Aliquid ad mores

The prefaces and epilogues of Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones*

PROEFSCHRIFT

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Cover illustration: Pompeii, House of the Chaste Lovers (IX 12.6), triclinium, west wall, indoor banqueting scene (ca. 35-45 AD).
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Main question of this study................................................................................. 1
2. Subject of the study......................................................................................... 7
3. The order of the books in the Naturales Quaestiones............................... 10
4. The range of subjects in the Naturales Quaestiones................................. 12

CHAPTER 1. THE LITERARY CONTEXT ....................................................... 16
1. Prefaces, epilogues, digressions and transitions.............................................. 16
   1.1 The function of a preface ........................................................................ 16
   1.1.1 Middle prefaces .............................................................................. 21
   1.2 Epilogues ............................................................................................... 23
   1.2 The (somewhat) elusive preface.............................................................. 24
      1.2.1 A case for comparison: the prefaces of Vitruvius’ De architectura... 25
      1.2.2 Cicero, Ad Atticum 16.6.4.............................................................. 28
      1.2.3 Quintilian, Institutio oratoria 3.8.8-9.............................................. 30
      1.2.4 Aristotle, Rhetorica 3.14................................................................. 32
      1.2.5 Prefaces in forensic oratory............................................................. 33
   1.3 Modern research on the concept of unity ................................................... 35
      1.3.1 Heath .............................................................................................. 35
      1.3.2 Hutchinson .................................................................................... 38
      1.3.3 Genette ......................................................................................... 40
   1.4 Digressions............................................................................................... 41
   1.5 Transitions.............................................................................................. 44
2. A brief comparison of the Naturales Quaestiones with works of a similar  structure................................................................. 47
   2.1 Didactic poetry.......................................................................................... 47
      2.1.1 Ovid, Metamorphoses 15.75ff.: Pythagoras’ speech and the structure  of didactic natural philosophy......................................................... 50
   2.2 Technical prose....................................................................................... 53
2.3 Pliny the Elder’s Naturalis Historia and the two discourses ....................... 54

CHAPTER 2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT .............................................. 56
1. Physics and ethics ........................................................................................... 56
   1.1 Early evidence......................................................................................... 56
   1.2 The Hellenistic creed.............................................................................. 58
   1.3 The modern debate.................................................................................. 61
   1.4 Cicero, De republica 1.15ff.: the ancient debate...................................... 64
   1.5 The pre-eminence of ethics in Seneca..................................................... 69
2. Science and philosophy: the Naturales Quaestiones as naturalis philosophia 72
   2.1 Epistulae Morales 88............................................................................. 72
   2.2 The Naturales Quaestiones and Epistulae Morales 88........................... 74
   2.3 Natural philosophy versus mathematical sciences.................................. 77
   2.4 The philosopher at work...................................................................... 80
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

#### CHAPTER 3. HORTATORY TEXTS .............................................................. 84
1. Introduction .......................................................................................... 84
2. How philosophy should not be practised ............................................ 86
3. How philosophy should be practiced ................................................... 88
4. Hortatory philosophy and written texts ............................................... 90
5. The evidence of Epistulae Morales 94-95 ............................................ 92
6. The Naturales Quaestiones .................................................................. 95
   6.1 The Naturales Quaestiones and Lucretius’ De rerum natura ............... 97
   6.2 The Naturales Quaestiones and Musonius Rufus’ Diatribes ............... 98
7. ‘Spiritual exercises’ .............................................................................. 99
8. Means of persuasion ........................................................................... 102
9. An example of a hortatory text ............................................................ 105
10. ‘Präskriptive Sprache’ and ‘directives’ .............................................. 106

#### CHAPTER 4. THE BEGINNING OF THE WORK: THE PREFACE OF NQ 3 ..................................................... 111
1. Introduction ......................................................................................... 111
2. Preface §1-4 ....................................................................................... 113
   2.1 The first sentence of the preface: the subject of the work ................. 114
   2.2 Indications of the preoccupation with natural and moral philosophy . 118
   2.3 The importance and difficulty of the undertaking ......................... 119
   2.4 ‘Vagellius’ verse’ .......................................................................... 120
   2.5 Seneca senex ................................................................................ 122
   2.6 The haste ...................................................................................... 125
   2.7 Seneca’s haste in writing the Naturales Quaestiones ....................... 127
3. Preface §5-6 ....................................................................................... 128
   3.1 Comparatio artium ........................................................................ 129
   3.2 Historiography ............................................................................. 131
4. Preface §7-9 ....................................................................................... 133
5. Preface §10-17 ................................................................................... 136
   5.1 The nature of the passage .............................................................. 136
   5.2 The Stoic content of the passage ................................................... 138
   5.3 The form of the passage ................................................................ 141
6. Preface §18 ....................................................................................... 142
7. Conclusion ......................................................................................... 144
8. The transition to the scientific discussion .......................................... 145

#### CHAPTER 5. THE CAUSES OF THE FLOOD: THE END OF NQ 3 (NQ 3.27-30) .................................................. 149
1. Introduction ......................................................................................... 149
2. The transition ..................................................................................... 150
3. Conflagration and flood ...................................................................... 151
4. Seneca’s representation of the flood: a deviation from Stoic philosophy? 155
5. The literary element: the polemic with Ovid and the dramatizing description of the flood ................................................................. 159
   5.1 Seneca and Ovid ........................................................................... 159
   5.2 Seneca’s dramatizing description of the flood ............................... 163
6. The moral element ............................................................................. 165
7. The causes of the flood ...................................................................... 167
   7.1 The comparison with the human body .......................................... 172
TABLE OF CONTENTS

8. The manifestation of lex naturae in the world .......................................................... 174
9. Levels of causation ................................................................................................ 175
10. The relevance of levels of causation for the theodicy ........................................ 176

CHAPTER 6. A LETTER ON THE TOPIC OF FLATTERY:
THE PREFACE OF NQ 4a ...................................................................................... 183
1. The connection between preface and main text ................................................. 183
2. The epistolary character of the preface ............................................................... 185
   2.1 Resemblance to the Epistulae Morales ...................................................... 187
   2.2 The epistolary preface ............................................................................. 194
3. Adulatio .............................................................................................................. 195
   3.1 Preface §14ff. ......................................................................................... 200
   3.2 Seneca and flattery ................................................................................. 203

CHAPTER 7. THE MORALIZING EPILOGUES: NQ 4b, 5 AND 1 ................. 206
1. The epilogue of NQ 4b ...................................................................................... 206
   1.1 Hoc quid ad mores?: the justification of the Naturales Quaestiones. First part of epilogue (4.13.1-3) ................................................................. 206
      1.1.1 The prevalence of morals ................................................................. 207
      1.1.2 Logic and the reproach of uselessness .......................................... 211
   1.2 Decadence and (table) luxury .................................................................... 212
      1.2.1 Modern historians’ views on Roman luxury of the table .............. 214
      1.2.2 Citroni Marchetti’s study of Roman moralism .............................. 217
      1.2.3 Reflection on the idea of decadence in ancient authors .............. 220
   1.3 NQ 4b 13.5-11: Luxus mensae .................................................................. 224
      1.3.1 Table luxury and digestion ............................................................ 228
         1.3.1.1 The correct attitude towards drinking .................................... 228
         1.3.1.2 Reasons for and results of wrong eating ................................. 229
         1.3.1.3 Gastronomic vice and illness ................................................. 230
         1.3.1.4 The process of (bad) digestion .............................................. 230
         1.3.1.5 The standard ingredients of table luxury ............................. 233
         1.3.1.6 Table luxury and luxury or vice in general .......................... 233
         1.3.1.7 Snow as a fashionable vice .................................................. 234
         1.3.1.8 Epicurean descriptions of table luxury ................................. 235
         1.3.1.9 Food in satire ...................................................................... 235
      1.3.2 The contra naturam motif (NQ 4b.13.3-4) .................................... 236
         1.3.2.1 Putting a price on an element of nature ............................... 236
         1.3.2.2 Contra naturam: Epistulae Morales 122 .............................. 239
      1.3.3 A moralistic motif: vice’s inventions .............................................. 241
   2. The epilogue of NQ 5 .................................................................................... 243
      2.1 The connection between epilogue and main text .................................... 243
      2.2 The folly of navigation .......................................................................... 245
         2.2.1 Concluding sententiae .................................................................. 248
      2.3 Attitudes towards navigation ................................................................. 249
      2.4 Man’s misuse of nature’s gifts ............................................................... 255
         2.4.1 De brevitate vitae ........................................................................ 256
         2.4.2 De beneficiis .............................................................................. 256
         2.4.3 De natura deorum 3.65b-78 ....................................................... 257
      2.5 Parallels in Pliny’s Naturalis Historia ...................................................... 260
TABLE OF CONTENTS

2.5.1 The theme of man’s misuse of nature’s gifts.................................261
2.5.2 Moralizing remarks about navigation in the Naturalis Historia........263

3. The epilogue of NQ 1 ..........................................................................265

3.1 The tabella: Hostius Quadra’s misuse of mirrors (NQ 1.16) .................265
3.1.1 The rhetorical character of chapter 16 ...........................................268
3.1.2 Amplification ..................................................................................269
3.1.3 The faculty of sight ........................................................................271
3.1.4 Hostius speaks ...............................................................................272
3.1.5 Hostius Quadra as anti-sapiens .......................................................273
3.1.6 The fabella as a moralizing digression .............................................274

3.2 On the correct usage of mirrors (NQ 1.17.1-4) ....................................276
3.2.1 The ambivalence of the mirror .......................................................277
3.2.2 Apuleius’ passage on mirroring .......................................................279

3.3 The tale of the gradual increase in the (mis)use of mirrors (NQ 1.17.5-10) ..........................................................................................................................281
3.3.1 Rhetorical aspects ...........................................................................281
3.3.2 Gauly’s interpretation of NQ 1.17 .....................................................284
3.3.3 Cleanliness: the ‘normal’ usage of mirrors in between vice and virtue ..........................................................................................................................286

3.4 The relation of the epilogue to the rest of the book ................................289
3.4.1 The explicit connection .................................................................289
3.4.2 Implicit connections between the epilogue and the main text and/or preface.................................................................292
3.4.2.1 Waiblinger’s theory .................................................................293
3.4.2.2 Leitao’s theory ........................................................................294
3.4.2.3 The motif of sight ....................................................................295
3.4.2.4 Gauly’s theory .........................................................................296

CHAPTER 8. CONSOLATION FOR DEATH BY NATURAL PHENOMENA: NQ 6 AND 2 ........................................................................299

1. Introduction ...........................................................................................299
2. A reading of NQ 6.1-2 ............................................................................303
2.1 Place and time of earthquakes ...........................................................303
2.2 The amplification of the disaster (6.1.4-7) .............................................304
2.2.1 Epistulae Morales 91 .......................................................................306
2.2.2 A mechanism ................................................................................307

2.3 The counter-movement: consolation (6.1.8-9) ......................................310
2.4 Earthquakes occur everywhere (6.1.10-15) .........................................311
2.5 The second counter-movement ..........................................................313
2.5.1 Solace for imperiti (6.2.1-3) ............................................................313
2.5.2 Everything can cause death (6.2.3-6) ..............................................315
2.5.3 Death by earthquake is preferable (6.2.7-9) ....................................316
2.6. Grande solacium est cum universo rapi (De providentia 5.8) ................317
2.7 Different views on NQ 6 .....................................................................322

3. The epilogue of Book 6 (NQ 6.32) .........................................................325
3.1 From death by earthquake to death in general ....................................325
3.2 Contempt of death and ensuing securitas or felicity ..............................326
3.3 After death .........................................................................................328
3.4 The death of the earth .......................................................................330
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Time and death</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>The epilogue</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>NQ 6.32 and meditatio</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>'Death in general'</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Death by thunder and lightning</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The epilogue of Book 2 (NQ 2.59)</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>'Death in general'</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Death by thunder and lightning</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>NQ 6.32 and meditatio</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### CHAPTER 9. KNOWLEDGE OF OBSCURA: NQ 7 AND ITS END

1. The beginning of the book | 343 |
2. The divine character of the comets | 345 |
3. The end of Book 7 (NQ 7.29.3-7.32) | 347 |
   - 3.1 Chapter 30: Knowledge of the divine | 347 |
     - 3.1.1 Non omnia homini deus fecit | 348 |
     - 3.1.2 God cannot be seen or known | 349 |
     - 3.1.3 The powers similar to god | 351 |
     - 3.1.4 The study of natural phenomena and the limits of knowledge | 354 |
     - 3.1.5 Manilius, Astronomica Book 4 | 356 |
     - 3.1.6 Other Senecan passages on heavenly inquiries | 359 |
     - 3.1.7 Ratio versus sight as a means of attaining knowledge | 361 |
     - 3.1.8 Aperta versus obscura | 362 |
     - 3.1.9 The idea of progress | 365 |
     - 3.1.10 NQ 7.25 | 367 |
     - 3.1.11 Reverence for the mysteries of the world | 368 |
3.2 Chapters 31-32: The progress of decadence | 372 |

#### CHAPTER 10. THE FLIGHT OF THE MIND: THE PREFACE OF NQ 1

1. The preface and Book 1 | 377 |
2. Physics versus ethics | 380 |
   - 2.1 The battle against the vices is not sufficient | 384 |
3. The flight of the mind | 385 |
   - 3.1 Seneca’s flight: Platonic or Stoic? | 389 |
   - 3.2 The flight of the mind in Epistulae Morales 58 and 65 | 394 |
   - 3.3 The protreptic character of the flight of the mind | 397 |
   - 3.4 The occurrence of the image of the flight in prefaces | 398 |
4. Knowledge of god | 399 |
5. God’s nature: Platonic or Stoic? | 401 |
   - 5.1 The texts and the question | 401 |
   - 5.2 The Stoic context | 404 |
     - 5.2.1 Summus deus | 405 |
     - 5.2.2 The different aspects of the Stoic god | 406 |
     - 5.2.3 The Stoics’ dualism | 408 |
   - 5.3 Some final remarks about context | 410 |

#### CONCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Knowledge of god</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>God’s nature: Platonic or Stoic?</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The texts and the question</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Stoic context</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Summus deus</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>The different aspects of the Stoic god</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>The Stoics’ dualism</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Some final remarks about context</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Consulted EDITIONS of the Naturales Quaestiones | 424 |
2. Consulted MODERN STUDIES | 425 |

#### SAMENVATTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Knowledge of god</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>God’s nature: Platonic or Stoic?</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The texts and the question</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Stoic context</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Summus deus</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>The different aspects of the Stoic god</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>The Stoics’ dualism</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Some final remarks about context</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Knowledge of god</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>God’s nature: Platonic or Stoic?</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The texts and the question</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Stoic context</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Summus deus</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>The different aspects of the Stoic god</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>The Stoics’ dualism</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Some final remarks about context</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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#### SAMENVATTING

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Knowledge of god</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>God’s nature: Platonic or Stoic?</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The texts and the question</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Stoic context</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Summus deus</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>The different aspects of the Stoic god</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>The Stoics’ dualism</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Some final remarks about context</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURRICULUM VITAE ................................................................. 464</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The task of writing a preface to a study concerned with ancient Latin prefaces and epilogues is rendered somewhat complex by the combined awareness of ancient prefatory rules and modern dissertation conventions. In contrast to the book that follows, this preface will therefore be brief.

This dissertation is a study of the prefaces and epilogues of Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones* or, as I often described it, ‘a study of the less well-known work of the Roman philosopher Seneca, the tutor of the emperor Nero’. In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, a work devoted to the analysis of several natural phenomena, a large place is taken up by prefaces and epilogues with a moralizing message. This thesis aims at clarifying the nature of these moralizing passages.

There is no doubt about it that the study of the prefaces and epilogues of Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones* leads to the discussion of great matters: to give but a few examples, such questions are dealt with as the degree of literary unity one may expect from a work, the correct understanding of Seneca’s repetitive texts, and the true nature of Seneca’s beliefs on the question whether it is possible to obtain knowledge of god. Great literary talent would be required to do justice to these subjects; if such literary talent is not found in this dissertation written in a foreign language, I hope that this shortcoming will be compensated by a zealous intent to discover the truth about arduous matters.

The feeling that has accompanied me in my research is well described by the ancient historian Livy. At the beginning of Book 31 of the *Ab urbe condita*, he says, considering the greatness of his task: ‘I see that I am like people who are tempted by the shallow water along the beach to wade out to sea; the further I progress, the greater the depth, as though it were a bottomless sea into which I am carried. I imagined that as I completed one part after another the task before me would diminish; as it is, it almost becomes greater’. Spending several years on the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* has given me the possibility to place these texts in the literary and philosophical context in which I believe they should be understood. However, each stage of my research has opened up new questions. Thus, this dissertation is the crystallization of an ongoing research process.
It remains to me to express my gratitude to all those, from colleagues and friends to fellow flamenco addicts, who contributed to this study in some way or other, with sound advice or a break from my research.

From this general expression of gratitude I single out NWO, whose grant made it possible to spend a month at the haven of peace that is the Fondation Hardt nearby Geneva, and realise much work there. The research institute of the Faculty of Arts at Leiden, Pallas, as well as OIKOS, the national research school in classical studies, also contributed to several shorter journeys from which my research profited.

I would further like to thank the corrector of my English, who removed as many errors as was humanly possible from this book. Of course, I alone am responsible for any dubious subsequent rewritings.

Finally, I am particularly grateful to my family, who has kindly given me support and borne with me through the different stages of my research.