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SENECA IN SEARCH OF PASSING TIME

SUMMARY: Seneca shows us that reading the philosophers can enable the reader to escape time. He also teaches how to possess the future achieving fame among wise and virtuous people. In Seneca's opinion, time is our greatest wealth, however ephemeral it might be, although his tragic heroes and heroines as well as the author himself are conscious of the fact that death limits the time of life thus making it valuable. Nevertheless, his philosophy is often pessimistic, neglecting hope as a key to the future.

KEYWORDS: time, future, past, death, conscience

According to the author of a recently published book, "We all know intuitively that human life is short, at least when we get older and have to recognize that we have significantly less time ahead of us than behind us. Physicians are most aware of this, since their task, which they often strive in vain to fulfil, is to make people's lives as long as possible" (Weinrich 2008: 1). And he adds: "It was a great physician, Hippocrates, who first formulated the famous saying *Life is short and art is long*" (Weinrich 2008: 1).[1] Today it is hard to say which part of this opposition was more important for the Greek philosopher…

[1] The author of this quotation devoted a whole chapter to this famous, but as it turns out, equivocal formulation of the "crying philosopher" appearing in a very telling place, namely, in the first verse of the first aphorism of those included in the so-called *Corpus Hippocraticum*.

Someone once said that philosophy has arisen from the human need to tame the awareness of death that we are always accompanied by. For death puts an end to our existence, but thanks to it the time of our life acquires special value (Edwards 2014: 341). In antiquity, death was much closer to man than it is now, if only for the fact that mortality, particularly among children, was incomparably higher, and the lifespan was much shorter.[2] This could be the reason why ancient thinkers were fascinated by the lapse of time and its impact on man, as well as our way of taming the passing of it.[3]

What we are going to focus on in this article is the standpoint of Seneca the Younger, the famous and failed tutor to Nero, and author of profound moral lessons. Seneca, philosopher and writer, is particularly predestined to be more thoroughly looked at in the context of the reflections on time. This article is aimed at supplementing the statements made by Catharine Edwards (2014: 323-341) in her very interesting and competent presentation of this issue, as well as what was written by Dana F. Sutton with reference to dramatic time (Sutton 1986). Edwards focussed first of all on examining the value of time in the aspect of the Stoic perception of the lapse of time from the past through the present and into the future death. Then she passed on to analyse death and suicide in the aspect of reigning over time, and writing and philosophy as securing immortality for oneself. I would like to supplement her reflections with some of the ways of treating time by Seneca in all time categories: gratitude and lie in respect of the past,[4] hope and fear in

[2] Probably for these reasons an aged man who in addition fully preserved his intellect, was somebody very esteemed, like the talkative Cato in Cicero's treatise *Cato Maior de senectute.* This Cato, who was famous for his maxim: "Stick to the subject, the words will follow!"(*Rem tene, verba sequentur!*), because time is too short for superfluous words, cf. Weinrich 2008: 108. To see the connection between age and wisdom it is worth noting here a half-legendary Epimenides, who supposedly slept in a cave for 150 years and acquired the gift of prophesying, as mentioned by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*.

[3] In *De brevitate vitae* 10.2 Seneca makes a presentation of the three divisions of time. Supposedly, it was the Stoics who authored the tripartite division into past, present and future (Edwards 2014: *passim*).

[4] Also, one must not forget about a special attempt to tame the past which in antiquity was consolation, a piece that brought comfort to a suffering person. Seneca addressed this issue three times, paradoxically when he himself would suffer most, i.e.

respect of the future, and attempts to join both of them in memory and in the feeling of time periodicity. I will touch upon a certain attempt to reign over the present, which is always there both in tragedies and correspondence with Lucilius.[5] I will take advantage of narratological establishments (Barrett 2002) a couple of times concerning the dramatic output of Aeschylus in the aspect of retrospective narration in Senecan drama.

I intend to demonstrate here Seneca in his dual unity, as a philosopher and dramatist,[6] as a reconnaissance only and, moreover, in such a peculiar field as an attitude towards time. Indeed, he was a thinker who devoted many of his reflections to the varieties of time and our approach to this unusual gift.[7] In drama, which he also went in for, time is an inherent value not only in stage production, but also in textual communication, when time of statement is the real time of contact with the speaking person (Elam 1980: 117ff.).[8] Apart from that, it is time that decides about the span of the play plot as had already been stated by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at the problem of awareness of the lapse of time in drama characters of this Roman poet, which is visible both in reflection of the chorus, and drama protagonists.[9]

If our task is also to take up the past, one should dwell a bit on the subject of the Latin meaning of the word "lost". Two semantic fields of this adjective/participle overlap. We are dealing here both with

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in Corsica. However, there will not be a special place in this article devoted to this issue as much has been written on it, see e.g. Kassel 1958; Manning 1981.

5 This matter has been addressed by Edwards 2014: *passim.*

6 The current stance of scholars in this matter is such that the Roman Stoic was in his philosophic output to a great extent "compatible" with views expressed in dramas, if only as *coincidentia oppositorum.*

7 The author of this article had attempted to touch upon these issues in the following articles: Wesołowska 2001: 59-65; Wesołowska 1998: 23-33; Wesołowska 2009: 179-186 .

8 Some years ago, I attempted a sort of experiment to examine the real time of expression in Seneca's dramas to acquire an argument in favour of their theatrical and stage potentiality, see Wesołowska 1993: 119-129.

9 Surely, what appears here is a well-known problem of to what degree can one consider expressions of drama characters as *porte parole* of the author. These doubts, however, are many more in the case of the tragedy chorus.

a participle expression like *perditus* or *amissus* – lost, mislaid, or *dissipatus, tritus* – wasted, dissipated, squandered. Although, which is obvious, 'lost' time not always presupposes our will or guilt, originating from irreversibly fluid nature of time (Zimbardo, Boyd 2008: 8). On the contrary, it sometimes just results from our action or failure to act.

TIME ON STAGE

In Seneca's tragedies, fictional time tends to be emphasized in the aspect of beginning of drama. And so, in four tragedies we have clear clues to the moment when the action begins. In *Oedipus* and *Hercules furens, Thyestes,* and *Agamemnon*, extratextual audience receives such information at the beginning of the drama, which, according to Sutton (1986: 25-27) is particularly explicit in the prologue to *Agamemnon* as it provides information about day dawning (v. 53 ff.):

> Sed cur repente noctis aestivae vices
> hiberna longa spatia producunt mora,
> aut quid cadentes detinet stellas polo?
> Phoebum moramur. redde iam mundo diem.

Similarly, in *Thyestes* also this type of reference occurs, generally related to the status of the character appearing on stage, that being an apparition emerging from the other world, and vanishing at daybreak.[10] One could refer here to Aristotelian (*Poetics* 5 1449b8) suggestions about constructing time in drama so as to make the drama plot last as long as the Sun's cycle in the sky. It must be remembered that the plot in Greek tragedy begins at dawn, which is evident in *Antigone* by Sophocles or *Ion* by Euripides. Only how can one be sure that in Seneca's time that tradition was still viable? However, I believe it is worthwhile to mention here Seneca's opinion on the relationship between human and cosmic time (*Epist.*12,7) on the example of a singular day: "parem esse unum diem omnibus similitudine; nihil enim habet longissime temporis spatium, quod non et in uno die invenias".[11]

[10] However, one may discuss Juno's appearance in *Hercules furens* with regard to her divine status and her last words before disappearing: "Movenda iam sunt bella: clarescit dies/Ortuque Titan lucidus croceo subit".

[11] Cf. Edwards 2014: 325.

Sutton claims that apart from that clues to time governing the theatre macrocosm appear twice, i.e. in *Oedipus* and *Hercules furens*, namely in *Oedipus* summer harvest is mentioned (v. 37-43), and Juno appears in the prologue to tragedy *Hercules furens* under the sky characteristic of summer starry sky (v. 8 ff.).

Also, there is a clear non-homogeneity of dramatic time with its peculiar flexibility, e.g. in *Trojan women*, when on announcing Calchas' arrival, he appears instantly.[12] Most probably, Seneca was aware of the tradition of time construction in drama, and knew how to take advantage of its potentiality on stage, if only an imagined one.

Another interesting aspect here is temporal progress of passion in Seneca thoughts. In his drama[13] the long absence of Theseus is a main reason of arising Phaedra's affection toward Hippolytus. This fact is evident in her own utterance (v. 91-92):

profugus en coniunx abest
praestatque nuptae quam solet Theseus fidem.
Hence, time becomes almost the second guilty one of the affair.

Cassandra's approach to time is also worthy of peculiar interest. If we compare her character here with the one in Euripides, we can conclude of her special creation as an almost "rational" seer. Namely she relates the current events passing in the royal palace in spite of having the vision as it happens in Greek tragedy. We may assume that here apart from prophesying Roman Cassandra is gifted with a superhuman ability to see through the walls (v. 872-873):[14]

Tam clara numquam prouidae mentis furor
ostendit oculis; video et intersum et fruor.

We should notice here emphasizing of her utterance by juxtaposing "furor" and "fruor" closing both lines in her vision (Staley 2010: 62).

[12] I agree here with Sutton (1986: 27) that this is not an argument in favour of the "non-stageability of these tragedies".

[13] About temporal aspect of passion in his philosophical writings see: Budzowska2009: 187-196.

[14] This can be, of course, a disputable interpretation. Cf. Tarrant (Seneca, *Agamemnon,* 1976, 337 f.) who focuses his attention on possible examples in Aeschylus and Virgil of such assurance of clarity of hers, instead.

THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN SENECA

As is known, in his youth Seneca received a broad education and made successful attempts in this field before he switched over to philosophy and literature. Perhaps that study period left in him a lively interest in the problem of memory, understood both as mnemonics[15] and that capacity of our mind which brings back the past as close and alive. And so, he teaches that memory must be exercised so that it is docile to us, as he perceived its significance in treating the past time, feeling grateful,[16] developing intellectually, contacting friends and approaching death. Thus, he sees memory as an attribute of the spirit. One can presume that this requires certain spiritual exercise, when the philosopher writes about a particular human nature which makes him store harm longer in his memory than favour which gets forgotten quickly.[17] Therefore, the desire to revenge is generally stronger than the will to feel gratitude. Here appear very precious Senecan pieces of advice directed both to those who do acts of kindness and those who receive it: May those who give forget that immediately, and a faithful remembrance of kindness lives in the memories of those who receive it.[18]

However, his *dramatis personae* do not act in accordance with his suggestions. In the tragedy *Agamemnon*, a Trojan chorus of captive women passionately broods over the loss of their personal freedom and tragic fall of Troy, and immerse in the pain of memories, something that the philosopher never advised.[19] Clytemnestra in the same tragedy, in turn, explains her coldness towards her returning husband by his ten years of absence (v. 155), and refuses to remember that they have a son, but willingly contemplates her second daughter's death by his hand (v. 158f.) In *Medea*, the mad Colchean is convinced that Jason should be

[15] It concerns hints to divide into small parts what we have gathered during different readings, and thereby (following the example of bees) preserve it better, cf. *Epist*. 83.

[16] Some of Seneca's opinions concerning gratitude are still acceptable for us, e.g.: "One should value lightly what one has given, highly what one has received" and "The giver's pure heart is the measure of the gift's value" (*De beneficiis*, *passim*). We should add here the words spoken by Thyestes in the drama (*Thyestes,* 416): "cum quod datur spectabis, et dantem aspice".

[17] *De beneficiis* I 2, 3.

[18] Cf. e.g. *De beneficiis* II 17, 7; II 22, 1, and also *De brevitate vitae* 15, 3-4.

[19] *Epist.* 78, 14.

grateful to herself for all her share she had had in the success of the expedition of the Argonauts (v. 555 ff.). Her retrospective narration concerning these old events was fragmentary, but only focused on her own role in the expedition. Hence, she acts so as to be in conflict with the philosopher's suggestions regarding gratitude.[20] In the dramatic sense, memories of some past events may be an argument in the *agon*, an element that corrects the characters' conduct or have an impact on their perception of the past. Such a narration appears in Theseus' statement who portrays atrocities of the Underworld in tragedy *Hercules furens* to even more strongly emphasize the horror of the situation after successful return home.

It is not allowed to waste time, neither that ahead of us nor past one[21] – teaches Seneca. The past already belongs completely to us, but surely not in a sense that it is submissive to us. Yet, we should learn from it for the future. *De brevitate vitae* 10.4*:*

Atqui haec est pars temporis nostri sacra ac dedicata, omnis humanos casus supergressa, extra regnum fortunae subducta, quam non inopia, non metus, non morborum incursus exagitet; haec nec turbari nec eripi potest; perpetua eius et intrepida possessio est.[22]

But the old times connected with youth may appal, too. In the drama *Thyestes*, the title character is afraid to enter his family home. Not for love or money does he want these horrible events to come back. The trauma of his youthful years effectively repulses him from his family threshold. Time may close itself and then everything will happen once again, thinks Thyestes. And he is right, because the wheel of terrible revenge of the ancestral spirit Alastor has already been put in motion. Thyestes is frightened. The atrocity of his youth is right next to him, and the past is the breath of his life, which paralyses him. Fear prompts him not to enter his home as something terrible can happen.

[20] About the definition of gratitude in Greek philosophy, see Anagnostopoulos, Miller, Jr. 2013: 312.

[21] *De brevitate vitae* VIII 1 Seneca teaches in this dialogue also: "How great mindfulness do we need to save what we do not know for how long it will suffice".

[22] Seneca teaches also that one needs great mindfulness to make use of what we do not know for how long it will suffice (*De brevitate vitae* 8, 3).

This ill-fated, gravely experienced wanderer has a special gift, that of fear.[23] That is why he utters these telling words (v. 418 ff):

> fortis fui laetusque. nunc contra in metus
> revolvor: animus haeret ac retro cupit
> corpus referre, moveo nolentem gradum.[24]

However, at his sons insistence he stops listening to his fear and comes into the house, and there his sons get killed and he himself is insidiously forced to the atrocious crime of cannibalism.

MEMORIES OF THE SWEET PAST

What I elsewhere call the sweet charm of memories (Wesołowska 2001) appears at least twice in Seneca's tragedies. In both cases, those who recollect are women who miss their better past twice. Each of us has an emotional baggage, and no wonder that it grows, but changes in the course of our lives as well. For memories not only grow in number, but they somehow exchange, complement and supplant one another. Memories come over us suddenly in moments of meditation, but also in situations that widely engage our emotions. So, let us look at such sentimental wanders of Seneca's tragedy characters. It turns out, however, that Seneca's protagonists find time and will to think back on the past. So they are not so much "occupied" with dramatic present time and can look back.[25]

We are talking about Phaedra and Medea who suffer because their bright past is gone forever. Phaedra misses her youth. Medea misses her youth, but also the position and power that she used to have by the side of her father, Aietes. It takes place in a special situation, when she is treated by Creon in a way that offends her high feeling of dignity. Here is how she begins to recollect (v. 203-210):

> Difficile quam sit animum ab ira flectere
> iam concitatum, quamque regale hoc putet,

[23] Present-day psychology does not disregard this gift, see e.g. Becker 1997: *passim*.

[24] This can be a reference to both old age or symptoms of fear of Thyestes.

[25] It is worth mentioning here the so-called autobiographical memory with its specificity, see Maruszewski 2005: *passim*.

sceptris superbas quisque admovit manus,
qua cepit ire, regia didici mea.
quamvis enim sim clade miseranda obruta,
expulsa supplex sola deserta, undique
afflicta, quondam nobili fulsi patre,
avoque clarum Sole deduxi genus.

And she finishes bitterly (v. 219 f.):
rapida Fortuna ac levis
praecepsque regno eripuit, exilio dedit.[26]

Where fate has been particularised as *fortuna levis, praceps* and *rapida.* Medea once again reaches back to her past, but less distant now, when she reminisces about her share she had had in the success of the expedition of the Argonauts. She presents the participants of the expedition in detail. Very strong is the context of her role and merits in the success of the expedition, which she emphasized with an expression *munus meum*, which surrounds the names Castor and Pollux (v. 230) – double merit, and Orpheus (v. 228). Such an appropriation (symbolic for that matter) of some of the Argonauts is particularly significant. Medea appears to us as turned towards the past, from which she draws her feeling of strength, but that of having been wronged either. Medea wants to take root in the past anew, hence her amazing cry (v. 1016 f.):

Perfruere lento scelere, ne propera, dolor.
meus dies est: tempore accepto utimur.
which leads to such a sentence built on the basis of deviant logic (v. 934f.):

occidant, non sunt mei,/ pereant, mei sunt). Her logic becomes strange, as we can notice that this sentence combines two antithetic implications. Finally, the protagonist welcomes the returning past (v. 984): rediere regna, rapta uirginitas redit.

What is peculiar is that both statements of the drama protagonist are not just limited to a sad conclusion and regret over her youth that

[26] Thus Medea offers us a privileged view and guides our witnessing of the invisible past, becoming to some degree extradiegetic or outside the world of characters (cf. Barrett 2002: 3f.).

is irreversibly gone. Twice mad Medea does her utmost to recover that past or restore it to the present. She does it quite cleverly following the principle: "though this be madness, yet there is method in it". The other day, Medea lost her virginity to the Argonaut Jason and has children with him. How simple it is: to get her offspring out of her way to heal over that mental wound, and regressively restore that intact female part to herself.

Phaedra acts differently. Her method for living her youth anew is connected with young Hippolytus who so much resembles young Theseus back when she loved him, herself being much younger. Her beloved one's youth is also a method to improve her unfortunate past, as if she lived it once more as one who is richer with all the wisdom drawn out from this relationship (v. 646 f.):

> Thesei vultus amo
> illos priores, quos tulit quondam puer.

A character plainly tragic and tragically characteristic in reflections on time is Oedipus. One who had learnt too much about his future at the cost of what everyone of us knows, i.e. his past. That tragic balance caused his manic attempts to change his future, and all this because he really neither knew his past nor his present time at all. What is the Senecan Oedipus distinguished by against a backdrop of his Greco-Roman prototypes? Well, by many features, e.g. greater virulence and harshness of character. However, regarding the perception and role of the past and the future he is more cautious, and not completely sure of his role, which makes him so much different from the Sophoclean King Oedipus, presumptuous and arrogant in his innate intelligence. Here are his words full of naivety in the tragedy prologue (v. 12 ff.):

> Quam bene parentis sceptra Polybi fugeram!
> Curis solutus exul, intrepidus vagans
> (caelum deosque testor) in regnum incidi.

However, protagonists sometimes happen to distort the picture of past events by resorting to lying. *Phaedra* is an excellent though ambiguous example here, where the title character suggests to have been

raped by her stepson. She does not say it openly, and leaves activity to Theseus who does not even feel that he is being manipulated by his wife[27] (v. 896 f):

Phaedra
Hic dicet ensis, quem tumultu territus
Liquit stuprator civium accursum timens.

TIME IN SENECAN PHILOSOPHY.

It is worthwhile to pass on briefly to considerations of Seneca the philosopher concerning the lapse and value of time. In ancient reflection, there is a real tangle of issues in this subject. Ancient thinkers were strongly aware of the irreversible passage of time, the transience of the present moment or the impossibility of embracing the future.[28] Similarly with Seneca, whose many opinions in this matter are naturally derivative in character, and the entirety of the philosopher's outlook does not form a coherent whole, and presumably this was not intended by Lucius Annaeus. Most reflections on time and its meaning in human life are included in his two philosophical works, namely in the dialogue *De brevitate vitae* and in his *Epistulae morales*. Also, he touched upon the issue of time as a special kind of remedy in his consolatory writings, particularly in the consolation meant for his mother, where he writes the following:

"expectabam itaque dum ipse uires suas frangeret et ad sustinenda remedia mora mitigatus tangi se ac tractari pateretur".[29]

It is an example of how to understand the role of the passing of time as the thing that alleviates pain, which was a well-known ancient topos on whose basis grew a quite noted (though not the only one) practice to give comfort even two years after the death of the loved one!

[27] Another opinion is that Phaedra does not want to lie, but she is completely misunderstood by her husband because she is speaking ambiguously in shock.

[28] The are many clues on that matter, e.g. see Edwards 2014. In modern psychology such an approach is rather not evident, e.g. Zimbardo, Boyd 2008: *passim*.

[29] *De consolatione ad Helviam matrem* 1.

Another frequent topic in Roman literature is the Golden Age as a paradisiacal time lost. No wonder as it expressed a longing for old-time primeval paradise, Arcadia or whatever we could call that memory. Those reflections would often be at the service of propaganda. Also in our philosopher we find examples of such reflections. In a piece where we could not expect to find them, namely *Apocolocyntosis*, the author introduces in a strange way a laudatory trifle in honour of young Nero with whose birth there came along again a golden age. It is probably a topos as quite a number of rulers had been extolled this way, but that serious place among scoff and derision of intellectual and physical shortcomings or recently deceased emperor Claudius is astonishing. One could venture to say that a panegyric so strangely juxtaposed with satire loses its lofty character, and becomes suspicious to say the least as far as purity of the author's intentions is concerned. The myth of four ages of mankind in an abridged version also appears in *Medea* in contrasting the iron age with the golden age, which was a very common topos. Intermediary ages of mankind, i.e. silver and copper ones, are not important to the author. The issue here is first of all to pessimistically demonstrate human decay, similarly to *Phaedra*.

In Seneca's opinion, the legend of the Republican Rome was a reflection of the legend of the Golden Age. And this aspect is brought up by the author, however in a not fully definite way. A symbol of Seneca's admiration of "good old times" is Cato Uticensis. The Roman philosopher devotes a great deal of place and attention to Cato. For the purpose of this address, let us mention only several epigrams commonly ascribed to that philosopher. Cato the Younger is presented here as a sage in the fight for death by his own hand. Mad, but totally free; he wants to die, and nobody can prevent him from doing it (*Epigram* 399, 5-6).

Most probably it was a form of taming death by means of a retrospection of the glorious deeds of the Roman hero for consolatory purposes during his exile, of course if we agree on a hypothetical dating of these minor pieces back to Seneca's stay in Corsica. In this case, it would be a very interesting evocation of the past and lost time to feel confident about the present time stricken with fear that arises from

uncertainty.[30] Seneca's interest in time which results in death meant as law not punishment was also expressed in epigram 235, which is commonly ascribed to him.

In this reflection of Seneca, the past intertwines with the future in a special way, so in the cyclical state of affairs could be fulfilled a new stage in the existence of the world, yet not the same one, as the philosopher argues. This apocalyptic vision of the continuity of the world is of a non-uniform significance. It can be tinged with very special optimism, like in *De consolatione ad Marciam*, when a mother's pain can be soothed by being aware that everything will eventually come to an end as it happens in the cosmic scale. This end of the world is the lost time indeed, because the world will be annihilated to such an extent (by fire and deluge) that everything will decompose into particles, and the souls of virtuous people will become primeval elements.

A special place in Seneca's philosophy is occupied by hope, which he connects with fear. Hope and fear seem to be the bane of our life, he learns,[31] because nobody can be perfectly happy with the risk of disappointment, which is a result of fear or hope for anything. Seneca sees here a special *coniunctio oppositorum,* namely without fear there would be no hope. In turn, without hope there would be no longer fear but despair. In my opinion, it is hard to find any counterpoint in his tragedies of such a conjunction between fear and hope, nevertheless we have some evidence of it in *Phaedra,* in its first part, where the heroine is hoping for the mutual feeling from Hippolytus, being afraid of such incest. It should be mentioned here that epigram 415, if correctly attributed to Seneca, is a very interesting, if not ambiguous, praise of Hope.

Generally, however, this is Seneca's pessimistic vision of the lapse of time in the world, in which time is being lost in every moment of our lives either due to our own actions or those of somebody else. We are not able to learn on the basis of the past, which is the only thing submissive to us though no longer subject to our will. This existential and ethical pessimism manifests itself with the Roman writer most explicitly in *De brevitate vitae*, the most important of his reflections

[30] Similar thing happened e.g. in idylls by Calpurnius who exalted Nero as one who originated another Golden Age.

[31] *De vita beata,* XIII 1ff.

on personal time, although undoubtedly it is also an apologia of our influence on lasting in personal dimension through high standards that we should give to our lives. Seneca teaches us that ultimately our future is a big mystery to us, and finally the world will draw to a close as a whole, and although it will be reborn, yet it will not be ours any more and devoid of our share in it. So, if we can talk about Seneca's ontological and moral optimism, then we can do so only in a global sense. And our lost past is supposed to serve us so that we can learn from it and improved ourselves based on our own faults, sufferings or forever lost events. However, one must neither refer to the past to look for incentives to revenge for old harms,[32] nor take the credit for other ones perhaps not sufficiently settled the other day. As you can see, our Roman philosopher demands a lot from us. Not otherwise does he act towards the present. He cautions against unwise wasting of time and letting others rob us of it. For it is our greatest wealth, however ephemeral it might be. Seneca attacks very busy people because "the lives of the *occupati* are the shortest of all" and argues that the *occupati* cannot employ the past (10.3–6) and barely enjoy the present (10.6). Hence, wasted their lives, but also viciously attack those who live an *otium occupatum* or *desidiosum* (12–13).[33]

He builds all his reflections with a pessimistic awareness that the old times of humanity used to carry more moral virtues, and "Stoic" waiting for a cyclical course of events assumes a great end of the world of people, out of which only fragments will remain. What then is our inside judge and criterion personal time that passes? Conscience, responds Seneca, in which he comes close to present-day Christian thinkers. This Roman philosopher was highly appreciated by Christian writers from the very beginning, as supposed to have some relation to Christianity (Ramelli 2013: 323) maybe even beyond his merits.[34] This way he could continue to exist in the time to come, that is achieved

[32] An obvious example of an inconsistency in our Roman philosopher's teaching in the context of his own life was the famous revenge on the late emperor Claudius. Seneca in his own way settled old scores with his painful past and exile by cruelly portraying Claudius as the one humiliated by gods after his death.

[33] For further commentary, cf. Smith 2014: 163.

[34] For Patristic testimonies on Seneca, see Trillitzsch 1971.

fame. It was not publicity, which he did not care for, but memory in wise and virtuous people.[35]

We find a very interesting approach to time in *De brevitate vitae,* where Seneca shows that reading the philosophers, can enable the reader to escape time: *hi tibi dabunt ad aeternitatem iter* […] *haec una ratio est extendendae mortalitatis, immo in immortalitatem vertendae* (15.4). As Edwards writes: "The philosopher alone has the capacity to collapse distinctions between past, present, and future, to combine all times into one: *longam illi vitam facit omnium temporum in unum conlatio*, (15.5). Philosophers teach us how to die (*De brevitate* 15.1) but at the same time communing with philosophers allows one to transcend time (15.4).75".

As we see, Seneca's pupils as well as his tragic heroes and heroines are conscious of the fact that death always limits the time of their life, but simultaneously makes the time valuable. Being aware of this paradox we become more divine (Edwards 2014: 341). Maybe this is our only treasure to have "an awareness of time that is entirely based on the aspects of time that are dwindling and floating away" (Weinrich 2008: 209).

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[35] Seneca takes a clear stand on posthumous fame, that particular case of remembrance of one's own life by posterity, cf. Wesołowska 1998: 32.

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