

MEMINISSE IUVABIT:
SENECA ON CONTROLLING MEMORY*

Seneca tells us that memory is more enduring than grief, and that therefore a man should grieve only briefly:

“What then”, you say, “Am I going to forget a friend?” It is surely a short memory that you grant him, if it is to last only as long as your grief, for some circumstance however fortuitous will soon change your brow into laughter. I will not push forward the time at which any sense of loss is soothed, and even the sharpest sorrows quiet down. As soon as you stop looking at yourself, this picture of sadness will go away; now you are keeping watch over your suffering. But even while you keep watch, your suffering slips away, and the sharper it is, the faster it stops. Let us see to it that the memory of those whom we have lost is happy. No one turns back with pleasure to those things which will give him pain if he thinks of them (Ep. 63.3–4).¹

Ep. 99.23–24 elaborates on the same theme: it is not human to forget dear ones, to weep profusely and to remember little. The love of an animal for its young burns warmly, but dies when the young die, whereas a sensible man should always remember his loved ones but quickly stop mourning for them (*meminisse perseveret, lugere desinat*).

By contrasting lasting memory and short-lived grief, Seneca challenges the shared sentiment that memories of a dead person nourish grief. The sentiment goes back to Homer: Achilles weeps because he remembers Patroclus, he remembers Patroclus as he sighs (Il. 19.314: *μνησάμενος δ' ἄδινῶς ἀνευείκατο*) and weeps (Il. 24.4: *κλαίει φίλου ἑτάρου μεμνημένος*); memories make Achilles

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1) “*Quid ergo?*” *inquis*, “*Obliviscar amici?*” *Brevem illi apud te memoriam promittis, si cum dolore mansura est; iam istam frontem ad visum quaelibet fortuita res transferet. Non differo in longius tempus quo desiderium omne mulcetur, quo etiam acerrimi luctus residunt. Cum primum te observare desieris, imago ista tristitiae discedet; nunc ipse custodis dolorem tuum. Sed custodienti quoque elabitur eoque citius, quo est acrior, desinit. Id agamus ut iucunda nobis amissorum fiat recordatio. Nemo libenter ad id redit quod non sine tormento cogitaturus est.* (The translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.)

and Priam cry (Il. 24.509–12).² Seneca opposes this cliché: grief, in spite of our attachment to it, will pass, no matter how dearly we nurture it;³ memory survives. The divorce of memory from grief is made possible by our ability to control memories: I choose to evoke an image; I do not let that image flood my mind. The deceased will not come to me in the way he wishes but I will go to him in the way I wish.

Seneca's conception of memory can be termed "voluntaristic", because it is grounded in the conviction that memories, their use and their effects can be governed by the will.⁴ To be sure, Seneca acknowledges that one can control memory (and forgetfulness) only so much: *quantum potest* (Ep. 81.25). Ep. 49 is indeed inspired by an involuntary reminiscence. A visit to Campania stirs up the memory of Lucilius' departure and a longing for him. Seneca vividly sees the parting scene, with Lucilius crying and unsuccessfully resisting his emotions. But soon afterwards he shifts tone and content. He gains control over his memory and exploits it to convey a philosophical message. A comparison with Sappho's "consolation poems", in particular with fragment 94 (Lobel/Page), brings out Seneca's effort to canalize the involuntary reminiscence.⁵ Sappho lets the image of the departed friend and the remembrance of their shared pleasures take hold of her mind. By contrast Seneca converts the vividness of the memory of his separation from Lucilius, and of the latter's emotional distress, into a meditation on memory itself: the remark *modo amisisse te videor* (it seems to me that I have lost you just now) develops into a broader observation on our perception of the past. Seneca dominates the involuntary reminiscence.⁶ He does not walk down memory's lane, as it happens for instance to Catullus in poem 68, in which memory is not thematized but just activated (70–72: "... where my splendid goddess with soft steps entered, and paused upon the well-worn threshold, resting her

2) On these episodes, cf. Simondon 69–70.

3) We are reminded of Tonio Kröger in Thomas Mann's novella of the same name, who realizes that his love for the "blonde Ingeborg" has died in spite of his efforts to keep it alive.

4) Cf. Armisen-Marchetti 556 ("mémoire volontaire").

5) On the role of memory in Sappho's consolatory poems, cf. Simondon 78–79.

6) Cf. already the meditative incipit: "A person is indolent and careless, dear Lucilius, if he is reminded of a friend only by a landscape."

shining foot on her tapping sandal”) as well as to numerous characters of modern literature or even opera.⁷

Language and imagery emphasize Seneca’s voluntaristic conception of memory. It is true that he employs *recordatio* and *memoria* indifferently, whereas one might expect a preference for *recordatio*, the equivalent to Greek ἀνάμνησις that is, the active search for memories, as opposed to μνήμη.⁸ The difference between the two Greek terms is formalized by Aristotle in his essay *De memoria*, where it is stated that ἀνάμνησις is essentially voluntaristic (though not exclusively⁹) and intellectually more complex than μνήμη: animals have the latter but not the former (450a15–18).¹⁰ While ἀνάμνησις is connected with learning, μνήμη is a passive process, a πάθος (449b4–9; 449b28). Latin, however, does not distinguish as sharply between *memoria* and *recordatio*. Seneca highlights the voluntaristic character of memory rather by describing the act of remembering with the phrases *se convertere, repetere, in praeteritum tempus animum mittere*,¹¹ or with the simple verb *respicere*,¹² as well as by claiming that all of our past comes to us when summoned and lets itself be looked at and retained at our will,¹³ and by mentioning *recordari* among the activities of the mind unhampered by sickness: though you are ill, *suadebis doceris, audies disces, quaeres recordaberis* (Ep. 78.20). Remembering

7) An intriguing parallel to the verses of Catullus quoted above is the beginning of the aria ‘E lucean le stelle’ from Puccini’s *Tosca*, where Cavaradossi similarly follows the vision of his beloved crossing the threshold of their love-alcove: “stridea l’uscio dell’orto, e un passo sfiorava la rena” (the garden’s threshold cracked, and a step lightly touched upon the ground). The aria continues: “entrava ella fragrante”, just as Laodamia, conjured up by the vision of Lesbia in Catullus’ poem, is *flagrans* (68.73). I suspect that Giacosa, Puccini’s librettista, had Catullus’ poem in mind.

8) The term *reminiscentia* is not classical: it occurs (in the plural) in Tertullian and Arnobius as a translation of Plato’s ἀνάμνησις. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* does not give the lemma.

9) Cf. De mem. 451b26–27 and 453a16–27, with the comments of Ross 266.

10) Seneca’s own view is that animals have no abstract memory. For instance, horses remember a road only if they are taken back to it (Ep. 124.16–18). Cicero more radically denies animals the possession of any kind of memory (De off. 1.4.11).

11) Cf. Ad Marc. 5.4; Ep. 99.23; Ad Pol. 10.3, with Armisen-Marchetti 556.

12) Cf., e.g., De brev. vit. 10.2; Ep. 73.3.

13) Cf. De brev. vit. 10.4: *praeteriti temporis omnes, cum iusseritis, aderunt, ad arbitrium tuum inspicit se ac detineri patientur*.

goes together with highly intellectual exercises, such as teaching and learning.

To control memories means to choose among them. Opposing a behavioral pattern that goes back to Homeric epic,¹⁴ Seneca claims that in deciding a course of action, the memory of benefits should outweigh that of offenses (Ep. 81.7). Even when no action is involved, one should avoid dwelling on the memory of past misfortunes:

I think that we should do away with complaints about past sufferings ... What benefit is there in reconsidering past sufferings and in being unhappy just because once you were? And what shall we say to this, that everyone adds much to his ills and tells lies to himself? In addition, that which was harsh to bear is pleasant to have borne: it is natural to rejoice at the end of one's ills. We must therefore remove these two things, fear of future misfortune and memory of past one: the latter concerns me no longer, the former not yet. When set in the very midst of hardships, one should say: "perhaps one day it will be pleasing to remember even these things" (Ep. 78.14–15; the citation is Virg. Aen. 1.203).¹⁵

The imaginative effort that Seneca recommends consists in converting a present unpleasant happening into a future pleasurable memory. The sufferer detaches himself from his predicament by projecting himself onto the future. As R. G. Austin notes, "the sentiment is a commonplace".¹⁶ One is reminded especially of Virgil's direct source, Od. 12.212, where Odysseus, before passing by Scylla, encourages his comrades with these words: "some day I think you will remember even these things (καί που τῶνδε μνήσεσθαι οἶώ)." μνήσεσθαι corresponds to *meminisse iuvabit* because in that context it is not neutral but implies "with pleasure".¹⁷

On a deeper level, however, to control one's memories means to control our disposition towards them, for even memories of misfortune can be fruitfully used: *meminisse iuvabit*. If bad people

14) Cf., e.g., Il. 9.646–48, with Simondon 62–64.

15) *Detrabendas praeteritorum dolorum conquestiones puto ... quid iuuet praeteritos dolores retractare et miserum esse quia fueris? Quid quod nemo non multum malis suis adicit et sibi ipse mentitur? Deinde, quod acerbum fuit ferre, tulisse iucundum est: naturale est mali sui fine gaudere. Circumcidenda ergo duo sunt, et futuri timor et veteris incommodi memoria: hoc ad me iam non pertinet, illud non-dum. In ipsis positus difficultatibus dicat, 'forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit'.*

16) Austin (ed.) ad. loc.

17) Simondon 76 quotes the eloquent translation of V. Bérard: "ce sera quelque jour de nos bons souvenirs."

do not want to remember their past, the culprit is their shameful behavior (De brev. vit. 1.10.2: *iniucunda est paenitendae rei recordatio*). It is true that at Ep. 78.18, Seneca urges us to recall our “good roles” when we suffer: “think of your honorable or valiant deeds; consider the good roles that you have played”.¹⁸ This passage matches the interpretation of *meminisse iuvabit* in the same letter: on the one hand Seneca recommends us to project a present misfortune onto a future pleasurable memory; on the other, to take refuge in a pleasurable memory against a present misfortune. Nonetheless, by a “good role” Seneca means, not an attractive script (“I played a rich man”) but a good staging of any script (“I played well [*honeste, fortiter*] whatever I was asked to play”). In hardship one remembers how well one has played in the theater of life, just as an actor remembers his good performances. As is well known, acting is a common metaphor in Stoic thought, including Seneca’s, to signify the right disposition towards life-happenings (do not identify with any role, be able to switch according to the orders of the stage-director, god or fate¹⁹). What matters is the interpretation we give, not the character impersonated. To remember our good roles means to remember our good performance of any part we were assigned to.

Similarly Seneca’s analysis of the relationship between memory and mourning puts emphasis on one’s attitude to the past rather than on the latter’s content. In dissociating memory from grief Seneca is in line with the Roman tradition of celebrating the deceased, which he indeed echoes in the *Consolatio ad Marciam*: the memories of her son which Marcia should cultivate are all good memories (5.4: his childish games, his progress in study). But even here Seneca recommends that good memories should not upset us by sharpening our sense of loss. If Octavia could not see images of Marcellus it is because they made her sad, no matter how happy they were. No one can live with a memory “if he makes it sad for himself” (Ad Marc. 5.4).²⁰ We should remember serenely whatever it is that we remember. Seneca criticizes the Epicurean Metrodorus for finding a certain pleasure in sadness (Ep. 99.25) and, for a simi-

18) *Cogita quid honeste, quid fortiter feceris; bonas partes tecum ipse tracta.*

19) On the metaphor, cf. Goldschmidt 178–86; Setaioli (2001) 62; Long 242–43.

20) Cf. also Ep. 99.23: *memoriam eius, quantum potes, celebra. Quae ad te saepius revertetur, si erit sine acerbitate ventura*; Ep. 63.4, quoted above.

lar reason, his own teacher Attalus (Ep. 63.5–7).²¹ The optimal disposition towards past goods is gratitude (Ep. 98.11; Ad Pol. 10.2–3). One should remember them as “inalienable” in the sense that having enjoyed them cannot be taken away: “To have is snatched away, to have had never” (*Habere eripitur, habuisse numquam*, Ep. 98.11); “The time that has passed is ours and nothing is in a safer place than that which has been (*nostrum est quod praeterit tempus nec quicquam est loco tutiore quam quod fuit*, Ep. 99.3).”²² You are dying, but you have lived; you are blind, but you have seen. Having seen, having lived cannot be taken away from you (De ben. 6.2.2). Hence we will remember with pleasure the joys we had: the memory of deceased friends is *dulcis ac blanda* (Ep. 63.7). Remembering past joys brings tranquillity to the soul:

People set a narrow limit to their enjoyment if they rejoice only at present goods: both the future and the past give pleasure, the one by anticipation, the other by remembrance. The one, however, is still suspended and might not happen, whereas the other must have been. What madness is it, then, to lose the most certain thing of all? Let us rest content with the pleasures that we have drunk, if only our soul, while we were drinking them, was not pierced and did not lose whatever it received (Ep. 99.5).²³

Thus, memory provides an antidote against the anxiety caused by the precariousness of possessions and the fleetingness of time. Present possessions can only be enjoyed with a “tempering” of reason, with a *caveat*. We should possess them as if we did not: “I had friends as if I would lose them” (Ep. 63.7). Past possessions, by contrast, can

21) Seneca’s disagreement with his Stoic teacher might depend on the latter espousing a typical Epicurean motif, as shown by the reference to Metrodorus at Ep. 99.25. Cf. Setaioli (1988) 250.

22) Cf. also De ben. 3.4; De brev. vit. 10.4; Ad Pol. 10.3.

23) *Anguste fructus rerum determinat qui tantum praesentibus laetus est: et futura et praeterita delectant, haec expectatione, illa memoria, sed alterum pendet et non fieri potest, alterum non potest non fuisse. Quis ergo furor est certissimo ex-cidere? Adquiescamus iis quae iam hausimus, si modo non perforato animo hauriebamus et transmittente quidquid acceperat.* For the image of “resting”, cf. also Ad Pol. 10.3: *in praeteritis adquiescit*. The motif is Epicurean (*adquiescere* translates ἡδονὴ καταστηματικὴ): cf. Johann 85–92. Johann discusses Ep. 99 (and other Senecan texts) in connection with Lucretius 3.391–67. Grimal 98 also observes that the idea that a past pleasure is the safest and the most stable one is shared by Epicurus (the main text is Usener, Epicurea 436, which Grimal compares with Seneca, De ben. 3.4). On memory and tranquillity, cf. also De brev. vit. 10.5: *Securae et quietae mentis est in omnes vitae suae partes discurrere.*

be enjoyed fearlessly and forever (De brev. vit. 10.4: *perpetua eius et intrepida possessio est*) because, as we have seen, they are unassailable. Paradoxically to lose someone is the safest way of possessing him ("I lost them as if I have them still", Ep. 63.7). Along the same lines Seneca says that a wise man draws greater pleasure from a benefit than a foolish man, because what pleases him is not to receive but to have received, which is *immortale et adsiduum* (Ep. 81.24).²⁴

Memory helps us to settle also by boosting our sentiment of psychic continuity. Without memory we would have no sense of self-identity but would be carried off by the torrent of life. We are rivers, fleeting creatures of time:

None of us in old age is the same person he was in his youth; no one tomorrow is the same person he was yesterday. Our bodies are carried off like rivers. Whatever you see runs with time: none of the things we see remains, and I myself, even while I say that these things change, have changed. This is what Heraclitus says, "in the same river we step twice and we do not step", for the name of the river remains the same, but the water has passed through (Ep. 58.22–23).²⁵

In spite of Seneca's confusing contamination of two readings of the Heraclitean image ("we cannot step into the same river twice" and "we step and do not step into the same river"²⁶), the core of the passage is clear: while the river remains the same as an abstract concept (*nomen*), as a concrete object it keeps changing; likewise, while each individual keeps the same "name", he is subject to continual transformations.²⁷

24) On this aspect of memory, cf. Grimal and Viparelli 50–51. Seneca's emphasis on the past as the only time in our possession is at odds with his claim that past and future do not exist because we have no experience of them (cf. Ep. 74.33–34; this was the standard Stoic position: cf. Goldschmidt *passim*, especially 39, 43–44). We should not look for consistency. Though Seneca shows awareness of the philosophical importance of the problem of time (for instance at Ep. 88.33), he subordinates theoretical speculation to the moral point he wants to make. At Ep. 74.33–34, he argues that only the present exists in order to dispel the troubles caused by fear or memory.

25) *Nemo nostrum idem est in senectute qui fuit iuvenis; nemo nostrum est idem mane qui fuit pridie. Corpora nostra rapiuntur fluminum more. Quidquid videt currit cum tempore; nihil ex iis quae videmus manet; ego ipse, dum loquor mutari ista, mutatus sum. Hoc est quod ait Heraclitus: 'in idem flumen bis descendimus et non descendimus.' Manet enim idem fluminis nomen, aqua transmissa est.*

26) Cf. Setaioli (1988) 91–94.

27) Cf. Capizzi 71–76. The Heraclitean image is exploited in a similar way by Maximus of Tyre (Or. 1.2), who considers the stability of the river's name (τὸ μὲν ὄνομα ἔν) an illusion.

Yet, Seneca thinks that each person has a sense of sameness in spite of the passing of time: “The periods of childhood, boyhood, youth and old age are different; but I, who was a child, a boy and a youth, am the same. Thus, although each person has a different constitution each time, his adjustment to his constitution is the same. In fact, nature does not entrust the boy, the youth or the old man to me, but me to myself” (Ep. 121.16).²⁸ This ‘me’ is not an abstraction, like the river’s name, but the concrete experience of a permanent self as opposed to the passing ages. Memory helps one to preserve this sense of permanence by creating a “storage” in one’s soul. Seen from the outside, all past time ends in the same, deep place (Ep. 49.3: *omnia in idem profundum cadunt*). Likewise one’s individual time falls into irretrievable depths if we do not resort to memory (De brev. vit. 10.5: *in profundum*). The souls of the engrossed (*occupati*), who cannot “turn and look behind” (*flectere se ac respicere*), are like sieves: no matter how much time they receive, it is not deposited there but slips through their holes (*nihil refert quantum temporis detur, si non est ubi subsidat, per quassos foratosque animos transmittitur*).²⁹ Memory, then, allows time to settle (*subsidere*).

As the last passage suggests, Seneca’s appreciation of memory is related to the importance he attributes to *intentio* (attention, concentration, self-awareness).³⁰ Memory itself is a form of *intentio*: just as we should be aware each time of where we are going and what we are doing, we should be aware of our movements and actions in the past. At De brev. vit. 10.2, Seneca associates being attentive to oneself in the present and “looking back” to one’s past. Shortly before recommending to *praeterita respicere*, he urges self-awareness in each present moment by comparing the *occupati* to sleepy people who do not observe their movements in their journey through life (9.5). Unawareness of one’s movements is called *oblivio* in another passage in which Seneca insists that we should not live like the bloke who did not even know whether he was sit-

28) *Alia est aetas infantis, pueri, adulescentis, senis; ego tamen idem sum qui et infans fui et puer et adulescens. Sic, quamvis alia atque alia cuique constitutio sit, conciliatio constitutionis suae eadem est. Non enim puerum mihi aut iuvenem aut senem, sed me natura commendat.*

29) On the image of the sieve in this passage, cf. Motto / Clark 31–41.

30) On the importance of *intentio* in Seneca’s conception of the self, cf. Foucault 51; Nussbaum 328, 340; Hadot 138.

ting or not (ibid. 12.7–8). The role of memory in producing self-awareness is apparent in the introspective exercise that Seneca practices every night. This attentive review of one's day, no matter how brief the extension of time to which it is applied, how else can it be carried out than by memory? Indeed, a verb employed by Seneca for mnemonic activity, *respicere*, appears in connection with the imperative to review one's day at Ep. 83.2: "I shall watch myself continually and – a most useful practice – I shall review my day. What makes us wicked is that no one looks back (*respicit*) to his life. We only think of what we are to do. . . . But our decisions for the future come from the past."³¹

Seneca apparently learned the practice of reviewing his day from his teacher Sextius (De ira 3.36), who was influenced by Neopythagoreanism and believed in the transmigration and incorporeality of the soul. The review of one's day was a fundamental exercise in Pythagorean circles, probably as early as the fourth century BC.³² This exercise was aimed at reconstructing the history of one's soul as far back as its previous incarnations.³³ The goal was to reconnect one's individual life to the rhythm of the cosmos, that is, to exit the contingency of the present incarnation, rather than to foster individual self-awareness by focusing on the present incarnation. As Jean-Pierre Vernant beautifully puts it, "Il ne s'agit pas pour un sujet de s'appréhender soi-même dans son passé personnel, de se retrouver dans la continuité d'une vie intérieure qui le différencie de toutes les autres créatures; il s'agit de se situer dans le cadre d'un ordre général, de rétablir sur tous les plans la continuité entre soi et le monde en reliant systématiquement la vie présente à l'ensemble des temps, l'existence humaine à la nature entière, le destin de l'individu à la totalité de l'être, la partie au tout."³⁴ Conversely, Seneca recommends this daily exercise purely as a form of self-examination: the focus of the recollection is the individual in his immediate and personal past. True, memory also allows the wis-

31) *Observabo me protinus et, quod est utilissimum, diem meum recognoscam. Hoc nos pessimos facit, quod nemo vitam suam respicit. Quid facturi simus cogitamus. . . . Atqui consilium futuri ex praeterito venit.*

32) Cf. Iamblichus, VP 164–65, who quotes the Aristotelian Aristoxenus. On the reliability of this source, cf. Simondon 158 n. 34.

33) Cf. Vernant 124, 131, 140; Simondon 155, 157–160.

34) Vernant 131. On this aspect of Pythagorean ἀνάμνησις, cf. also Simondon 160.

est ones of us to expand our individual lives by linking them with past lives: we have access to all ages and can roam through a great stretch of time to communicate with men better than ourselves (*De brev. vit.* 14.1–2). Memory builds spiritual, as well as psychic, continuity.³⁵ It belongs to the act of contemplation, which grants the philosophical soul control over time.³⁶ But its journey does not take us beyond our present existence and remains within this world, within our historical past.

Seneca's concept of memory as an inward-directed effort that gives one a sense of fixity in the "river" of life finds a parallel in Plutarch's *De tranq.* 473c–d. I am suggesting to compare, not Seneca's conception of memory with Plutarch's but more specifically the emphasis Seneca places on the unifying function of memory with Plutarch's discussion of the role of memory in *De tranquillitate animi*, where memory is likewise credited with fostering a sense of continuity in one's life.³⁷ Both Seneca and Plutarch point out 1) that fools are always intent upon the future, hence they miss the present, while wise men make even the past vividly present by resorting to memory (cf. *Plut. De tranq.* 473b12–c4: ἐναργῶς ὄντα); 2) that memory promotes tranquillity (cf. *Plut. De tranq.* 473b8; *Sen. Ep.* 99.5 and *De brev. vit.* 10.5, quoted above). Finally Plutarch, like Seneca, argues that an oblivious person "does not allow life to become unified, when past is interwoven with present, but separating yesterday's life, as though it were different, from today's, and tomorrow's likewise, as though it were not the same as today's, forgetfulness straightway makes every event to have never happened because it is never recalled" (*De tranq.* 473d2–4; Helmbold's translation, slightly modified). Memory saves one's life from unawareness of itself (only recalled events have happened) and from fragmentation and dispersion, just as in Seneca it guaran-

35) Commenting on *De brev. vit.* 14.1–2, Moreau 123 writes: "Pour Sénèque, il [le spectacle de l'histoire] nous découvre la permanence des valeurs de l'esprit" (my emphasis).

36) On the theme of the contemplation of time in Seneca, cf. Armisen-Marchetti 558–59; Setaioli (2000) 299, 306–14. The main sources, in addition to *De brev. vit.* 14.1–2, are *Ep.* 102.2 and 22; *Ad Helv.* 11.6–7 and the conclusion of the *Consolatio ad Marciam*.

37) The comparison seems to me justified also by the connection (whatever its nature) between Plutarch's *De tranquillitate animi* and Seneca's essay of the same name, though Seneca in that text does not develop the theme of memory as Plutarch does.

tees the continuity of the ‘I’. Plutarch argues that forgetful people are the counterparts to the theoreticians who see being in flux, because both deny increases: “For those who in the Schools do away with growth and increase on the ground that Being is in a continual flux, in theory make each of us a series of persons different from oneself; so those who do not preserve or recall by memory former events, but allow them to flow away, actually make themselves deficient and empty each day” (473d8–11). The reference to life-in-flux recalls Seneca’s image of the Heraclitean river against the flowing of which memory stands.

In Plutarch’s view, however, memory builds a narrative continuum, an interweaving (συμπλεκόμενων) of time, whereas Seneca prefers to see it as a ‘camera’ that collapses time-differences. In Seneca’s perception memory creates awareness of a unified self by producing, not a narrative but a synoptic picture of one’s life: all past events are brought to the same temporal level. Ep. 49.2 highlights this synchronizing effect of memory: “It seems to me that I have lost you just now, for what is not ‘just now’, if you resort to memory? It was just now that I sat, as a boy, in the school of the philosopher Sotion, it was just now that I started to plead, just now that I was no longer willing to do it, just now that I was no longer able to.”³⁸ Everything we remember, no matter how distant in time, “just” happened. Seneca reformulates the idea at Ep. 70.1: “After a long time I have seen your dear Pompei. I was brought back in front of my youth. And it seemed to me that I could still do and had done only a short time ago all the things that I did there as a young man.”³⁹

By collapsing time-differences, memory contributes to creating a totality of time in every instant.⁴⁰ This totalizing movement of memory and its power to erase time differences fit within the Stoic ideal of wisdom as “total and instantaneous”,⁴¹ because the

38) *Modo amisisse te videor; quid enim non ‘modo’ est, si recorderis? Modo apud Sotionem philosophum puer sedi, modo causas agere coepi, modo desii velle agere, modo desii posse.*

39) *Post longum intervallum Pompeios tuos vidi. In conspectum adolescentiae meae reductus sum. Quidquid illic iuvenis feceram, videbar mihi facere adhuc posse et paulo ante fecisse.*

40) Cf. Viparelli 45: “la tensione del pensiero richiama a sé tutto il suo tempo.”

41) Cf. Goldschmidt 65.

past is made to become present – and all present at once. Memory stops the flowing of time by recalling the past in its entirety. It participates in “bringing all times together” (*omnium temporum in unum conlatio*, *De brev. vit.* 15.5), a privilege of the wise man, to whom all the ages obey as to a god (*ibid.*).⁴²

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42) Cf. Armisen-Marchetti 566–67. Our conclusions differ from Castagna's (91–117), who maintains that Seneca, contrary to Plato, dismisses memory (likewise Goldschmidt 170 and Sangalli 57 and 79 do not acknowledge Seneca's appreciation of memory). It is true that in Seneca's conception, as Castagna correctly notes, memory is not “la preziosa fibra ottica che ci concede una parziale e velata visione del mondo vero” (106; but cf. the Platonizing *Ep.* 120.15; *Ad Helv.* 11.6, with Setaioli [1995] 55–62 and [2000] 292–93). Nonetheless, it is essential for the acquisition of wisdom because it promotes self-possession and participates in the contemplation of the ages.

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