
Vulnerable Body Week 7 (after reading week)

Exercise on Seneca Letter 12.

- **Turn this letter into a dramatic dialogue**

Seneca: What the hell is this? The house is falling apart!

Bailiff: I'm sorry Sir, I'm doing my best, but the house is very old

Seneca: (to himself) But I built this house with my own hands! If the house is in this state, what am I like? (to the Bailiff) Why have the trees been neglected? You should've watered them!

Bailiff: I did everything I could, they're just old.

Seneca: (to himself) Who am I? Almost dead, ready for burial.

Seneca: (outwards, to the audience) Just between us, I also planted those trees all by myself, and had the pleasure of seeing them in their first leaf!
(sighs dramatically)

(points to slave - Felicio) Who is this?! Where did you get him? Is he new here, this broken-down geriatric? Has he not knocked upon death's door already?!

Felicio: I am Felicio, remember? I used to be your slave as a little boy - I still am! You even used to bring me action figures!

Seneca: Are you crazy?! My pet slave was a little boy, not a senile old man!
(to himself, musingly) Actually it's not even that bad to be old. Life gets better in your declining years, just like a bottle of wine or a fine cheese...

Lucilius: What? You've been complaining about old age till now and now you say we have to love it? **(to audience)** He's finally lost it.

Seneca: Well, it's all about how we use it. If we know how to use old age, it can be full of pleasure...just like overripe fruit... **(under his breath)** mushy bananas are always my favourite! Or even that last round at the bar, before bed (the one that gets you completely pissed, am I right?)

Lucilius: (Bewildered) Honestly? I've gotta say, that's really not very stoic of you...Are you not afraid of your inevitable death after these so-called 'most delightful' years?

Seneca: (Sagely) Death is not something we should be afraid of, especially in old age. Death is something we have to come to terms with earlier in our lives. Death is not a destination that you should be afraid of, it's part of the journey of life.

Lucilius: But isn't it annoying to have to be looking death in the face all the time? I mean, speak for yourself - I've still got a few good decades in me, old man.

Seneca: Well, you never know. We're not summoned by Death according to our age on the Censor's list, remember. Any one of us could get hit by a chariot tomorrow. So we must all be able to 'look death in the face', as you put it. My advice is to live each day as if it is a life in miniature - every day has a sunrise and sunset, birth and death. Take Pacuvius - you know, governor of Syria; he used to celebrate his own death and burial at the end of every day!

Lucilius: now you're pulling my leg. He reminds me of Trimalchio in that awful novel by Petronius. His daily rituals were all about narcissistic self-indulgence. Surely you can't mean...

Seneca: Ha ha. Just testing. Pacuvius was corrupt of course. But what counts is the motivation. You can think about death and dying daily, but in a virtuous way. Let's say *'vixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna, peregi'*.

Lucilius: So now demented, suicidal Dido is a role-model?

Seneca: well-spotted. I can see you know your Virgil. But what's to stop us taking that line differently? And there's so much prejudice against Dido. If you ask me she had more balls than Aeneas and Turnus combined...

Lucilius: That's for sure.

Seneca: We need to question everything, you see, not least the way we have been taught to read texts. Dido's sentiment is a noble one. We might take just the first word of the line - *vixi* - and repeat it every bedtime. And talking of endings - it's time for me to conclude my letter.

Lucilius: What, nothing more? It's so hard coming to the end of anything. Parting gifts for your dear friend?

Seneca. OK. Here's food for thought: 'It is wrong to live under constraint. No man is forced to live under constraint'.

Lucilius: you are messing with me again - that's Epicurus! What are you, a Stoic, doing quoting *him*?

Seneca: Have you learnt nothing from what we said about the Virgil quote? I can call any truth my own. All the best ideas are common property. Farewell.