and this number could itself be enormous.

lingers on as a tool of the trade with which bad men may dispossess their betters of what was once properly theirs.

Seneca has arrived with his memory to offer some weight in the contrary direction. Though he is but a new man like Cineas,⁴⁴ Seneca is going to greet each speaker by his name. More importantly, like a Hortensius, Seneca will watch over the traffic in speech and duly record whose was what, and for what price it was gotten. Seneca will even participate in the assigning of the values.

After recounting this latest anecdote of the prodigies of memory, Seneca draws himself up and remarks that perhaps he has been going on rather too long about Latro. In the course of his explanation, though, Seneca offers two more instances of the word memory. Seneca returns to speaking of memory as the thing recalled, not as an active capacity for remembering. Yet in this return Seneca also blurs the lines between the two as he reveals once again the means by which memory actively appropriates: memory concerns possessions, and these possessions affect the self.

Plura fortasse de Latrone meo uideor uobis quam audire desiderastis exposuisse; ipse quoque hoc futurum prouideram, ut memoriae eius quotiens occasio fuisset difficulter auellerer. nec his tamen ero contentus; sed quotiens me inuitauerit memoria, libentissime faciam ut illum totum et uos cognoscatis et ego recognoscam.

I think I may have said more about my Latro than you wanted to hear. I knew it would happen: as often as I would have a chance to remember him I could only with difficulty be torn away from my reminiscences. But I will not be satisfied with just as much as I have said; instead as often as memory invites me, I will gladly see to it that you get to know the whole man and I get to know him anew. (Seneca, *Controversiae*, 1.pr. 13)

Now Seneca is not yielding to a fickle memory. Memory invites Seneca to recall, and Seneca accepts its invitation. Seneca concludes with a bit of word play: he contrasts *cognoscere* with *recognoscere*. The one means “to get to know,” the other is traditionally translated as “to recall” though here I have translated it as “to get to know anew.” Seneca seeks in the same moment to both recover and transmit a knowledge of his friend. Moreover Seneca asserts that this is a knowledge of the “whole man” (*illum totum*): nothing will escape us; we will be in a position to know. Though fragmentary, Seneca’s memory – or for that matter the extant text of Seneca’s work – nevertheless aspires to offer a comprehensive account of a genre, of the

⁴⁴ Note, then, the surprising phrase *nouus homo* used of Cineas in Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.19. Here it means “new to the city”, though the phrase far more readily implies “new to elite Roman politics” as opposed to membership in the traditional aristocracy.

speakers from that genre, of good men and their good rhetoric, and, lastly of the author himself.

Seneca justly concludes his preface with a complaint that others did not appreciate Latro's subtlety. They saw in him only manliness and vigor. The same might be said for our author: he too has traditionally been read as simple, as the exponent of a crusty and familiar message about oratory and aristocracy. Despite these fine sentiments, one nevertheless laments that Seneca was so foolish as to believe declamation to be worthy of the effort. Moreover Seneca's own prose style is itself rather tainted by his favorite genre. Such a reading of Seneca fails to appreciate that the whole preface has been elaborately woven. The question of memory saturates every paragraph, and one soon comes to recognize that subject and object, act of recollection and thing recalled are protean questions whose subtlety Seneca does not so much depict as he performs. And, as Seneca himself says, "Perhaps the greatest failing of subtlety would be to show itself too much: a hidden ambush does more damage. The most useful is the most hidden subtlety. Its effects are clear, its character obscure."⁴⁵

Seneca seeks also to make whole both himself and his own memory in the act of remembering his friends and their memories. Seneca has chosen subtle means to pursue his end. The effects, though, are meant to be clear: one ought to recognize and to get to know all over again manly oratory, a manly orator, and a rhetorical father who offers both to us.

I wish to examine another set of friends for a moment in order both to highlight the structural properties of amicable recollections and to explore the sociology of such a structure. Derrida's comments on Paul de Man obey a logic that will be familiar to readers of Seneca. The closeness of this parallel itself provokes questions about the discourse of memory as a peculiar subset of the question of the proper, of propriety, of possession, and of a community of men. Questions of absence, presence, and re-presentation preoccupy both Seneca and Derrida. And much as the deconstructive turns of Derrida help to expose the operations of Seneca's text, the explicit sociality of Seneca reveals an important moment of blindness amidst Derrida's insights.

Derrida published a series of recollections of his then recently deceased friend Paul de Man that addressed the question of memory and did so

⁴⁵ *Et nescio an maximum uitium subtilitatis sit nimis se ostendere. magis nocent insidiae quae latent: utilissima est dissimulata subtilitas, quae effectum apparet, habitu latet.* Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.21. "Subtlety" is not a preferred translation for *subtilitas*. Usually one renders it as "fineness" or in rhetorical contexts "precision". In this paragraph, though, the lurking quality of the word is highlighted.

specifically within the context of the loss of a friend.⁴⁶ Thus the Derridean text invites comparison with the Senecan as to both theme and occasion. Derrida's commentary on memory in the course of his memorial offered to a friend speaks of what it means to remember, what it means to be a friend, and, lastly, the significance of both to the problems of literary criticism.

Furthermore the Derridean practice, despite being filled with the usual self-conscious tokens, also enacts without commentary several aspects of Seneca's own text. First Derrida inscribes the theme of the friend as double in what is initially an uncritical fashion: the friendship was profound; they never disagreed.⁴⁷ On the other hand, de Man and Derrida never spoke of music, and hence Derrida never knew of his friend's deep interest in music. Nevertheless Derrida does learn one evening of the "soul" of the violin from de Man. The *âme* is a piece of wood allowing the proper communication between the sounding boards of a violin.⁴⁸ Later Derrida finishes his first lecture at Irvine by conflating under the heading of allegory the names of Psyche, Mnemosyne, and de Man.⁴⁹ The allegory of the musical soul, though, allows one to reread Derrida: memory becomes the medium of communication; the proper name disappears as something proprietary; and instead the psyche is something external, an *âme*, a piece of joint property allowing for intercommunication between two objects. And these objects do not so much provide an original meaning as they re-sound when the shared soul trembles with recollection.

Latro works as if he were Seneca's *âme*. Latro provides the privileged psyche within Seneca's text. Latro also acts as an object of memory, the subject of Seneca's memorialization, and as one who himself remembers. He is the model of memory that stands young and untarnished within the text as the reliable double for a narrator who earlier discredited himself. Thus just as Derrida becomes a necessary fourth term if one is to read his list of three allegorical equivalents,⁵⁰ so too must one think of Seneca in order to read of memory, the soul, and the friend. And, lastly, the image of the soundpost or *âme* allows one to reread Seneca's preface in terms of a communication addressed to his sons about the state of communication: declamation allows for the sharing of speech amongst a community of men. It is not the actual contents of the declamations that matter – everything is a fiction after all – so much as it is the very act of sharing the speech that counts. Declamation thus becomes the community's *âme*. And much

⁴⁶ See Derrida 1989. ⁴⁷ Derrida 1989: xvi.

⁴⁸ Derrida 1989: xx. ⁴⁹ Derrida 1989: 39.

⁵⁰ Although Derrida takes pains to show that allegory is not about equivalence, but rather about non-identity and non-closure.

as Derrida highlights the sense of futurity in memory, so too does Seneca strive to recover in the present and to future effect the world of good men for his sons by going back to remember them.⁵¹

In his practical treatment of de Man Derrida offers extended quotations from him, letting de Man “speak for himself” as it were.⁵² Or, as Derrida at one point declares, he is “letting [his] own memory speak here.”⁵³ Derrida supplements his friend’s written commentaries, superadding his own text to de Man’s and simultaneously displacing de Man’s readings. Such, at least, is the “orthodox” deconstructive reading of the process of supplementation as it would relate to Derrida’s practice. One might see the same at work vis à vis Seneca and Latro: Seneca cites in order to recall and to recover; he also cites in order to demonstrate Latro’s subtlety even as he promises that this faculty cannot be apprehended. The readers of Latro fail to understand him: Seneca rewrites Latro in order to remedy the situation. But this is itself a project of great subtlety. These other speakers are not merely “speaking for themselves.” Senecan subtlety thus comes to embrace both Latro and the whole of the preface on memory as Seneca produces an idealized union of speech, memory, and text.

Seneca’s recollections of declamation turn around who said what. That is, the text is principally concerned with the proper attribution of words to their speakers, a proper naming of proper names when it comes to declamation. Nevertheless, despite the demands made of memory, it remains the “defective cornerstone of the entire system”⁵⁴ which, as defective, reveals that there is no entire system and that the whole is not totalized.⁵⁵ Memory is an art, not a science. Moreover we can describe the art of memory as a creative one and not a question of simple reproductions. Further, the community both produced and reproduced is not itself a totalized whole, but it is instead an always provisional act of citations and references to the *idea* of a community of good men and not to the fact of such a community.

While Derrida’s specific comments on memory deserve reading in themselves, I have focused on the ways in which his text performs its own thesis in order to highlight the convergences with Seneca. Thus while Derrida

⁵¹ On memory and the future, see for example Derrida 1989: 57. Notice, though, that Derrida, unlike Seneca, does not explicitly speak to his audience, nor does he address the question of a possible threat to the institution of deconstruction posed by the loss of one of its members.

⁵² “I wanted only to *bear witness* as would befit the sort of admiring observer I have also been . . .” (Derrida 1989: xviii [original emphasis]).

⁵³ Derrida 1989: 8. The moment and the phrase, while not careless slips, nevertheless are never resumed within any direct account of the problem of citation as it relates to memory.

⁵⁴ This is Derrida quoting de Man on allegory in Hegel (Derrida 1989: 76).

⁵⁵ See Derrida further quoting and glossing de Man at Derrida 1989: 78.

comments on and performs “Deconstruction in America”, so too does Seneca record and enact “Rhetoric in Rome.” In particular it is this performative aspect of the text and its relationship to the notion of the community that is the least well elaborated aspect of Derrida’s text while also being one of the most obvious keys to the proper reading of Seneca.⁵⁶

Derrida does not make enough of the fact that the “life” of the sign is lived by humans. That is, Derrida fails to indicate either that there are more dimensions than those of the auto-affectation of the allegorical imperative, or that the instability of signification and the immanence of deconstruction are at best autonomous processes limited by a necessarily contingent predicate, the living individual. Indeed a deconstructive reading of Derrida remembering de Man both reaffirms Derrida’s own key themes and reveals that the community of the letter is a vital element structuring the play of its repetition and dissemination. And this is a community prone to (re) forge itself by staging wakes and producing texts that both recall and make present the thing recalled by way of the double-logic of *memoria*.

This is a community of the dearly departed, a community of texts remembering living men and their vital speech, a community mourning over the letter as dead as opposed to the lived presence of speech. In short, Derrida’s practice parallels Seneca’s as the commentary and the practice become hopelessly blurred. That Derrida should become enmeshed in a set of issues that run athwart so much of Derrida’s own deconstructive philosophy testifies to the worldliness of the world of criticism.⁵⁷ And yet such an objectification of the social sphere on my part should in no wise serve as a reductivist last word on such matters: the community of the letter is not so monolithic as to be condemned only to speak its own name over and over again. Indeed the question asked by deconstruction as well as declamation, and the question asked keenly by memorials of both, is what is the status of repetition and reproduction? What makes for a community of letters where the human members of such a community are transient yet their words and particularly the writing of their words partake of the eternal?

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What, exactly, does memory offer? What sort of possession is it? These questions are left open by Seneca: he tantalizes more than he answers. The

⁵⁶ Derrida, for example, is uncomfortable with the notion that deconstruction might be explicable in terms of its own institutional incarnation. Instead he wishes to preserve for it an unboundedness and irreducibility that allows it to act as a moment of non-being or as a trace. For Derrida the movement of deconstruction is autonomous and necessary, a force immanent within the very order it destabilizes. See, for example, Derrida 1989: 72–73.

⁵⁷ See Bourdieu for an attempt to objectify the French intellectual *milieu* – Derrida included – for his English readers (Bourdieu 1988: xi–xxvi).

subtle fabric of his text is woven in such a way that, paradoxically, one is ready to forget that the main body of the work is nothing but the product of an old man's memories, a memoir on memory. Seneca's work is readily taken for a catalog of speech instead of a repository of memories.⁵⁸ On such a reading the preface becomes merely an unwelcome and literal *hors d'oeuvre* on the way to the main fare. Instead one should see the preface as an appetizer that foregrounds an ingredient rendering the entire text possible.

Memory acts as a poetic force, then. For Seneca memory reproduces not just words, but also the lived consequence of those words, the society of language. The actual path traversed by Seneca's reminiscences, though, is not one of direct production or reproduction. Seneca promises that his memory can only wander, associate, and deliver unexpected thoughts out of place or requisite ones later than they ought to have been furnished. Thus instead of recording after the manner of a stenographer Seneca recalls in the fashion of a poet or even of a dreamer.

Memory should be explored as a protean and profound attribute of the text. Indeed, in as much as it is a psychic process, memory produces a dimension of meaning that outstrips what is found by looking merely to the surface of Seneca's prose. Thus one must not only take Seneca up on his subtle allusion to subtlety, but one should also ask questions of memory that exceed the compass of Seneca's own formulation. For example, Seneca's text is enriched by reference to the purposes of memory. These motives of memory are both expressed and implied. Memory recalls and reproduces. And yet one is also entitled to ask about those things that are forgotten. What goes permanently unsaid? What is the chain of associations? What of false or misleading recollections?

Clearly one cannot possibly answer every such query. As a "case history" the text must remain forever incomplete.⁵⁹ On the other hand, by attending to some of the operations of memory, its tropes, as it were, one can nevertheless develop a style of reading memories. First, Freud understands memories as points of affective attachment:⁶⁰ the significance of the moment recalled is the chief variable in its accessibility. On the other hand,

⁵⁸ Note, though, that the first case recounted is introduced as a particularly important reminiscence: it is the first declamation Latro ever spoke: "I will begin with the *controuersia* that I remember was the first my Latro ever declaimed . . ." (*Ab ea controuersia incipiam quam primam Latronem meum declamasse memini . . .* Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.24)

⁵⁹ Note, though, that Freud himself made an effort towards interpreting written records of the memories of Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe. See Freud 1990b and Freud 1990a. In each case, though, Freud relies on biographical and other information that would be unavailable in a study of Seneca.

⁶⁰ See Freud 1990b: 175.

such memories need not be “accurate” even though they are significant. So-called “screen memories” readily supplant recollections of certain facts.⁶¹ That is, one memory imposes itself between the subject and another memory. A purposeful amnesia displaces the original memory in a process wholly analogous to neurotic symptom formation.⁶² One wonders, then, at the extent to which Seneca’s failures to remember, the chain of his memories, and the mistakes in his memory – the last being more or less impossible to identify – are mutually related.

But rather than pursue the impossible by way of numerous appeals to the improbable, let us look not so much to the man as revealed by the preface as to the declamations themselves. Though these will be handled in detail in later chapters of this study, I would like to propose that the declamations are for Seneca as fairy tales are for children. Freud claims that one can justly argue “that fairy tales can be made use of as screen memories in the same kind of way that empty shells are used as a home by the hermit crab. These fairy tales then become favorites, without the reason being known.”⁶³

Thus Seneca may be evoking more than just the specific declamations themselves when he remembers for us what was said, for instance, about the war hero with no hands. For both Seneca and, in all likelihood, the various declaimers, the predilection for certain topics indicates a site of investment even though the specific subject may seem fanciful in the extreme. Declamations routinely explore crises within the family setting: one finds an impotent or castrating father, supposititious children, and a variety of illicit sexual unions. Brooding upon any of these involves working out and working through real questions of a related stamp without necessarily avowing such, or, more to the point, without ever coming to any final conclusions.

One repeats these cases again and again; and Seneca himself repeats their repetitions. The text on declamations becomes on this reading declamatory in the extreme. And to recall declamations means also to reinvolve the psychic world of these fairy tales as a world whose topography of affect is to be reproduced in another generation. Similarly the tropes of declamation become like the mechanisms of dream-work where the former are no more empty and mechanical than the latter.

⁶¹ See Freud 1965: 62–73.

⁶² Freud 1965: 66. Lacan, describing neurotic memory, makes the following aside: “Vous remarquez ici un remarquable concours avec la structure de ce que l’on peut appeler le souvenir-écran, c’est-à-dire le moment où la chaîne de la mémoire s’arrête.” (Lacan 1994: 119)

⁶³ Freud 1965: 70 n.10. As has been mentioned memory readily attaches itself to a sense of place and possession: hence the hermit crab in this regard too serves as a useful image.

Much as the declaimer in his imagined speech seeks to talk his audience into a sense of the community's values as against the deeds of one of the fictive parties of the case, so too does Seneca himself hope to record and assign to their place the communal values of rhetoric. His project is to defend the community of speech against the indignities it has suffered. In this sense, then, one justly compares Seneca to one of the characters of a declamation, to a war hero seeking redress against the violation of his house and bed: declamation's fantastic scenarios offer both the training ground and the point of retreat when it comes time to defend oneself against an imaginary threat. In fact, the rhetoric of the actual forum is a tool far less suited to repelling such an assault than are the devices of declamation. Declamation need never depart from the affective crisis in order to deal with more worldly questions of evidence, politics, and practical consequences. The good man that Seneca hopes to recall is hence already present in the declamations themselves. He speaks out there against the very transgressions that Seneca now needs him to smash down underneath a barrage of words: it is thus precisely the empty contents of declamations that make them worth recalling.

This homology between author and subject, though, contains yet another fold further complicating the structure of the text. The lost objects of rhetoric, of memory, and of declamation are actually meant to be lost. That is, the cry of outrage and the demand for reparation is itself tropological: there is no golden age, no moment before the crime, and no thing itself to which we may return. Hence the lost community of good men and lost virile authority were, in a sense, never there. To begin with, their real power resides in their persistence as objects of nostalgia in the present. Thus it is more the appeal to these objects than their actual existence that constitutes the engine of the text's psychic life.⁶⁴ And what genre describes better than declamation both the way we never were and the way we wish to be? Seneca's *recherche du temps perdu* becomes both a remembrance of things past and a recovery of lost time.

Rome needs, though, more than a renaissance of good rhetorical taste. In fact, Roman thinking on rhetoric expresses a nearly permanent dissatisfaction with the present in the name of a superior and more virile past. And yet the nostalgia for lost men is clearly a special sort of "getting to know all over again."

⁶⁴ See Lacan 1994: 6–69 for the child's appeal, its frustration, and the emergence of the symbol in the wake of the dialectic of presence and absence that ensues.

Freud argues that the finding of an object is actually the refinding of it.⁶⁵ The formulation is paradoxical and somewhat cryptic. Lacan's explication of the point helps to unpack its profound implications while also explaining memory's role in the process: there is a fundamental discord between the object that is refound and the object that was sought. One never recalls just what one remembered.⁶⁶ For psychoanalysis, the relationship to the first object, the mother and her breast, is not the same for a subject once it has become aware of its own body, of the process of frustration and lack, and of the mechanism of signification that is entailed by the play of presence and absence. Moreover, the term that structures this imaginary relationship between infant and mother is the phallus:⁶⁷ each represents phallic presence and power to the other partner, but neither actually possesses such authority. The image of potency and power remains always just that, an image: one never actually has that authority upon which the notion of the relationship of meaning subsisting between self and object depends.

Senecan memories obey this same logic, a logic that is fundamental to the relationship to the object as such. Or, rather than speaking of the object relation, Lacan reminds us that what is fundamental for psychic life is the lack (*manque*) of an object.⁶⁸ The action of memory proceeds by way of refinding an object that one has lost and that one seeks to recover. This object is one whose absence, though, is a fundamental aspect of one's psychic life. One compulsively repeats items from memory by way of summoning endlessly back into the present objects that one claims as one's own without at the same time finishing the process of recollection. The desire to remember is thus never satisfied. One can therefore describe memory as a screen behind which the relationship between the object and nothingness is played out for the subject.⁶⁹ Hence all memory, and especially rhetorical memory, does not participate in a relationship to the object so much as it mediates the relationship between the subject and the presence/absence of objects.

The impossibility of satisfaction is not merely a property of memory: one could no more be satisfied by the living presence of good men and good orators. For one does not actually desire them as such, instead the

⁶⁵ Freud 1962: 88.

⁶⁶ Lacan 1994: 53. Note as well Seneca's statements about the inadequation between imitation and original at Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.6.

⁶⁷ Lacan 1994: 70–75.

⁶⁸ The whole of the fourth seminar concerns this problem, but a clear introduction to it can be found at Lacan 1994: 35–37.

⁶⁹ See Lacan 1994: 156 for *le schéma du voile*.

point of orientation is a presumed phallic authority that they represent. And as representatives they are also “mere” representatives, mere images of authority rather than authority itself. One seeks access to the question of authority *per se* by way of these men: there is something, the phallus, beyond or behind them to which one seeks access.⁷⁰ Behind the speech, the man. Behind the man, the phallus. And this last is only apprehended indirectly, by way of appeals to and claims of legitimacy.

In the case of memory, though, the appeal’s indirection is highlighted. The orators are manifestly no longer there; they need refinding. Once Seneca has recalled them he will also have brought back into play the circuit of desire within which they play a pivotal role. Indeed, one might even say of these objects of memory that they must be lost as a prerequisite to the full significance of their refinding.⁷¹ We must look to the structure as a whole: virile authority, mastery, and presence neither “are” nor are they anywhere. Instead there is a process whereby the phallus is sought, cited, and reproduced rather than found, presented and produced. The declamations themselves obey this same logic: they forever cite an authority that is only hypothetical; they defend a law that has been conjured for the occasion; and they champion the values of an imagined community. These fanciful performances are consumed, though, with great relish by a worldly audience of men whose own lived relationship to authority can be mediated by way of these fictions.

On this reading Seneca labors under the curse neither of a failing memory nor of a wicked age. Instead his very protestations about each underscore the manner in which the psychic life of rhetoric must be the object of constant solicitude. By citing the declaimer Seneca also cites the masculine authority of speech; he performs fundamental operations of authority by using his memory to refind and reapportion language and authority.⁷² He also explicitly hopes to use his memories to ensure the reproduction of this particular economy of desire for his sons’ and subsequent generations. Thus he refuses to identify with passive male sexuality and in so doing claims to strike a blow simultaneously against ignorance, idleness, and dispossession.

⁷⁰ Compare Lacan 1994: 95–147 on the indirect route taken by such desires. See especially Lacan 1994: 88 and 110 for the discussion of courtly love as a means of aspiring to the phallus that resides *au delà de l’objet aimé*. See as well the phallus as veiled/screened in Lacan 1983.

⁷¹ As Lacan notes, “La retour est par Freud affirmé comme fondamental concernant l’objet. Ce n’est jamais, souligne-t-il, que sous sa forme retrouvé quel l’objet trouve à se constituer dans le développement du sujet. L’éloignement de l’objet y est nécessaire. Cette nécessité est à proprement parler corrélatrice de la dimension symbolique. Mais si l’objet s’éloigne, c’est pour que le sujet le retrouve.” (Lacan 1994: 321)

⁷² Once again one could compare Butler’s model of performativity.

The active knowledge of Seneca ensures a vigorous circuit of proper desire that will ever and properly allot to each his own. Opinions may differ as to what the proper economy of language ought to be at Rome, but Seneca's memories work to achieve the reproduction of a certain version of this authority, and the reasonableness of the whole social world is made to depend upon his success.