

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

audio. Adeo tecum sum, ut dubitem, an incipiam non epistulas, sed codicellos tibi scribere. VALE.

LVI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Peream, si est tam necessarium quam videtur silentium in studia seposito. Ecce undique me varius clamor circumsonat. Supra ipsum balneum habito. Propone nunc tibi omnia genera vocum, quae in odium possunt aures adducere: cum fortiores exercentur et manus plumbo graves iactant, cum aut laborant aut laborantem imitantur, gemitus audio, quotiens retentum spiritum remiserunt, sibilos et acerbissimas respirationes; cum in aliquem inertem et hac plebeia unctione contentum incidi, audio crepitum inlisae manus umeris, quae prout plana peruenit aut concava, ita sonum mutat. Si vero pili-crepus supervenit et numerare coepit pilas, actum est.
- 2 Adice nunc scordalum et furem deprensam et illum, cui vox sua in balineo placet. Adice nunc eos, qui in piscinam cum ingenti impulsae aquae sono saliunt. Praeter istos, quorum, si nihil aliud, rectae voces sunt, alipilum cogita tenuem et stridulam vocem, quo sit notabilior, subinde exprimentem nec umquam

^a *Pili-crepus* probably means "ball-counter,"—one who keeps a record of the strokes. Compare our "billiard-marker."

^b This was especially true of poets, cf. Horace, *Sat.* i. 4. 76 *suave locus voci resonat conclusus*, and Martial, iii. 44.

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and at this very moment I hear you ; I am with you to such an extent that I hesitate whether I should not begin to write you notes instead of letters. Farewell.

LVI. ON QUIET AND STUDY

Beshrew me if I think anything more requisite than silence for a man who secludes himself in order to study ! Imagine what a variety of noises reverberates about my ears ! I have lodgings right over a bathing establishment. So picture to yourself the assortment of sounds, which are strong enough to make me hate my very powers of hearing ! When your strenuous gentleman, for example, is exercising himself by flourishing leaden weights ; when he is working hard, or else pretends to be working hard, I can hear him grunt ; and whenever he releases his imprisoned breath, I can hear him panting in wheezy and high-pitched tones. Or perhaps I notice some lazy fellow, content with a cheap rub-down, and hear the crack of the pummeling hand on his shoulder, varying in sound according as the hand is laid on flat or hollow. Then, perhaps, a professional ^a comes along, shouting out the score ; that is the finishing touch. Add to this the arresting of an occasional roysterer or pickpocket, the racket of the man who always likes to hear his own voice in the bathroom,^b or the enthusiast who plunges into the swimming-tank with unconscionable noise and splashing. Besides all those whose voices, if nothing else, are good, imagine the hair-plucker with his penetrating, shrill voice,—for purposes of advertisement,—continually giving it vent and never holding

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tacentem, nisi dum vellit alas et alium pro se clamare cogit. Iam libari¹ varias exclamationes et botularium et crustularium et omnes popinarum institores mercem sua quadam et insignita modulatione vendentis.

- 3 "O te," inquis, "ferreum aut surdum, cui mens inter tot clamores tam varios, tam dissonos constat, cum Chrysippum nostrum adsidua salutatio perducatur ad mortem." At mehercules ego istum fremitum non magis curo quam fluctum aut deiectum aquae, quamvis audiam cuidam genti hanc unam fuisse causam urbem suam transferendi, quod fragorem Nili
- 4 cadentis ferre non potuit. Magis mihi videtur vox avocare quam crepitus. Illa enim animum adducit, hic tantum aures implet ac verberat. In his, quae me sine avocatione circumstrepunt, essedas transcurrentes pono et fabrum inquilinum et serrarium vicinum, aut hunc, qui ad Metam Sudantem tubulas² experitur et tibias, nec cantat, sed exclamat.

- 5 Etiamnunc molestior est mihi sonus, qui intermittitur subinde quam qui continuatur. Sed iam me sic ad omnia ista duravi, ut audire vel pausarium possim voce acerbissima remigibus modos dantem. Animum enim cogo sibi intentum esse nec avocari ad

¹ *libari* Caelius Rhodiginus; *biberari* pLVM; *liberari* Pb.
² *tubulas* Gruter; *tabulas* pLV; Summers conj. *tubulos*.

^a It is nowhere else related of the famous Stoic philosopher Chrysippus that he objected to the salutations of his friends; and, besides, the morning salutation was a Roman, not a Greek, custom. Lipsius, therefore, was probably right when he proposed to read here, for *Chrysippus*, *Crispus*, one of Seneca's friends; cf. *Epigr.* 6.

^b The same story is told in *Naturales Quaestiones*, iv. 2. 5.

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his tongue except when he is plucking the armpits and making his victim yell instead. Then the cake-seller with his varied cries, the sausageman, the confectioner, and all the vendors of food hawking their wares, each with his own distinctive intonation.

So you say: "What iron nerves or deadened ears you must have, if your mind can hold out amid so many noises, so various and so discordant, when our friend Chrysippus^a is brought to his death by the continual good-morrows that greet him!" But I assure you that this racket means no more to me than the sound of waves or falling water; although you will remind me that a certain tribe once moved their city merely because they could not endure the din of a Nile cataract.^b Words seem to distract me more than noises; for words demand attention, but noises merely fill the ears and beat upon them. Among the sounds that din round me without distracting, I include passing carriages, a machinist in the same block, a saw-sharpener near by, or some fellow who is demonstrating with little pipes and flutes at the Trickling Fountain,^c shouting rather than singing.

Furthermore, an intermittent noise upsets me more than a steady one. But by this time I have toughened my nerves against all that sort of thing, so that I can endure even a boatswain marking the time in high-pitched tones for his crew. For I force my mind to concentrate, and keep it from straying to

^a A cone-shaped fountain, resembling a turning-post (*meta*) in the circus, from which the water spouted through many jets; hence the term "sweating" (*sudans*). Its remains may still be seen now not far from the Colosseum on the Velia.

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externa ; omnia licet foris resonent, dum intus nihil tumultus sit, dum inter se non rixentur cupiditas et timor, dum avaritia luxuriaque non dissideant nec altera alteram vexet. Nam quid prodest totius regionis silentium, si adfectus fremunt ?

6 Omnia noctis erant placida composta quiete.

Falsum est. Nulla placida est quies, nisi qua¹ ratio composuit. Nox exhibet molestiam, non tollit, et sollicitudines mutat. Nam dormientium quoque insomnia tam turbulenta sunt quam dies. Illa tranquillitas vera est, in quam bona mens explicatur.

7 Aspice illum, cui somnus laxae domus silentio quaeritur, cuius aures ne quis agitet sonus, omnis servorum turba conticuit et suspensum accedentium propius vestigium ponitur ; huc nempe versatur atque illuc,
8 somnum inter aegritudines levem captans. Quae non audit, audisse se queritur. Quid in causa putas esse ? Animus illi obstrepit. Hic placandus est, huius conpescenda seditio est, quem non est quod existimes placidum, si iacet corpus. Interdum quies inquieta est.

Et ideo ad rerum actus excitandi ac tractatione bonarum artium occupandi sumus, quotiens nos male
9 habet inertia sui inpatiens. Magni imperatores, cum male parere militem vident, aliquo labore conpescunt

¹ qua Gemoll ; quam MSS.

^a A fragment from the *Argonautica* of Varro Atacinus,
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things outside itself; all outdoors may be bedlam, provided that there is no disturbance within, provided that fear is not wrangling with desire in my breast, provided that meanness and lavishness are not at odds, one harassing the other. For of what benefit is a quiet neighbourhood, if our emotions are in an uproar?

"Twas night, and all the world was lulled to rest.^a

This is not true; for no real rest can be found when reason has not done the lulling. Night brings our troubles to the light, rather than banishes them; it merely changes the form of our worries. For even when we seek slumber, our sleepless moments are as harassing as the daytime. Real tranquillity is the state reached by an unperturbed mind when it is relaxed. Think of the unfortunate man who courts sleep by surrendering his spacious mansion to silence, who, that his ear may be disturbed by no sound, bids the whole retinue of his slaves be quiet and that whoever approaches him shall walk on tiptoe; he tosses from this side to that and seeks a fitful slumber amid his frettings! He complains that he has heard sounds, when he has not heard them at all. The reason, you ask? His soul is in an uproar; it must be soothed, and its rebellious murmuring checked. You need not suppose that the soul is at peace when the body is still. Sometimes quiet means disquiet.

We must therefore rouse ourselves to action and busy ourselves with interests that are good, as often as we are in the grasp of an uncontrollable sluggishness. Great generals, when they see that their men are mutinous, check them by some sort of labour

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- et expeditionibus detinent; numquam vacat lascivire districtis nihilque tam certum est quam otii vitia negotio discuti. Saepe videmur taedio rerum civilium et infelicis atque ingratae stationis paenitentia secessisse, tamen in illa latebra, in quam nos timor ac lassitudo coniecit, interdum recrudescit ambitio. Non enim excisa desit, sed fatigata aut etiam obirata
 10 rebus parum sibi cedentibus. Idem de luxuria dico, quae videtur aliquando cessisse, deinde frugalitatem professos sollicitat atque in media parsimonia voluptates non damnatas, sed relictas petit, et quidem eo vehementius, quo occultius. Omnia enim vitia in aperto leniora sunt; morbi quoque tunc ad sanitatem inclinant, cum ex abdito erumpunt ac vim suam proferunt. Et avaritiam itaque et ambitionem et cetera mala mentis humanae tunc perniciosissima scias esse, cum simulata sanitate subsidunt.
- 11 Otiosi videmur, et non sumus. Nam si bona fide sumus, si receptui cecinimus, si speciosa contemnimus, ut paulo ante dicebam, nulla res nos avocabit, nullus hominum aviumque concentus interrumpet
 12 cogitationes bonas, solidasque iam et certas. Leve illud ingenium est nec sese adhuc reduxit introrsus, quod ad vocem et accidentia erigitur. Habet intus aliquid sollicitudinis et habet aliquid concepti

^a See Introduction, page viii.

^b § 4 of this letter.

^c An allusion to the Sirens and Ulysses, cf. § 15 below.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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