

Seneca's scathing *diatribê* concerning the treatment of slaves in letter 47 of the *Epistulae Morales* has struck scholars as everything from completely hypocritical to "the most humane statement...[about slavery] from the pagan world" (Mark Morford 2002). Most commonly, readers admire his impassioned tone and the high ideals he expresses, but find them hard to reconcile with his ultimate endorsement of the institution of slavery. In examining the literary and philosophical use of images of slaves and slavery throughout the *Epistulae*, I hope to show that the rhetoric of letter 47 is not as enlightened as it seems and not at all inconsistent with his complacency about the institution. I argue that this complacency was not a forgone conclusion, as questioning the validity of slavery was a part of the heritage of the Stoic school, and agreeing in principle, at least, with arguments against it was current in philosophical circles in 1st c A.D. Rome (Andrew Erskine 1990, Malcolm Schofield 1999, Miriam Griffin 1976). Beyond the occasional explicit use of the state of slavery as an *exemplum* for the aspiring sage in his struggle for freedom, there is an additional undercurrent running through slaves' appearances in the letters which reveals them to be more extensions of their master's character and conscience than individuals, external reflections of his soul and struggle towards philosophy (or lack thereof), testing his psyche and perception in the same way that, according to Stoic doctrine, the impulses of the body are constantly testing one's higher mind or *hegemonikon*. As such, they must be closely observed and cared for by the wise man, but not separated or freed from him. Letter 47 is a perfect illustration of how it is the degradation of the *master's* character, as it is reflected in the misery or depravity of his slaves, which is the main concern of these digressions. In fact, there are several passages in the letters in which slaves more concretely manifest the abstract goals or vanities of their master, such as when they put aside money to buy their freedom (freedom being the ultimate goal of the sage), or when the slavers at the market try to hide the defects of their slaves by covering them with finery (80.4, 80.9). Elsewhere, the appetite and obtrusiveness of a large retinue of slaves physically manifest their master's boorishness and greed (127.3). At 19.11 and 47.8, slaves physically embody their master's snobbery and bad judgment, as *nomenclatores* choosing who will dine with a master who is careless of what company he keeps. Beyond these intended and explicit *exempla* there are more subtle examples, such as the slaves of Tullius Marcellinus, who, in their hesitance and then ultimate agreement to help him commit suicide, dramatize the arc of their master's fear and resignation (77.6-9). In my paper I will explore several such examples of Seneca's 'stoic' slaves, and finally speculate as to how important the treatment and display of one's slaves could become in a philosopher's presentation of himself.