

# THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

## LVII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Cum a Bais deberem Neapolim repetere, facile credidi tempestatem esse, ne iterum navem experirer; et tantum luti tota via fuit, ut possim videri nihilo minus navigasse. Totum athletarum fatum mihi illo die perpetiendum fuit; a ceromate nos haphe exceptit
- 2 in crypta Neapolitana. Nihil illo carcere longius, nihil illis facibus obscurius, quae nobis praestant non ut per tenebras videamus, sed ut ipsas. Ceterum etiam si locus haberet lucem, pulvis auferret, in aperto quoque res gravis et molesta; quid illic, ubi in se volutatur et, cum sine ullo spiramento sit inclusus, in ipsos, a quibus excitatus est, recidit? Duo incommoda inter se contraria simul pertulimus: eadem via, eodem die et luto et pulvere laboravimus.
- 3 Aliquid tamen mihi illa obscuritas, quod cogitarem, dedit; sensi quendam ictum animi et sine metu mutationem, quam insolitae rei novitas simul ac foeditas fecerat. Non de me nunc tecum loquor, qui multum ab homine tolerabili, nedum a perfecto absum, sed de illo, in quem fortuna ius perdidit. Huius quoque ferietur animus, mutabitur color.

---

<sup>a</sup> *i. e.*, an "anointing" with mud.

<sup>b</sup> A characteristic figure. After anointing, the wrestler was sprinkled with sand, so that the opponent's hand might not slip. The Naples tunnel furnished a short cut to those who, like Seneca in this letter, did not wish to take the time to travel by the shore route along the promontory of Pausilipum.

## EPISTLE LVII.

### LVII. ON THE TRIALS OF TRAVEL

When it was time for me to return to Naples from Baiae, I easily persuaded myself that a storm was raging, that I might avoid another trip by sea; and yet the road was so deep in mud, all the way, that I may be thought none the less to have made a voyage. On that day I had to endure the full fate of an athlete; the anointing<sup>a</sup> with which we began was followed by the sand-sprinkle in the Naples tunnel.<sup>b</sup> No place could be longer than that prison; nothing could be dimmer than those torches, which enabled us, not to see amid the darkness, but to see the darkness. But, even supposing that there was light in the place, the dust, which is an oppressive and disagreeable thing even in the open air, would destroy the light; how much worse the dust is there, where it rolls back upon itself, and, being shut in without ventilation, blows back in the faces of those who set it going! So we endured two inconveniences at the same time, and they were diametrically different: we struggled both with mud and with dust on the same road and on the same day.

The gloom, however, furnished me with some food for thought; I felt a certain mental thrill, and a transformation unaccompanied by fear, due to the novelty and the unpleasantness of an unusual occurrence. Of course I am not speaking to you of myself at this point, because I am far from being a perfect person, or even a man of middling qualities; I refer to one over whom fortune has lost her control. Even such a man's mind will be smitten with a thrill and

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

- 4 Quaedam enim, mi Lucili, nulla effugere virtus potest; admonet illam natura mortalitatis suae. Itaque et vultum adducet ad tristia<sup>1</sup> et inhorrescet ad subita et caligabit, si vastam altitudinem in crepidine eius constitutus despexerit; non est hoc timor, sed naturalis adfectio inexpugnabilis rationi.
- 5 Itaque fortes quidam et paratissimi fundere suum sanguinem alienum videre non possunt. Quidam ad vulneris novi, quidam ad veteris et purulenti tractationem inspectionemque succidunt ac linquuntur animo. Alii gladium facilius recipiunt quam vident.
- 6 Sensi ergo, ut dicebam, quandam non quidem perturbationem, sed mutationem. Rursus ad primum conspectum redditae lucis alacritas rediit incogitata et iniussa. Illud deinde mecum loqui coepi, quam inepte quaedam magis aut minus timeremus, cum omnium idem finis esset. Quid enim interest, utrum supra aliquem vigilarium ruat an mons? Nihil invenies. Erunt tamen, qui hanc ruinam magis timeant, quamvis utraque mortifera aequae sit; adeo non effectus, sed efficientia timor spectat. Nunc me putas de Stoicis dicere, qui existimant animam hominis magno pondere extriti permanere non posse et statim spargi, quia non fuerit illi exitus liber? Ego vero non facio; qui hoc dicunt, videntur mihi
- 8 errare. Quemadmodum flamma non potest obprimi,

<sup>1</sup> *ad tristia* Gruter; *ad (a) tristitiam*, or *ad tristiam* MSS.

---

<sup>a</sup> Cf. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean*, p. 61, on the doctrine of interpenetration, explaining the diffusion of soul throughout the body; and Rohde, *Psyche*, ii. 319, on the popular superstition that one who dies in a whirlwind has his soul snatched away by the wind-spirits. The doctrine referred to by Seneca is not, however, a purely Stoic doctrine.

## EPISTLE LVII.

he will change colour. For there are certain emotions, my dear Lucilius, which no courage can avoid; nature reminds courage how perishable a thing it is. And so he will contract his brow when the prospect is forbidding, will shudder at sudden apparitions, and will become dizzy when he stands at the edge of a high precipice and looks down. This is not fear; it is a natural feeling which reason cannot rout. That is why certain brave men, most willing to shed their own blood, cannot bear to see the blood of others. Some persons collapse and faint at the sight of a freshly inflicted wound; others are affected similarly on handling or viewing an old wound which is festering. And others meet the sword-stroke more readily than they see it dealt.

Accordingly, as I said, I experienced a certain transformation, though it could not be called confusion. Then at the first glimpse of restored daylight my good spirits returned without forethought or command. And I began to muse and think how foolish we are to fear certain objects to a greater or less degree, since all of them end in the same way. For what difference does it make whether a watch-tower or a mountain crashes down upon us? No difference at all, you will find. Nevertheless, there will be some men who fear the latter mishap to a greater degree, though both accidents are equally deadly; so true it is that fear looks not to the effect, but to the cause of the effect. Do you suppose that I am now referring to the Stoics,<sup>a</sup> who hold that the soul of a man crushed by a great weight cannot abide, and is scattered forthwith, because it has not had a free opportunity to depart? That is not what I am doing; those who think thus are, in my opinion, wrong. Just as fire cannot be crushed out, since it

## THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

nam circa id effugit, quo urgetur; quemadmodum aer verbere atque ictu non laeditur, ne scinditur quidem, sed circa id, cui cessit, refunditur; sic animus, qui ex tenuissimo constat, deprehendi non potest nec intra corpus effligi, sed beneficio subtilitatis suae per ipsa, quibus premitur, erumpit. Quomodo fulmini, etiam cum latissime percussit ac fulsit, per exiguum foramen est relictus, sic animo, qui adhuc tenuior est igne, per omne corpus fuga est. Itaque de illo quaerendum est, an possit immortalis esse. Hoc quidem certum habet: si superstes est corpori, praeteri<sup>1</sup> illum nullo genere posse, propter quod non perit, quoniam nulla immortalitas cum exceptione est nec quicquam noxium aeterno est. VALE.

### LVIII.

#### SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quanta verborum nobis paupertas, immo egestas sit, numquam magis quam hodierno die intellexi. Mille res inciderunt, cum forte de Platone loqueremur, quae nomina desiderarent nec haberent, quaedam vero, quae<sup>2</sup> cum habuissent, fastidio nostro perdidissent.
- 2 Quis autem ferat in egestate fastidium? Hunc quem

<sup>1</sup> *praeteri* Buecheler; *preter* p; *propter* VLPb; *proteri* Haupt.

<sup>2</sup> *quae* added by Hense, after Koch and G. Gemoll.

<sup>a</sup> For this belief compare Xenophon, *Mem.* iv. 3. 14, "No one sees the bolt either on its way down or on its way back." Seneca himself was much interested in lightning, *cf.* *N. Q.* ii. 40. 2.

<sup>b</sup> This theme was emphasized by Lucretius, i. 136 and 832, and iii. 260. Munro thinks, however, that "Lucretius had too much instead of too little technical language for a poet." Seneca knew Lucretius; *cf.* *Epp.* lviii. 12, xc. 11, etc.

## EPISTLES LVII., LVIII.

will escape round the edges of the body which overwhelms it; just as the air cannot be damaged by lashes and blows, or even cut into, but flows back about the object to which it gives place; similarly the soul, which consists of the subtlest particles, cannot be arrested or destroyed inside the body, but, by virtue of its delicate substance, it will rather escape through the very object by which it is being crushed. Just as lightning, no matter how widely it strikes and flashes, makes its return through a narrow opening,<sup>a</sup> so the soul, which is still subtler than fire, has a way of escape through any part of the body. We therefore come to this question,—whether the soul can be immortal. But be sure of this: if the soul survives the body after the body is crushed, the soul can in no wise be crushed out, precisely because it does not perish; for the rule of immortality never admits of exceptions, and nothing can harm that which is everlasting. Farewell.

## LVIII. ON BEING

How scant of words our language is, nay, how poverty-stricken, I have not fully understood until to-day. We happened to be speaking of Plato, and a thousand subjects came up for discussion, which needed names and yet possessed none; and there were certain others which once possessed, but have since lost, their words because we were too nice about their use. But who can endure to be nice in the midst of poverty?<sup>b</sup> There is an insect, called

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:  
**Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature**  
which can be purchased on our Website :  
[www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :  
**Brainfly Inc.**  
**5100 Garfield Ave. #46**  
**Sacramento CA 95841-3839**

## **TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:**

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website ([www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

[webcomments@brainfly.net](mailto:webcomments@brainfly.net)