

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

XLIX.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Est quidem, mi Lucili, supinus et neglegens, qui in amici memoriam ab aliqua regione admonitus reducitur; tamen repositum in animo nostro desiderium loca interdum familiaria evocant nec extinctam memoriam reddunt, sed quiescentem iniritant, sicut dolorem lugentium, etiam si mitigatus est tempore, aut servulus familiaris amisso¹ aut vestis aut domus renovat.

Ecce Campania et maxime Neapolis ac² Pompeiorum tuorum conspectus³ incredibile est quam recens desiderium tui fecerint; totus mihi in oculis es. Cum maxime a te discedo. Video lacrimas conbibentem et adfectibus tuis inter ipsam coercionem exeuntibus non satis resistentem. Modo amisisse te
2 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. Infinita est velocitas temporis, quae magis apparet respicientibus. Nam ad praesentia intentos fallit; adeo praecipitis fugae transitus lenis
3 est. Causam huius rei quaeris? Quicquid temporis transit, eodem loco est; pariter aspicitur, una iacet. Omnia in idem⁴ profundum cadunt. Et alioqui non

¹ *servulus familiaris amisso* Gertz; *servuli fam. amissi (amisso)* MSS.

² *ac* Volkmann; *a* and *ad* MSS.

³ *conspectus* Volkmann; *conspectum* MSS.

⁴ *in idem* Rossbach; *inde* pLb; *in* P.

^a Probably the birthplace of Lucilius.

^b The Pythagorean. For his views on vegetarianism, and their influence on Seneca, see *Ep.* cviii. 17 ff.

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XLIX. ON THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE

A man is indeed lazy and careless, my dear Lucilius, if he is reminded of a friend only by seeing some landscape which stirs the memory; and yet there are times when the old familiar haunts stir up a sense of loss that has been stored away in the soul, not bringing back dead memories, but rousing them from their dormant state, just as the sight of a lost friend's favourite slave, or his cloak, or his house, renews the mourner's grief, even though it has been softened by time.

Now, lo and behold, Campania, and especially Naples and your beloved Pompeii,^a struck me, when I viewed them, with a wonderfully fresh sense of longing for you. You stand in full view before my eyes. I am on the point of parting from you. I see you choking down your tears and resisting without success the emotions that well up at the very moment when you try to check them. I seem to have lost you but a moment ago. For what is not "but a moment ago" when one begins to use the memory? It was but a moment ago that I sat, as a lad, in the school of the philosopher Sotion,^b but a moment ago that I began to plead in the courts, but a moment ago that I lost the desire to plead, but a moment ago that I lost the ability. Infinitely swift is the flight of time, as those see more clearly who are looking backwards. For when we are intent on the present, we do not notice it, so gentle is the passage of time's headlong flight. Do you ask the reason for this? All past time is in the same place; it all presents the same aspect to us, it lies together. Everything slips into the same abyss.

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possunt longa intervalla esse in ea re, quae tota brevis est. Punctum est quod vivimus et adhuc puncto minus. Sed et hoc minimum specie quadam longioris spatii natura derisit; aliud ex hoc infantiam fecit, aliud pueritiam, aliud adulescentiam, aliud inclinationem quandam ab adulescentia ad senectutem, aliud ipsam senectutem. In quam angusto quodam
 4 quot gradus posuit! Modo te prosecutus sum; et tamen hoc "modo" aetatis nostrae bona portio est, cuius brevitem aliquando defecturam¹ cogitemus. Non solebat mihi tam velox tempus videri; nunc incredibilis cursus apparet, sive quia admoveri lineas sentio, sive quia adtendere coepi et computare damnum meum.

5 Eo magis itaque indignor aliquos ex hoc tempore, quod sufficere ne ad necessaria quidem potest, etiam si custoditum diligentissime fuerit, in supervacua maiorem partem erogare. Negat Cicero, si duplicetur sibi aetas, habiturum se tempus, quo legat lyricos; eodem loco pone² dialecticos; tristius inepti sunt. Illi ex professo lasciviunt, hi agere ipsos aliquid
 6 existimant. Nec ego nego prospicienda ista, sed prospicienda tantum et a limine salutanda in hoc unum, ne verba nobis dentur et aliquid esse in illis magni ac secreti boni iudicemus.

¹ *defecturam* Müller; *futuram* MSS.

² *pone* inserted by Haase; *pono* or *habeo* was proposed by Schweighäuser; *conloco* by Hermes, followed by Hense.

^a Source unknown; perhaps, as Hense thinks, from the *Hortensius*.

^b An intentional equivocation on the part of Cicero, who intimates that he will "lose no time" in reading them.

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Besides, an event which in its entirety is of brief compass cannot contain long intervals. The time which we spend in living is but a point, nay, even less than a point. But this point of time, infinitesimal as it is, nature has mocked by making it seem outwardly of longer duration; she has taken one portion thereof and made it infancy, another childhood, another youth, another the gradual slope, so to speak, from youth to old age, and old age itself is still another. How many steps for how short a climb! It was but a moment ago that I saw you off on your journey; and yet this "moment ago" makes up a goodly share of our existence, which is so brief, we should reflect, that it will soon come to an end altogether. In other years time did not seem to me to go so swiftly; now, it seems fast beyond belief, perhaps because I feel that the finish-line is moving closer to me, or it may be that I have begun to take heed and reckon up my losses.

For this reason I am all the more angry that some men claim the major portion of this time for superfluous things,—time which, no matter how carefully it is guarded, cannot suffice even for necessary things. Cicero^a declared that if the number of his days were doubled, he should not have time to read the lyric poets.^b And you may rate the dialecticians in the same class; but they are foolish in a more melancholy way. The lyric poets are avowedly frivolous; but the dialecticians believe that they are themselves engaged upon serious business. I do not deny that one must cast a glance at dialectic; but it ought to be a mere glance, a sort of greeting from the threshold, merely that one may not be deceived, or judge these pursuits to contain any hidden matters of great worth.

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Quid te torques et maceras in ea quaestione, quam subtilius est contempsisse quam solvere? Securi est et ex commodo migrantis minuta conquirere; cum hostis instat a tergo et movere se iussus est miles, necessitas excutit quicquid pax otiosa collegerat.
7 Non vacat mihi verba dubie cadentia consecrari et vafritiam in illis meam experiri.

Adspice qui coeant populi, quae moenia clusis
Ferrum acuant portis.

Magno mihi animo strepitus iste belli circumsonantis
8 exaudiendus est. Demens omnibus merito viderer, si cum saxa in munimentum murorum senes feminaeque congererent, cum iuventus intra portas armata signum eruptionis expectaret aut posceret, cum hostilia in portis tela vibrarent et ipsum solum suffossionibus et cuniculis tremere, sederem otiosus et eiusmodi quaestiunculas ponens: "Quod non perdidisti, habes. Cornua autem non perdidisti; cornua ergo habes" aliaque ad exemplum huius acutae delirationis concinnata. Atqui aequè licet tibi demens videar, si istis
9 inpendero operam; et nunc¹ obsideor. Tunc tamen periculum mihi obsessio externum inmineret, murus me ab hoste secerneret; nunc mortifera mecum sunt. Non vaco ad istas ineptias; ingens negotium

¹ *nunc* added by Gertz.

^a Vergil, *Aeneid*, viii. 385 f.

^b A sample of syllogistic nonsense, quoted also by Gellius, xviii. 2. 9. See also *Ep.* xlv. 8.

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Why do you torment yourself and lose weight over some problem which it is more clever to have scorned than to solve? When a soldier is undisturbed and travelling at his ease, he can hunt for trifles along his way; but when the enemy is closing in on the rear, and a command is given to quicken the pace, necessity makes him throw away everything which he picked up in moments of peace and leisure. I have no time to investigate disputed inflections of words, or to try my cunning upon them.

Behold the gathering clans, the fast-shut gates,
And weapons whetted ready for the war.^a

I need a stout heart to hear without flinching this din of battle which sounds round about. And all would rightly think me mad if, when greybeards and women were heaping up rocks for the fortifications, when the armour-clad youths inside the gates were awaiting, or even demanding, the order for a sally, when the spears of the foemen were quivering in our gates and the very ground was rocking with mines and subterranean passages,—I say, they would rightly think me mad if I were to sit idle, putting such petty posers as this: "What **you** have not lost, **you** have. But **you** have not lost any horns. Therefore, **you** have horns,"^b or other tricks constructed after the model of this piece of sheer silliness. And yet I may well seem in your eyes no less mad, if I spend my energies on that sort of thing; for even now I am in a state of siege. And yet, in the former case it would be merely a peril from the outside that threatened me, and a wall that sundered me from the foe; as it is now, death-dealing perils are in my very presence. I have no time for such nonsense; a

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in manibus est. Quid agam? Mors me sequitur,
 10 fugit vita; adversus haec me doce aliquid. Effice,
 ut ego mortem non fugiam, vita me non effugiat.
 Exhortare adversus difficilia, adde aequanimitatem¹
 adversus inevitabilia. Angustias temporis mei laxa.
 Doce non esse positum bonum vitae in spatio eius,
 sed in usu, posse fieri, immo saepissime fieri, ut
 qui diu vixit, parum vixerit. Dic mihi dormituro:
 "Potes non expergisci"; dic experrecto: "Potes
 non dormire amplius." Dic exeunti: "Potes non
 11 reverti"; dic redeunti: "Potes non exire." Erras,
 si in navigatione tantum existimas minimum esse,
 quo a² morte vita diducitur; in omni loco aequae
 tenuae intervallum est. Non ubique se mors tam
 prope ostendit; ubique tam prope est.

Has tenebras discute; et facilius ea trades, ad
 quae praeparatus sum. Dociles natura nos edidit et
 12 rationem dedit imperfectam, sed quae perfici posset.
 De iustitia mihi, de pietate disputa, de frugalitate, de
 pudicitia utraque, et illa, cui alieni corporis abstinencia
 est, et hac, cui sui cura. Si me nolueris per
 devia ducere, facilius ad id, quo tendo, perveniam.
 Nam ut ait ille tragicus,

¹ *adde aequanimitatem* Linde; *de aequanimitate* pLPb.

² *a* added by Muretus.

^a *i.e.*, the timbers of the ship. Compare the same figure
 in *Ep.* xxx. 2.

^b Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 469 ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος τῆς ἀληθείας
 ἐφύ.

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