

Scholars have often recognized the crucial role played by both metaphor and exemplum in Seneca's prose (Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 1991; Mayer 1991, Roller 2001, e.g.). While some have realized that these two rhetorical devices are in fact connected in ancient rhetorical theory and Seneca's literary practice (Codoñer 2005), the social and philosophical significance of this connection have gone largely unnoticed. In this paper, I aim to illustrate a simple but profound analogy at work in Seneca's prose: metaphorical language is to its referent as exemplum is to the person who seeks to enact and embody the exemplum. While Seneca develops strict rules about decorum for metaphor, by which the language ought not to obscure the topic and misdirect the reader, it is only in breaking these rules that his exemplary practice becomes effective: unlike metaphorical language, the exemplum, *should* get out of hand and distract the reader and writer from their own identities; in distracting the reader and writer from their own identities, the exemplum may have a chance at actually working – at permanently and effectively changing their behavior and identity. The texts that I discuss most are Seneca's mini-treatises on exemplarity (*EM* 6, 120) and the scattered passages in which he treats metaphor and related figures (*Ben.* 2.34.2-5, 4.12.1, 5.13.3, e.g.).

In the first part of my paper, I review the case for comparing metaphor and exemplum. In this I follow ancient rhetorical theorists who actually considered certain species of metaphor analogous to exemplum since all were figures of thought or speech that served to increase vividness (*Ad Her.* 4.62, e.g.). For Seneca's part, he himself structures metaphor and exemplum in identical ways: after describing the person or notable action of an exemplum, Seneca signals the change of reference from the exemplar to the person enjoined to follow the exemplum with phrases like *idem fac, hoc faciamus*. The same *idem facit* formula appears again as image-hinge between the vehicle of the simile (*illustrans*) and its tenor (*illustrandum*)

In the second part of my paper I discuss the ways in which, despite the apparent similarity of metaphor and exemplum in his own practice, Seneca both explicitly and implicitly develops different rules for governing the parallel devices of metaphor and exemplum. With metaphor, the philosopher applies a principle of decorum, holding that metaphor (the *illustrans*) should only be used to clarify otherwise obscure or abstract concepts (*illustranda*): one should scrupulously avoid over-elaborating the *illustrans* to the point that it distracts from the *illustrandum*. Such over-elaboration is a sign of self-indulgence on a par with gross materialism or conspicuous consumption (*EM* 114).

In contrast to his theory and practice of metaphor, Seneca uses exemplum in ways designed to obscure or overpower the person to whom the exempla apply – usually himself (*EM* 6). In other words, when Seneca develops an exemplum in describing a virtuous deed, his aim is to elaborate the exemplum to the point that it obscures his own nature, behavior or identity, thereby effectively and permanently changing it. In maintaining the moral force of the otherwise rhetorical device of exemplum and using it as means of self-transformation in this way, Seneca in fact applies a *linguistic* model of social performance – whereby words change things – to the management and evaluation of moral status and identity. This conflation of social performance and linguistic performativity prefigures Derrida's (1982: 309-330) deconstruction of J.L. Austin's famous speech act theory and Judith Butler's (1993: 10-16, e.g.) application of that deconstruction to the social performance of gender, subjectivity, and agency.