On the Shortness of Life

SENECA
c. 4 BC – AD 65

On the Shortness of Life

De brevitate vitae

Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited

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On the Shortness of Life · Seneca (c. 4 BC – AD 65)

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INTRODUCTION

Seneca, the Roman statesman and Stoic philosopher, wrote this short essay around AD 49, probably just before he became tutor to the young Nero. It is addressed to Paulinus, a friend (perhaps his father-in-law) who held the demanding post of overseer of Rome's grain supply.

Its argument is simple and startling: life is not short, we make it short. Most people complain that nature gives them too little time, but they squander what they have on business, ambition, luxury, other people's demands and endless postponement, and only realize at the end that they have barely lived. Seneca surveys the "busy" — from politicians and lawyers to collectors and dinner-party hosts, and even Augustus, who longed for a leisure he never got — and sets against them the few who give their time to philosophy and so make the whole past their own.

The essay closes by urging Paulinus to step back from public office while he still can. It is one of the most quoted works of ancient philosophy, and one of the shortest.

On the Shortness of Life

Life is long enough if we know how to use it; the busy waste it, and only those who give their time to philosophy truly live.

CHAPTER 1

	LATIN	ENGLISH
1.1	Maior pars mortalium, Pauline, de naturae malignitate conqueritur, quod in exiguum aevi gignamur, quod haec tam velociter, tam rapide dati nobis temporis spatia decurrant, adeo ut exceptis admodum paucis ceteros in ipso vitae apparatu vita destituat. Nec huic publico, ut opinantur, malo turba tantum et imprudens volgus ingemuit; clarorum quoque virorum hic affectus querellas evocavit.	Most of humankind, Paulinus, complains about the meanness of nature. We are born for a brief span, they say, and the stretch of time given to us runs out so swiftly, so rapidly, that apart from a very few, life abandons the rest of us just as we are getting ready to live. Nor is it only the crowd and the unthinking masses who groan over what they take to be a universal evil; this feeling has drawn complaints from famous men as well.[1]
1.2	Inde illa maximi medicorum exclamatio est: 'vitam brevem esse, longam artem'; inde Aristotelis cum rerum natura exigentis minime conveniens sapienti viro lis: 'aetatis illam animalibus tantum indulsisse, ut quina aut dena saecula educerent, homini in tam multa ac magna genito tanto citeriorem terminum stare.'	Hence the cry of the greatest of doctors: "Life is short, art is long." Hence the quarrel of Aristotle, taking nature to task in a way most unbecoming to a wise man: "She has been so indulgent to animals that they live out five or ten human lifetimes, while for man, born for so many great things, the limit is set so much nearer."[2]
1.3	Non exiguum temporis habemus, sed multum perdimus. Satis longa vita et in maximarum rerum consummationem large data est, si tota bene collocaretur; sed ubi per luxum ac neglegentiam diffluit, ubi nulli bonae rei impenditur, ultima demum necessitate cogente quam ire non intelleximus transisse sentimus.	It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and it has been given in generous measure for accomplishing the greatest things, if the whole of it is well invested. But when it drains away through extravagance and carelessness, when it is spent on nothing good, then at last, under the pressure of the final necessity, we realize that it has passed, though we never noticed it passing.
1.4	Ita est: non accipimus brevem vitam, sed facimus, nec inopes eius sed prodigi sumus. Sicut amplae et regiae opes, ubi ad malum dominum pervenerunt, momento dissipantur, at quamvis modicae, si bono custodi traditae sunt, usu crescunt, ita aetas nostra bene disponenti multum patet.	So it is: we are not given a short life; we make it short. We are not poor in life but wasteful of it. Great, princely wealth that falls to a bad owner is squandered in a moment, while wealth however modest, entrusted to a good guardian, grows with use. In the same way, our lifetime offers plenty of room to the one who manages it well.

1 Pompeius Paulinus was prefect of Rome's grain supply, and probably a relative of Seneca's wife Pompeia Paulina.
2 The doctor is Hippocrates (fifth century BC), whose *Aphorisms* open with this line; "art" means the art of medicine. Elsewhere the complaint about animals is attributed to Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus.

CHAPTER 2: LIFE IS LONG IF YOU KNOW HOW TO USE IT

Nature is generous; greed, ambition, idleness and service to others waste our time, and no one belongs to himself.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
2.1	Quid de rerum natura querimur? Illa se benigne gessit; vita, si uti scias, longa est. At alium insatiabilis tenet avaritia, alium in supervacuis laboribus operosa sedulitas; alius vino madet, alius inertia torpet; alium defatigat ex alienis iudiciis suspensa semper ambitio, alium mercandi praeceps cupiditas circa omnis terras, omnia maria spe lucri ducit; quosdam torquet cupido militiae numquam non aut alienis periculis intentos aut suis anxios; sunt quos ingratus superiorum cultus voluntaria servitute consumat;	Why do we complain about nature? She has behaved generously: life is long if you know how to use it. But one man is gripped by insatiable greed, another by laborious devotion to pointless tasks. One is soaked in wine, another numb with idleness. One is worn out by an ambition that always hangs on the judgments of others; another is driven by a headlong craving for trade over every land and every sea in the hope of profit. Some are tormented by a lust for soldiering, always either intent on danger to others or anxious about their own. There are those who wear themselves out in voluntary servitude, courting superiors who show no gratitude;
2.2	multos aut affectatio alienae fortunae aut suae querella detinuit; plerosque nihil certum sequentis vaga et inconstans et sibi displicens levitas per nova consilia iactavit; quibusdam nihil, quo cursum derigant, placet, sed marcentis oscitantisque fata deprendunt, adeo ut quod apud maximum poetarum more oraculi dictum est, verum esse non dubitem: "Exigua pars est vitae, qua vivimus." Ceterum quidem omne spatium non vita sed tempus est.	many have been held back either by coveting someone else's fortune or by complaining about their own; most, pursuing nothing fixed, have been tossed from one new plan to another by a fickleness that is aimless, inconstant and dissatisfied with itself. Some approve of nothing to steer their course by, and fate catches them sluggish and yawning—so much so that I do not doubt the truth of what the greatest of poets said, in the manner of an oracle: "Small is the part of life we really live." All the rest of the span is not life but merely time.[3]
2.3	Urgent et circumstant vitia undique nec resurgere aut in dispectum veri attollere oculos sinunt, sed immersos et in cupiditatem infixos premunt. Numquam illis recurrere ad se licet; si quando aliqua fortuito quies contigit, velut profundum mare, in quo post ventum quoque volutatio est, fluctuantur nec umquam illis a cupiditatibus suis otium stat.	Vices press on them and surround them on every side. They do not let them rise again or lift their eyes to discern the truth, but hold them down, sunk and fixed in desire. They are never allowed to return to themselves. If some calm ever comes their way by chance, they toss about like the deep sea, which goes on heaving even after the wind has dropped, and they never get any leisure from their desires.[4]
2.4	De istis me putas dicere, quorum in confesso mala sunt? Aspice illos, ad quorum felicitatem concurritur; bonis suis offocantur. Quam multis divitiae graves sunt! Quam multorum eloquentia et cotidiana ostentandi ingenii sollicitatio sanguinem educit! Quam multi continuis voluptatibus pallent! Quam multis nihil liberi relinquit	Do you think I am talking about people whose failings are admitted? Look at those whose good fortune draws crowds: they are choking on their own blessings. How many find their wealth a burden! How many are drained of their lifeblood by their eloquence and the daily strain of showing off their

3 The poet is not identified, and no source for the line is known.
4 Leisure (*otium*): time free from public business, to be spent on oneself and on study—not idleness.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	circumfusus clientium populus! Omnis denique istos ab infimis usque ad summos pererra: hic advocat, hic adest, ille periclitatur, ille defendit, ille iudicat, nemo se sibi vindicat, alius in alium consumitur. Interroga de istis, quorum nomina ediscuntur, his illos dinosci videbis notis: ille illius cultor est, hic illius; suus nemo est.	talent! How many are pale from endless pleasures! How many are left no freedom at all by the throng of clients swarming around them! In short, run through them all, from the lowest to the highest: this one calls for legal support, that one gives it; this one is on trial, that one defends him, that one judges him. No one claims himself for himself; each is used up for someone else. Ask about those whose names are learned by heart, and you will see that these are the marks that tell them apart: this one cultivates that man, that one another. No one belongs to himself.
2.5	Deinde dementissima quorundam indignatio est: queruntur de superiorum fastidio, quod ipsis adire volentibus non vacaverint! Audet quisquam de alterius superbia queri, qui sibi ipse numquam vacat? Ille tamen te, quisquis es, insolenti quidem vultu sed aliquando respexit, ille aures suas ad tua verba demisit, ille te ad latus suum recepit; tu non inspicere te umquam, non audire dignatus es. Non est itaque, quod ista officia cuiquam imputes, quoniam quidem, cum illa faceres, non esse cum alio volebas, sed tecum esse non poteras.	And then there is the utterly insane indignation of certain people. They complain about the disdain of their superiors, who had no time for them when they wanted an audience! Does anyone dare complain of another's arrogance, when he himself never has time for himself? Yet that great man did at some point look your way, whoever you are, even if with an insolent expression; he bent his ears to your words; he took you to his side. You never deigned to look into yourself or to listen to yourself. So there is no reason to charge anyone for these services, since when you performed them it was not that you wanted to be with someone else, but that you could not be with yourself.

CHAPTER 3: TIME GIVEN AWAY

People guard their property but give away their lives; an old man is asked to count what his years were spent on.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
3.1	Omnia licet, quae umquam ingenia fulserunt, in hoc unum consentiant, numquam satis hanc humanarum mentium caliginem mirabuntur. Praedia sua occupari a nullo patiuntur et, si exigua contentio est de modo finium, ad lapides et arma discurrunt; in vitam suam incedere alios sinunt, immo vero ipsi etiam possessores eius futuros inducunt. Nemo invenitur, qui pecuniam suam dividere velit; vitam unusquisque quam multis distribuit! Adstricti sunt in continendo patrimonio, simul ad iacturam temporis ventum est, profusissimi in eo, cuius unius honesta avaritia est.	Let all the brilliant minds that have ever shone agree on this one point: they will never marvel enough at the fog that clouds human minds. People allow no one to seize their estates, and at the slightest dispute over a boundary they rush for stones and weapons; yet they let others invade their lives—indeed, they themselves bring in those who will take possession of them. No one can be found who is willing to share out his money; but among how many people each of us distributes his life! They are tight-fisted in guarding their inheritance, but as soon as it comes to wasting time they are utterly lavish with the one thing where it is honorable to be a miser.
3.2	Libet itaque ex seniorum turba comprendere aliquem: "Pervenisse te ad ultimum aetatis humanae videmus, centesimus tibi vel supra premitur annus; agedum, ad	So I would like to pick out someone from the crowd of old men: "We see that you have reached the limit of a human lifetime; your hundredth

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	computationem aetatem tuam revoca. Duc, quantum ex isto tempore creditor, quantum amica, quantum rex, quantum cliens abstuleris quantum lis uxoria, quantum servorum coercitio, quantum officiosa per urbem discursatio. Adice morbos, quos manu fecimus, adice et quod sine usu iacuit; videbis te pauciores annos habere quam numeras.	year, or more, is bearing down on you. Come, then, call your life to an audit. Reckon how much of that time has been taken from you by a creditor, how much by a mistress, how much by a patron, how much by a client, how much by quarrels with your wife, how much by punishing slaves, how much by dutiful rushing around the city. Add the illnesses we have brought on ourselves; add, too, the time that has lain unused. You will see that you have fewer years than you count.
3.3	Repete memoria tecum, quando certus consilii fueris, quotus quisque dies ut destinaveras processerit, quando tibi usus tui fuerit, quando in statu suo vultus, quando animus intrepidus, quid tibi in tam longo aevo facti operis sit, quam multi vitam tuam diripuerint te non sentiente quid perderes, quantum vanus dolor, stulta laetitia, avida cupiditas, blanda conversatio abstulerit, quam exiguum tibi de tuo relictum sit; intelleges te immaturum mori."	Search your memory: when were you ever sure of your purpose? How few days went as you had planned? When did you have the use of yourself? When did your face keep its natural expression, when was your mind free of fear? What work have you accomplished in so long a life? How many people have plundered your life while you had no idea what you were losing? How much has been taken by useless grief, foolish joy, greedy desire, the charms of society? How little of what was yours has been left to you? You will realize that you are dying before your time."
3.4	Quid ergo est in causa? Tamquam semper victuri vivitis, numquam vobis fragilitas vestra succurrit, non observatis, quantum iam temporis transierit; velut ex pleno et abundanti perditis, cum interim fortasse ille ipse qui alicui vel homini vel rei donatur dies ultimus sit. Omnia tamquam mortales timetis, omnia tamquam immortales concupiscitis.	So what is the reason? You live as if you were going to live forever; your frailty never occurs to you; you do not notice how much time has already gone by. You waste it as if it came from a full and overflowing supply, when all the while that very day you are giving to some person or some business may be your last. You fear everything like mortals, and want everything like immortals.
3.5	Audies plerosque dicentes: "A quinquagesimo anno in otium secedam, sexagesimus me annus ab officiis dimittet." Et quem tandem longioris vitae praedem accipis? Quis ista sicut disponis ire patietur? Non pudet te reliquias vitae tibi reservare et id solum tempus bonae menti destinare, quod in nullam rem conferri possit? Quam serum est tunc vivere incipere, cum desinendum est! Quae tam stulta mortalitatis oblivio in quinquagesimum et sexagesimum annum differre sana consilia et inde velle vitam inchoare, quo pauci perduxerunt!	You will hear most people say: "At fifty I will retire into leisure; at sixty I will be released from my duties." And what guarantee, may I ask, do you have of a longer life? Who will let things go as you have planned them? Are you not ashamed to keep for yourself only the leftovers of life, and to set aside for a sound mind only the time that cannot be used for anything else? How late it is to begin living just when you must stop! What foolish forgetfulness of our mortality, to put off sound plans to our fiftieth or sixtieth year, and to want to begin life at a point few have reached!

CHAPTER 4: AUGUSTUS LONGS FOR LEISURE

Even Augustus, the most powerful of men, kept hoping for leisure while wars and plots filled his life.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
4.1	Potentissimis et in altum sublatis hominibus excidere voces videbis, quibus otium optent, laudent, omnibus bonis suis praeferant. Cupiunt interim ex illo fastigio suo, si tuto liceat, descendere; nam ut nihil extra lacessat aut quatiat, in se ipsa fortuna ruit.	You will see the most powerful men, those raised to the heights, let slip remarks in which they long for leisure, praise it, and rank it above all their blessings. At times they wish they could come down from their pinnacle, if only they could do so safely; for even if nothing outside attacks or shakes it, great fortune collapses under its own weight.
4.2	Divus Augustus, cui dii plura quam ulli praestiterunt, non desiit quietem sibi precari et vacationem a re publica petere; omnis eius sermo ad hoc semper revolutus est, ut speraret otium. Hoc labores suos, etiam si falso, dulci tamen oblectabat solacio, aliquando se victurum sibi.	The deified Augustus, to whom the gods granted more than to anyone else, never stopped praying for rest and asking to be relieved of public affairs. All his conversation kept coming back to this: his hope of leisure. He used to cheer his labors with this consolation, false perhaps, but sweet: that one day he would live for himself.[5]
4.3	In quadam ad senatum missa epistula, cum requiem suam non vacuam fore dignitatis nec a priore gloria discrepantem pollicitus esset, haec verba inveni: "Sed ista fieri speciosius quam promitti possunt. Me tamen cupido temporis optatissimi mihi provexit, ut quoniam rerum laetitia moratur adhuc, praeciperem aliquid voluptatis ex verborum dulcedine."	In a letter he sent to the senate, after promising that his retirement would not lack dignity or be out of keeping with his former glory, I found these words: "But these things are finer to do than to promise. Still, my longing for that time I so deeply desire has carried me so far that, since the joy of the reality is still delayed, I have taken some pleasure in advance from the sweetness of words."[6]
4.4	Tanta visa est res otium, ut illam, quia usu non poterat, cogitatione praesumeret. Qui omnia videbat ex se uno pendentia, qui hominibus gentibusque fortunam dabat, illum diem laetissimus cogitabat, quo magnitudinem suam exueret.	Leisure seemed so great a thing to him that, since he could not have it in fact, he enjoyed it in advance in thought. The man who saw everything depend on him alone, who dispensed fortune to individuals and to nations, was at his happiest thinking of the day when he would lay aside his greatness.
4.5	Expertus erat, quantum illa bona per omnis terras fulgentia sudoris exprimerent, quantum occultarum sollicitudinum tegerent. Cum civibus primum, deinde cum collegis, novissime cum adfinibus coactus armis decernere mari terraque sanguinem fudit. Per Macedoniam, Siciliam, Aegyptum, Syriam Asiamque et omnis prope oras bello circumactus Romana caede lassos exercitus ad externa bella convertit. Dum Alpes pacat immixtosque mediae paci et imperio hostes perdomat, dum vel ultra Rhenum et Euphraten et Danuvium	He had learned how much sweat those blessings that shine across every land wring out of a man, how many hidden anxieties they conceal. Forced to settle matters by arms first with his fellow citizens, then with his colleagues, and finally with his relatives, he shed blood on land and sea. Driven by war through Macedonia, Sicily, Egypt, Syria, Asia and almost every coast, he turned his armies, weary of killing Romans, to foreign wars. While he was pacifying the Alps and subduing enemies

5 Augustus was Rome's first emperor (27 BC–AD 14).
6 This letter of Augustus does not otherwise survive.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	terminos movet, in ipsa urbe Murenae, Caepionis, Lepidi, Egnati, aliorum in eum mucrones acuebantur.	lodged in the middle of a peaceful empire, while he was pushing the frontiers beyond the Rhine, the Euphrates and the Danube, in Rome itself the swords of Murena, Caepio, Lepidus, Egnatius and others were being sharpened against him.[7]
4.6	Nondum horum effugerat insidias: filia et tot nobiles iuvenes adulterio velut sacramento adacti iam infractam aetatem territabant Paulusque et iterum timenda cum Antonio mulier. Haec ulcera cum ipsis membris absciderat: alia subnascebantur; velut grave multo sanguine corpus parte semper aliqua rumpebatur. Itaque otium optabat, in huius spe et cogitatione labores eius residebant, hoc votum erat eius, qui voti compotes facere poterat.	He had not yet escaped their plots when his daughter and so many young noblemen, bound together by adultery as if by a soldier's oath, were alarming his already failing years—and Paulus, too, and once again a woman to be feared alongside an Antony. He had cut out these ulcers together with the limbs themselves, but others kept growing up underneath; as in a body overloaded with blood, something was always bursting open somewhere. So he longed for leisure; in the hope and thought of it his labors found rest; this was the prayer of the man who could grant the prayers of others.[8]

CHAPTER 5: CICERO, HALF FREE

Cicero complains in a letter that he is only half free; the wise man is never half free.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
5.1	M. Cicero inter Catilinas, Clodios iactatus Pompeiosque et Crassos, partim manifestos inimicos, partim dubios amicos, dum fluctuatur cum re publica et illam pessum euntem tenet, novissime abductus, nec secundis rebus quietus nec adversarum patiens, quotiens illum ipsum consulatum suum non sine causa sed sine fine laudatum detestatur!	Marcus Cicero was tossed about among men like Catiline and Clodius, Pompey and Crassus—some open enemies, some doubtful friends. He was buffeted along with the republic and held it up as it went under, until at last he was swept away; never at peace in good times, never able to bear bad ones. How often he curses that very consulship of his, which he praised not without reason, but without end![9]
5.2	Quam flebiles voces exprimit in quadam ad Atticum epistula iam victo patre Pompeio, adhuc filio in Hispania fracta arma refovente! "Quid agam," inquit, "hic, quaeris? Moror in Tusculano meo semiliber." Alia deinceps adicit, quibus et priorem aetatem complorat et de praesenti queritur et de futura desperat.	What pitiful words he pours out in a letter to Atticus, when Pompey the father had already been defeated and his son was still reviving his shattered forces in Spain! "You ask what I am doing here?" he says. "I am lingering at my place at Tusculum, half free." He goes on to add more, lamenting his past life, complaining about the present and despairing of the future.[10]
5.3		

7 The younger Lepidus (30 BC), Egnatius Rufus (19 BC), and Murena and Caepio (c. 23–22 BC) all plotted against Augustus.
8 His daughter Julia was banished in 2 BC for adultery with Iullus Antonius, son of Mark Antony, and others—a new Cleopatra with a new Antony. Paulus, husband of Augustus's granddaughter, was later executed for conspiracy.
9 Cicero (106–43 BC), orator and statesman, crushed Catiline's conspiracy as consul in 63 BC and was killed in the proscriptions of 43 BC.
10 Atticus was Cicero's closest friend and correspondent; this letter does not survive. Tusculum, near Rome, was the site of Cicero's country house.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	Semiliberum se dixit Cicero. At me hercules numquam sapiens in tam humile nomen procedet, numquam semiliber erit, integrae semper libertatis et solidae, solutus et sui iuris et altior ceteris. Quid enim supra eum potest esse, qui supra fortunam est?	Cicero called himself half free. But the wise man, I assure you, will never sink to so abject a title. He will never be half free; his freedom will always be whole and solid; he will be unbound, his own master, and above everyone else. For what can be above the man who is above fortune?[11]

CHAPTER 6: DRUSUS AND THE RESTLESS GREAT

Livius Drusus regretted never having had a holiday, and vices shrink even a thousand-year life.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
6.1	Livius Drusus, vir acer et vehemens, cum leges novas et mala Gracchana movisset stipatus ingenti totius Italiae coetu, exitum rerum non pervidens, quas nec agere licebat nec iam liberum erat semel incohatas relinquere, execratus inquietam a primordiis vitam dicitur dixisse uni sibi ne puero quidem umquam ferias contigisse. Ausus est enim et pupillus adhuc et praetextatus iudicibus reos commendare et gratiam suam foro interponere tam efficaciter quidem, ut quaedam iudicia constet ab illo rapta.	Livius Drusus, a fierce and forceful man, had stirred up new laws and the mischief of the Gracchi, with a huge crowd from all over Italy around him. Not foreseeing how things would end—he could not carry his measures through, and once he had begun them he was no longer free to drop them—he is said to have cursed a life that had been restless from the very start, and to have said that he alone had never had a holiday, not even as a boy. For while still a ward and still in the boy's toga, he had dared to recommend defendants to jurors and to bring his influence to bear on the courts, so effectively indeed that some verdicts are known to have been extorted by him.[12]
6.2	Quo non erumperet tam immatura ambitio? Scires in malum ingens et privatum et publicum evasuram tam praecoquem audaciam. Sero itaque querebatur nullas sibi ferias contigisse a puero seditiosus et foro gravis. Disputatur, an ipse sibi manus attulerit; subito enim vulnere per inguen accepto conlapsus est, aliquo dubitante, an mors eius voluntaria esset, nullo, an tempestiva.	Where would such premature ambition not break out? You could tell that such precocious audacity would end in great harm, both private and public. So it was too late that he complained he had had no holiday since boyhood—this troublemaker, this menace to the courts. It is debated whether he took his own life; for he collapsed after suddenly receiving a wound in the groin, and some doubted whether his death was voluntary, but no one doubted that it was timely.
6.3	Supervacuum est commemorare plures, qui cum aliis felicissimi viderentur, ipsi in se verum testimonium dixerunt perosi omnem actum annorum suorum; sed his querellis nec alios mutaverunt nec se ipsos. Nam cum verba eruperunt, adfectus ad consuetudinem relabuntur.	There is no need to mention more of those who, though others thought them supremely fortunate, bore true witness against themselves and loathed every act of their years. But with these complaints they changed neither others nor themselves; for once the words have burst out, their passions slide back into habit.
6.4	Vestra me hercules vita, licet supra mille annos exeat, in artissimum contrahetur; ista vitia nullum non saeculum	Truly, even if your life should exceed a thousand years, it will shrink to the narrowest span: these

11 The wise man (*sapiens*) is the Stoic ideal: the perfectly rational person, whom nothing outside him can harm.
12 Marcus Livius Drusus, tribune in 91 BC, pushed reforms recalling those of the Gracchi brothers a generation earlier, and was murdered in office.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	devorabunt. Hoc vero spatium quod, quamvis natura currit, ratio dilatat, cito vos effugiat necesse est; non enim adprenditis nec retinetis nec velocissimae omnium rei moram facitis, sed abire ut rem supervacuam ac reparabilem sinitis.	vices of yours will devour any lifetime whatever. As for this span of ours, which nature makes run fast but reason can stretch, it is bound to slip away from you quickly. For you do not seize it, or hold it back, or slow down the swiftest of all things; you let it go as if it were something superfluous and replaceable.

CHAPTER 7: THE BUSY DO NOT LIVE

The busy cannot learn to live; the man who guards his time has enough, and gray hair proves nothing.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
7.1	In primis autem et illos numero, qui nulli rei nisi vino ac libidini vacant; nulli enim turpius occupati sunt. Ceteri etiam si vana gloriae imagine teneantur, speciose tamen errant; licet avaros mihi, licet iracundos enumeres vel odia exercentes iniusta vel bella, omnes isti virilius peccant; in ventrem ac libidinem proiectorum inhonesta labes est.	But first of all I count those who have time for nothing but wine and lust; for no one is busy in a more shameful way. The others, even if they are held captive by an empty image of glory, at least go wrong with some show of decency. You may list for me the greedy, the hot-tempered, those who pursue unjust hatreds or unjust wars: all these sin in a more manly way. Those who have thrown themselves away on the belly and on lust bear a stain of disgrace.[13]
7.2	Omnia istorum tempora excute, aspice quam diu computent, quam diu insidientur, quam diu timeant, quam diu colant, quam diu colantur, quantum vadimonia sua atque aliena occupent, quantum convivia, quae iam ipsa officia sunt: videbis, quemadmodum illos respirare non sinant vel mala sua vel bona.	Examine all their time. See how long they spend calculating, how long plotting, how long fearing, how long courting others, how long being courted; how much is taken up by their own court appearances and other people's, how much by dinner parties, which have now become duties in themselves. You will see how neither their troubles nor their blessings let them breathe.
7.3	Denique inter omnes convenit nullam rem bene exerceri posse ab homine occupato, non eloquentiam, non liberales disciplinas, quando districtus animus nihil altius recipit, sed omnia velut inculcata respuit. Nihil minus est hominis occupati quam vivere; nullius rei difficilior scientia est. Professores aliarum artium volgo multique sunt, quasdam vero ex his pueri admodum ita percepisse visi sunt, ut etiam praecipere possent. Vivere tota vita discendum est et, quod magis fortasse miraberis, tota vita discendum est mori.	Finally, everyone agrees that no activity can be pursued well by a busy man—not eloquence, not the liberal arts—since a distracted mind takes in nothing deeply, but rejects everything as if it had been crammed into it. Nothing is less characteristic of the busy man than living; there is nothing harder to learn. Teachers of the other arts are everywhere, and plentiful; and some of those arts even mere boys seem to have mastered well enough to teach them. It takes a whole life to learn how to live, and—what may surprise you more—a whole life to learn how to die.
7.4	Tot maximi viri relictis omnibus impedimentis, cum divitiis officiis voluptatibus renuntiassent, hoc unum in extremam usque aetatem egerunt, ut vivere scirent;	So many great men, casting off every encumbrance and renouncing wealth, office and pleas-

13 The busy (*occupati*): Seneca's term for people so absorbed in affairs, pleasures or ambition that they have no time for themselves or for philosophy.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	plures tamen ex his nondum se scire confessi vita abierunt, nedum ut isti sciant.	ure, made it their one aim right up to the end of their lives to know how to live. Yet most of them departed from life admitting that they did not know yet—still less do these people know.
7.5	Magni, mihi crede, et supra humanos errores eminentis viri est nihil ex suo tempore delibari sinere, et ideo eius vita longissima est, quia, quantumcumque patuit, totum ipsi vacavit. Nihil inde incultum otiosumque iacuit, nihil sub alio fuit, neque enim quicquam repperit dignum quod cum tempore suo permutaret custos eius parcissimus. Itaque satis illi fuit; iis vero necesse est defuisse, ex quorum vita multum populus tulit.	Believe me, it is the mark of a great man, one who rises above human error, to let nothing of his time be skimmed off; and his life is the longest precisely because, however much of it there was, all of it was free for him. None of it lay fallow and idle, none of it was under another's control; for, as the most frugal guardian of his time, he found nothing worth exchanging for it. So he had enough; but those whose lives the public has carried off in large part are bound to have fallen short.
7.6	Nec est quod putes non illos aliquando intellegere damnum suum. Plerosque certe audies ex iis, quos magna felicitas gravat, inter clientium greges aut causarum actiones aut ceteras honestas miserias exclamare interdum: "Vivere mihi non licet."	Nor should you think that such people never recognize their loss. You will certainly hear many of those weighed down by great prosperity cry out now and then, amid their herds of clients, their court cases or their other respectable miseries: "I have no chance to live!"
7.7	Quidni non liceat? Omnes illi, qui te sibi advocant, tibi abducunt. Ille reus quot dies abstulit? Quot ille candidatus? Quot illa anus efferendis heredibus lassa? Quot ille ad irritandam avaritiam captantium simulatus aeger? Quot ille potentior amicus, qui vos non in amicitiam, sed in apparatu habet? Dispunge, inquam, et recense vitae tuae dies; videbis paucos admodum et reiculos apud te resedisse.	Of course you have no chance! All those who call you to their side take you away from yourself. How many days has that defendant taken? How many that candidate? How many that old woman, worn out with burying her heirs? How many that man who pretends to be ill to whet the greed of legacy hunters? How many that more powerful friend who keeps people like you not as friends but as part of his display? Tick them off, I say, and review the days of your life: you will see that very few, and only the rejects, have stayed with you.
7.8	Adsecutus ille quos optaverat fasces cupit ponere et subinde dicit: "Quando hic annus praeteribit?" Facit ille ludos, quorum sortem sibi optingere magno aestimavit: "Quando," inquit, "istos effugiam?" Diripitur ille toto foro patronus et magno concursu omnia ultra, quam audiri potest, complet: "Quando," inquit, "res proferentur?" Praecipitat quisque vitam suam et futuri desiderio laborat, praesentium taedio.	One man, having won the fasces he longed for, wants to lay them down and keeps saying, "When will this year be over?" Another is putting on games, though he thought it a great prize when the lot fell to him: "When," he says, "will I be rid of them?" Another is an advocate fought over all through the forum, filling the whole place with a vast crowd far beyond the reach of his voice: "When," he says, "will the courts go into recess?" Everyone rushes his life along and suffers from longing for the future and weariness of the present.[14]

14 The fasces, bundles of rods carried before consuls and praetors, symbolized high office, which was held for a year.

THE MAN WHO OWNS HIS TIME

Whoever lives each day as if it were his last neither longs for tomorrow nor fears it.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
7.9	At ille qui nullum non tempus in usus suos confert, qui omnem diem tamquam ultimum ordinat, nec optat crastinum nec timet. Quid enim est, quod iam ulla hora novae voluptatis possit adferre? Omnia nota, omnia ad satietatem percepta sunt. De cetero fors fortuna, ut volet, ordinet; vita iam in tuto est. Huic adici potest, detrahi nihil, et adici sic, quemadmodum saturo iam ac pleno aliquid cibi, quod nec desiderat et capit.	But the man who puts every moment to his own use, who arranges every day as if it were his last, neither longs for tomorrow nor fears it. For what new pleasure can any hour now bring him? He knows it all; he has enjoyed it all to the full. As for the rest, let chance arrange it as it likes: his life is already safe. Something can be added to it, nothing taken away—and added in the way that a man already full and satisfied takes a little more food, which he does not want but has room for.
7.10	Non est itaque quod quemquam propter canos aut rugas putes diu vixisse; non ille diu vixit, sed diu fuit. Quid enim si illum multum putes navigasse, quem saeva tempestas a portu exceptum huc et illuc tulit ac vicibus ventorum ex diverso furentium per eadem spatia in orbem egit? Non ille multum navigavit, sed multum iactatus est.	So there is no reason to think anyone has lived long because of his gray hair or wrinkles: he has not lived long; he has been around long. Would you think a man had done a lot of sailing if a savage storm had caught him as he left harbor, carried him this way and that, and, with winds raging by turns from opposite quarters, spun him round and round in the same waters? He has not done a lot of sailing; he has been tossed about a lot.

CHAPTER 8: THE MOST PRECIOUS THING

People give away time freely because it cannot be seen, though no one can give back the years.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
8.1	Mirari soleo, cum video aliquos tempus petentes et eos, qui rogantur, facillimos. Illud uterque spectat, propter quod tempus petitum est, ipsum quidem neuter; quasi nihil petitur, quasi nihil datur. Re omnium pretiosissima luditur; fallit autem illos, quia res incorporalis est, quia sub oculos non venit, ideoque vilissima aestimatur, immo paene nullum eius pretium est.	I am always amazed when I see some people asking for time, and those who are asked granting it so readily. Both look at the purpose for which the time is requested; neither looks at the time itself. It is asked for as if it were nothing, given as if it were nothing. People are playing games with the most precious thing of all; and it deceives them because it is intangible, because it cannot be seen, and so it is valued very cheaply—indeed, it is given almost no value at all.
8.2	Annua, congiaria homines carissime accipiunt et illis aut laborem aut operam aut diligentiam suam locant. Nemo aestimat tempus; utuntur illo laxius quasi gratuito. At eosdem aegros vide, si mortis periculum propius admotum est, medicorum genua tangentes, si metuunt capitale supplicium, omnia sua, ut vivant, paratos impendere! Tanta in illis discordia adfectuum est.	People accept annual pensions and handouts most gratefully, and hire out their labor, their service or their diligence in return. No one puts a value on time; they use it freely, as if it cost nothing. But look at these same people when they are ill: if the danger of death comes closer, they clasp the doctors' knees; if they fear capital punishment, they are ready to spend all they have to stay alive! So contradictory are their passions.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
8.3	Quodsi posset quemadmodum praeteritorum annorum cuiusque numerus proponi, sic futurorum, quomodo illi, qui paucos viderent superesse, trepidarent, quomodo illis parcerent! Atqui facile est quamvis exiguum dispensare, quod certum est; id debet servari diligentius, quod nescias quando deficiat.	But if the number of each person's future years could be set before him as the number of his past years can, how those who saw that only a few remained would panic, how carefully they would spare them! And yet it is easy to manage an amount that is certain, however small; what you must guard more carefully is what may run out at a moment you cannot know.
8.4	Nec est tamen, quod putes illos ignorare, quam cara res sit; dicere solent eis, quos valdissime diligunt, paratos se partem annorum suorum dare. Dant nec intellegunt; dant autem ita, ut sine illorum incremento sibi detrahant. Sed hoc ipsum, an detrahant, nesciunt; ideo tolerabilis est illis iactura detrimenti latentis.	Still, you should not think they are unaware how precious a thing it is. They often tell those they love most that they are ready to give them part of their own years. They give without understanding; and they give in such a way that they take from themselves without adding anything to the others. But they do not even know whether they are taking anything away; that is why they can bear a loss whose damage is hidden.
8.5	Nemo restituet annos, nemo iterum te tibi reddet. Ibit, qua coepit aetas, nec cursum suum aut revocabit aut supprimet; nihil tumultuabitur, nihil admonebit velocitatis suae. Tacita labetur; non illa se regis imperio, non favore populi longius proferet. Sicut missa est a primo die, curret; nusquam devertetur, nusquam remorabitur. Quid fiet? Tu occupatus es, vita festinat; mors interim aderit, cui, velis nolis, vacandum est.	No one will give you back your years; no one will restore you to yourself. Your lifetime will go on the way it began, and will neither reverse nor halt its course. It will make no commotion, give no reminder of its speed. It will glide on in silence; it will not lengthen itself at a king's command or at the people's favor. It will run as it was sent off on the first day; it will never turn aside, never linger. What will happen? You are busy; life hurries on; meanwhile death will arrive, and for death, like it or not, you must make time.

CHAPTER 9: LIVE NOW

Postponement is the greatest waste of life; Virgil's line shows that the best day flees first.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
9.1	Potestne quicquam stultius esse quam quorundam sensus, hominum eorum dico qui prudentiam iactant? Operosius occupati sunt, ut melius possint vivere; impendio vitae vitam instruunt! Cogitationes suas in longum ordinant; maxima porro vitae iactura dilatio est; illa primum quemque extrahit diem, illa eripit praesentia, dum ulteriora promittit. Maximum vivendi impedimentum est expectatio, quae pendet ex crastino, perdit hodiernum. Quod in manu fortunae positum est, disponis, quod in tua, dimittis. Quo spectas? Quo te extendis? Omnia quae ventura sunt in incerto iacent; protinus vive!	Can anything be more foolish than the outlook of certain people—I mean those who boast of their good sense? They keep themselves laboriously busy so that they can live better; they build their life at the cost of life! They plan their thoughts far ahead; yet delay is the greatest waste of life. It robs us of each day as it comes; it snatches away the present by promising what lies beyond. The greatest obstacle to living is expectation, which hangs on tomorrow and loses today. You arrange what lies in fortune's hands and let go of what lies in your own. What are you looking at? What are you reaching for? Everything that is to come lies in uncertainty. Start living now.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
9.2	Clamat ecce maximus vates et velut divino ore instinctus salutare carmen canit: Optima quaeque dies miseris mortalibus aevi prima fugit. "Quid cunctaris?" inquit, "Quid cessas? Nisi occupas, fugit." Et cum occupaveris, tamen fugiet; itaque cum celeritate temporis utendi velocitate certandum est et velut ex torrenti rapido nec semper ituro cito hauriendum.	Listen: the greatest of poet-prophets cries out and, as if inspired by a divine voice, sings a saving song: "For wretched mortals, the best day of life is always the first to flee." "Why do you hesitate?" he says. "Why are you idle? Unless you seize it, it flees." And even when you have seized it, it will flee all the same. So you must compete with the swiftness of time by the speed with which you use it, and drink quickly, as from a rushing torrent that will not always flow.[15]
9.3	Hoc quoque pulcherrime ad exprobrandam infinitam cunctationem, quod non optimam quamque aetatem sed diem dicit. Quid securus et in tanta temporum fuga lentus menses tibi et annos in longam seriem, utcumque aviditati tuae visum est, exporrigis? De die tecum loquitur et de hoc ipso fugiente.	This, too, is a splendid touch, a rebuke to our endless procrastination: he says not "the best age" but "the best day." Why, amid such a rush of time, are you so unconcerned and so slow, stretching out months and years for yourself in a long series, however far your greed sees fit? He is talking to you about a day—and about this very day as it flees.
9.4	Num dubium est ergo, quin optima quaeque prima dies fugiat mortalibus miseris, id est occupatis? Quorum puerilis adhuc animos senectus opprimit, ad quam imparati inermesque perveniunt, nihil enim provisum est; subito in illam necopinantes inciderunt, accedere eam cotidie non sentiebant.	Can there be any doubt, then, that the best day is always the first to flee for wretched mortals—that is, for the busy? Old age overwhelms their still childish minds, and they arrive at it unprepared and unarmed, for they have made no provision. They have stumbled into it suddenly, without expecting it; they did not notice it drawing closer every day.
9.5	Quemadmodum aut sermo aut lectio aut aliqua intentior cogitatio iter facientis decipit et pervenisse ante sentiunt quam adpropinquasse, sic hoc iter vitae adsiduum et citatissimum, quod vigilantes dormientesque eodem gradu facimus, occupatis non apparet nisi in fine.	Conversation or reading or some absorbing thought beguiles people on a journey, and they find they have arrived before they realized they were getting close. In the same way, this unceasing and headlong journey of life, which we travel at the same pace awake or asleep, does not become apparent to the busy until the end.

CHAPTER 10: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Of life's three periods the past is certain and safe, but the busy have no time to look back at it.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
10.1	Quod proposui si in partes velim et argumenta diducere, multa mihi occurrent, per quae probem brevissimam esse occupatorum vitam. Solebat dicere Fabianus, non ex his cathedrariis philosophis, sed ex veris et antiquis: 'contra adfectus impetu, non suptilitate pugnandum, nec minutis vulneribus sed incursu avertendam aciem; non probam cavillationem esse, nam contundi debere, non vellicari.'	If I wanted to divide my theme into sections and separate arguments, many would occur to me to prove that the busy have the shortest lives. Fabianus—not one of our lecture-hall philosophers, but one of the true, old-fashioned kind—used to say that we must fight the passions by force, not subtlety, and turn back their battle line with a

15 Virgil (70–19 BC), Rome's greatest poet: *Georgics* 3.66–67, where the lines are about breeding cattle.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	Tamen ut illis error exprobretur suus, docendi, non tantum deplorandi sunt.	charge, not with pinpricks; that quibbling is no good, for they must be crushed, not nibbled at. Still, if people are to be reproached for their error, they must be taught, not merely lamented over.[16]
10.2	In tria tempora vita dividitur: quod fuit, quod est, quod futurum est. Ex iis quod agimus breve est, quod acturi sumus dubium, quod egimus certum. Hoc est enim, in quod fortuna ius perdidit, quod in nullius arbitrium reduci potest.	Life is divided into three periods: what has been, what is, and what will be. Of these, what we are doing is brief, what we will do is uncertain, what we have done is certain. For this is the part over which fortune has lost its rights, which cannot be brought back under anyone's control.
10.3	Hoc amittunt occupati; nec enim illis vacat praeterita respicere, et si vacet, iniucunda est paenitendae rei recordatio. Inviti itaque ad tempora male exacta animum revocant nec audent ea retemptare, quorum vitia, etiam quae aliquo praesentis voluptatis lenocinio surripiebantur, retractando patescunt. Nemo, nisi quoi omnia acta sunt sub censura sua, quae numquam fallitur, libenter se in praeteritum retorquet;	This is what the busy lose. They have no time to look back at the past, and even if they had, the memory of something to regret is unpleasant. So they are reluctant to turn their minds back to time badly spent, and they do not dare revisit it, since its faults—even those that slipped by, disguised by the lure of some pleasure of the moment—become plain when it is gone over again. No one willingly turns back to his past unless all his actions have passed his own review, which is never deceived;
10.4	ille qui multa ambitiose concupiit, superbe contempsit, impotenter vicit, insidiose decepit, avare rapuit, prodige effudit, necesse est memoriam suam timeat. Atqui haec est pars temporis nostri sacra ac dedicata, omnis humanos casus supergressa, extra regnum fortunae subducta, quam non inopia, non metus, non morborum incursus exagitet; haec nec turbari nec eripi potest: perpetua eius et intrepida possessio est. Singuli tantum dies, et hi per momenta, praesentes sunt; at praeteriti temporis omnes, cum iusseritis, aderunt, ad arbitrium tuum inspici se ac detineri patientur, quod facere occupatis non vacat.	the man who has craved much out of ambition, scorned arrogantly, conquered without restraint, deceived treacherously, plundered greedily, squandered extravagantly, is bound to fear his own memory. And yet this is the part of our time that is sacred and consecrated, beyond all human mishaps, removed from fortune's kingdom, the part that no poverty, no fear, no onset of disease can disturb. It can be neither troubled nor snatched away; our possession of it is everlasting and free from fear. Only one day at a time is present, and that only moment by moment; but all the days of past time will come when you call them, and let you examine them and hold on to them as you please—something the busy have no time to do.
10.5	Securae et quietae mentis est in omnes vitae suae partes discurrere; occupatorum animi, velut sub iugo sint, flectere se ac respicere non possunt. Abit igitur vita eorum in profundum; et ut nihil prodest, licet quantumlibet ingeras, si non subest quod excipiat ac servet, sic, nihil refert quantum temporis detur, si non est ubi subsidat, per quassos foratosque animos transmittitur.	It is the mark of a mind free from care and at peace to roam through every part of its life; the minds of the busy, as if under a yoke, cannot turn and look back. So their life vanishes into an abyss. It is no use pouring in as much as you like if there is nothing underneath to receive and hold it; in the same way, it does not matter how much time is given if there is nowhere for it to settle: it passes

16 Papirius Fabianus, orator and philosopher, was one of Seneca's teachers.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
		straight through minds that are cracked and full of holes.
10.6	Praesens tempus brevissimum est, adeo quidem, ut quibusdam nullum videatur; in cursu enim semper est, fluit et praecipitatur; ante desinit esse quam venit, nec magis moram patitur quam mundus aut sidera, quorum inrequieta semper agitatio numquam in eodem vestigio manet. Solum igitur ad occupatos praesens pertinet tempus, quod tam breve est, ut arripi non possit, et id ipsum illis districtis in multa subducitur.	The present is very short—so short, indeed, that to some it seems not to exist at all. For it is always on the move; it flows and rushes on; it ceases to be before it has arrived, and it no more allows delay than the heavens or the stars, whose ceaseless, restless motion never stays in the same track. So only the present concerns the busy, and it is so brief that it cannot be grasped—and even that is stolen from them while they are pulled in many directions.

CHAPTER 11: DYING WITHOUT HAVING LIVED

The busy cling to life at its end, while those free of business meet death with a steady step.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
11.1	Denique vis scire quam non diu vivant? Vide quam cupiant diu vivere. Decrepiti senes paucorum annorum accessionem votis mendicant; minores natu se ipsos esse fingunt; mendacio sibi blandiuntur et tam libenter se fallunt quam si una fata decipiant. Iam vero cum illos aliqua imbecillitas mortalitatis admonuit, quemadmodum paventes moriuntur, non tamquam exeant de vita, sed tamquam extrahantur. Stultos se fuisse, qui non vixerint, clamitant et, si modo evaserint ex illa valitudine, in otio victuros; tunc quam frustra paraverint, quibus non fruerentur quam in cassum omnis ceciderit labor, cogitant.	In short, do you want to know how little they live? See how much they long to live long. Decrepit old men beg in their prayers for a few more years; they pretend to be younger than they are; they flatter themselves with the lie and deceive themselves as happily as if they were deceiving fate at the same time. And when some infirmity has reminded them of their mortality, how terrified they are as they die—not as though they were leaving life, but as though they were being dragged out of it! They keep crying out that they were fools not to have lived, and that if only they get through this illness they will live in leisure. Then they reflect how uselessly they acquired things they would never enjoy, how all their labor has come to nothing.
11.2	At quibus vita procul ab omni negotio agitur, quidni spatiosa sit? Nihil ex illa delegatur, nihil alio atque alio spargitur, nihil inde fortunae traditur, nihil neglegentia interit, nihil largitione detrahitur, nihil supervacuum est; tota, ut ita dicam, in reditu est. Quantulacumque itaque abunde sufficit, et ideo, quandoque ultimus dies venerit, non cunctabitur sapiens ire ad mortem certo gradu.	But those whose life is spent far from all business —why should it not be ample? None of it is handed over to others, none scattered here and there, none of it entrusted to fortune, none lost through neglect, none taken away by giving it away; none of it is superfluous. The whole of it, so to speak, is earning interest. So however little there is, it is more than enough; and so, whenever his last day comes, the wise man will not hesitate to go to meet death with a steady step.

CHAPTER 12: BUSY LEISURE

Collectors, the overgroomed, dinner-party hosts and the pampered are not at leisure but idly busy.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
12.1	Quaeris fortasse, quos occupatos vocem? Non est quod me solos putes dicere, quos a basilica immissi demum canes eiciunt, quos aut in sua vides turba speciosius elidi aut in aliena contemptius, quos officia domibus suis evocant, ut alienis foribus inlidant, aut hasta praetoris infami lucro et quandoque suppuraturo exercet.	Perhaps you ask whom I call the busy? You need not think I mean only those whom the dogs let loose at last drive out of the basilica; those you see crushed with some distinction in their own crowd of followers, or with contempt in someone else's; those whose duties call them out of their own houses to dash them against other people's doors; or those whom the praetor's spear keeps busy with disgraceful gains that will fester one day.[17]
12.2	Quorundam otium occupatum est; in villa aut in lecto suo, in media solitudine, quamvis ab omnibus recesserint, sibi ipsi molesti sunt; quorum non otiosa vita dicenda est, sed desidiosa occupatio. Illum tu otiosum vocas qui Corinthia, paucorum furore pretiosa, anxia suptilitate concinnat et maiorem dierum partem in aeruginosis lamellis consumit? Qui in ceromate (nam, pro facinus! ne Romanis quidem vitiis laboramus) spectator puerorum rixantium sedet? Qui iumentorum suorum greges in aetatium et colorum paria diducit? Qui athletas novissimos pascit?	Some people's leisure is busy. At their country house or on their couch, in the midst of solitude, though they have withdrawn from everyone, they are a nuisance to themselves. Their life should be called not leisure but idle busyness. Do you call a man at leisure who arranges his Corinthian bronzes, made valuable by the mania of a few, with anxious fussiness, and spends most of his days on rusty scraps of metal? Who sits in the wrestling ring—for, shame on us, we suffer from vices that are not even Roman—watching boys brawl? Who sorts his herds of pack animals into pairs matched by age and color? Who feeds the latest athletes?[18]
12.3	Quid? illos otiosos vocas, quibus apud tonsorem multae horae transmittuntur, dum decerpitur, si quid proxima nocte subcrevit, dum de singulis capillis in consilium itur, dum aut disiecta coma restituitur aut deficiens hinc atque illinc in frontem compellitur? Quomodo irascuntur, si tonsor paulo neglegentior fuit, tamquam virum tonderet! Quomodo excandescunt, si quid ex iuba sua decisum est, si quid extra ordinem iacuit, nisi omnia in anulos suos reciderunt! Quis est istorum qui non malit rem publicam turbari quam comam suam? Qui non sollicitior sit de capitis sui decore quam de salute? Qui non comptior esse malit quam honestior? Hos tu otiosos vocas inter pectinem speculumque occupatos?	Well then, do you call people at leisure who spend many hours at the barber's, while whatever sprouted the night before is plucked out, while a council is held over each separate hair, while disordered locks are set back in place or thinning ones are coaxed forward onto the forehead from here and there? How angry they get if the barber has been a little careless, as if he were cutting a real man's hair! How they flare up if any of their mane has been cut off, if any of it lies out of place, if it does not all fall back into its proper ringlets! Which of them would not rather see the republic in disorder than his hair? Who is not more anxious about the beauty of his head than its safety? Who would not rather be well groomed than honorable? Do you call them at leisure, these people kept busy between the comb and the mirror?
12.4	Quid illi, qui in componendis, audiendis, discendis canticis operati sunt, dum vocem, cuius rectum cursum	What about those who are occupied with composing, hearing and learning songs, twisting the voice

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	natura et optimum et simplicissimum fecit, in flexus modulationis inertissimae torquent, quorum digiti aliquod intra se carmen metientes semper sonant, quorum, cum ad res serias, etiam saepe tristes adhibiti sunt, exauditur tacita modulatio? Non habent isti otium, sed iners negotium.	—whose natural straight course nature made the best and simplest—into the winding turns of the laziest melodies? Their fingers are always drumming, beating out some tune in their heads; even when they have been called to serious and often sad occasions, you can hear them humming under their breath. These people do not have leisure, but idle business.
12.5	Convivia me hercules horum non posuerim inter vacantia tempora, cum videam, quam solliciti argentum ordinent, quam diligenter exoletorum suorum tunicas succingant, quam suspensi sint, quomodo aper a coco exeat, qua celeritate signo dato glabri ad ministeria discurrant, quanta arte scindantur aves in frusta non enormia, quam curiose infelices pueruli ebriorum sputa detergeant. Ex his elegantiae lautitiaeque fama captatur et usque eo in omnes vitae secessus mala sua illos secuntur, ut nec bibant sine ambitione nec edant.	Truly, I would not count their dinner parties as free time, when I see how anxiously they arrange their silver, how carefully they tuck up the tunics of their kept boys, how on edge they are over how the boar will turn out from the cook's hands, with what speed the smooth-skinned slaves rush to their tasks at a signal, with what skill birds are carved into portions of just the right size, how carefully wretched little slave boys wipe up the spittle of drunks. By these means they angle for a reputation for elegance and refinement, and their vices follow them so far into every private corner of life that they cannot drink or eat without an eye to show.[19]
12.6	Ne illos quidem inter otiosos numeraverim, qui sella se et lectica huc et illuc ferunt et ad gestationum suarum, quasi deserere illas non liceat, horas occurrunt, quos quando lavari debeant, quando natare, quando cenare, alius admonet; usque eo nimio delicati animi languore solvuntur, ut per se scire non possint, an esuriant!	Nor would I count among the leisured those who have themselves carried this way and that in a sedan chair or litter, and turn up punctually for the hours of their outings as if they were not allowed to miss them; who must be reminded by someone else when to bathe, when to swim, when to dine. They are so enfeebled by the excessive languor of a pampered mind that they cannot tell by themselves whether they are hungry!
12.7	Audio quendam ex delicatis — si modo deliciae vocandae sunt vitam et consuetudinem humanam dediscere —, cum ex balneo inter manus elatus et in sella positus esset, dixisse interrogando: "Iam sedeo?" Hunc tu ignorantem, an sedeat, putas scire an vivat, an videat, an otiosus sit? Non facile dixerim, utrum magis miserear, si hoc ignoravit, an si ignorare se finxit.	I hear that one of these pampered people—if indeed unlearning human life and habits can be called pampering—was lifted out of the bath in people's arms and set down in a chair, and then asked: "Am I sitting down now?" Do you think this man, who does not know whether he is sitting, knows whether he is alive, whether he can see, whether he is at leisure? I cannot easily say whether I pity him more if he really did not know, or if he pretended not to know.
12.8	Multarum quidem rerum oblivionem sentiunt, sed multarum et imitantur. Quaedam vitia illos quasi	They really do forget many things, but many they also pretend to forget. Some vices delight them as

17 The basilica was a public hall used for the law courts; the praetor's spear marked a public auction, often of confiscated property.
18 Corinthian bronze, a prized alloy, was collected by connoisseurs at extravagant prices.
19 Kept boys (*exoleti*): young male slaves kept for their looks and for sex.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	felicitatis argumenta delectant; nimis humilis et contempti hominis videtur scire quid facias. I nunc et mimos multa mentiri ad exprobrandam luxuriam puta. Plura me hercules praetereunt quam fingunt et tanta incredibilium vitiorum copia ingenioso in hoc unum saeculo processit, ut iam mimorum arguere possimus neglegentiam. Esse aliquem, qui usque eo deliciis interierit ut an sedeat alteri credat!	proofs of their good fortune; it seems the mark of a very lowly and contemptible person to know what you are doing. Go on, then, and suppose that the mime shows make up a great deal to mock luxury! Truly, they leave out more than they invent; and such an abundance of incredible vices has come forth in this age, inventive in this one respect, that we could now accuse the mimes of negligence. To think that there is anyone so lost in luxury that he takes someone else's word for whether he is sitting down![20]
12.9	Non est ergo hic otiosus, aliud illi nomen imponas; aeger est, immo mortuus est; ille otiosus est, cui otii sui et sensus est. Hic vero semivivus, cui ad intellegendos corporis sui habitus indice opus est, quomodo potest hic ullius temporis dominus esse?	So this man is not at leisure; you must give him some other name. He is sick—no, he is dead. The man at leisure is the one who is aware of his leisure. But this half-alive creature, who needs someone to tell him what position his own body is in—how can he be master of any time at all?

CHAPTER 13: USELESS LEARNING

Antiquarian trivia about who first did what, from Duilius to Pompey's elephants, makes no one better.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
13.1	Persequi singulos longum est, quorum aut latrunculi aut pila aut excoquendi in sole corporis cura consumpsere vitam. Non sunt otiosi, quorum voluptates multum negotii habent. Nam de illis nemo dubitabit, quin operose nihil agant, qui litterarum inutilium studiis detinentur, quae iam apud Romanos quoque magna manus est.	It would take too long to go through them one by one—those whose lives have been used up by board games or ball games or the care of baking their bodies in the sun. People whose pleasures involve a great deal of business are not at leisure. As for those caught up in the study of useless literature—and there is now a large band of them among the Romans too—no one will doubt that they are laboriously doing nothing.
13.2	Graecorum iste morbus fuit quaerere, quem numerum Ulixes remigum habuisset, prior scripta esset Ilias an Odyssia, praeterea an eiusdem essent auctoris, alia deinceps huius notae, quae sive contineas, nihil tacitam conscientiam iuvant sive proferas, non doctior videaris sed molestior.	It used to be a Greek disease to ask how many oarsmen Ulysses had, whether the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* was written first, and moreover whether they were by the same author, and other questions of this kind. If you keep such things to yourself, they do you no good in private; if you bring them out, you seem not more learned but more tiresome.
13.3	Ecce Romanos quoque invasit inane studium supervacua discendi. His diebus audii quendam referentem, quae primus quisque ex Romanis ducibus fecisset; primus navali proelio Duilius vicit, primus Curius Dentatus in triumpho duxit elephantos. Etiamnunc ista, etsi ad veram gloriam non tendunt, circa civilium tamen operum	And now look: the empty eagerness to learn useless things has invaded the Romans too. The other day I heard someone reporting which Roman general had been the first to do what. Duilius was the first to win a naval battle; Curius Dentatus was the first to lead elephants in a triumph. Still, these

20 Mime was a popular, often coarse form of comic theater that satirized contemporary life.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	exempla versantur; non est profutura talis scientia, est tamen quae nos speciosa rerum vanitate detineat.	facts, though they do not lead to true glory, at least concern examples of service to the state. Such knowledge will do no good, but at least it holds our attention with the attractive emptiness of its subject.[21]
13.4	Hoc quoque quaerentibus remittamus, quis Romanis primus persuaserit navem conscendere. Claudius is fuit, Caudex ob hoc ipsum appellatus, quia plurium tabularum contextus caudex apud antiquos vocatur, unde publicae tabulae codices dicuntur et naves nunc quoque ex antiqua consuetudine, quae commeatus per Tiberim subvehunt, codicariae vocantur.	Let us also allow the researchers this question: who first persuaded the Romans to go on board a ship. It was Claudius, who was called Caudex for that very reason, because the ancients called a structure of several planks joined together a *caudex*. Hence public records are called *codices*, and even now, by old custom, the boats that carry supplies up the Tiber are called *codicariae*.[22]
13.5	Sane et hoc ad rem pertineat, quod Valerius Corvinus primus Messanam vicit et primus ex familia Valeriorum urbis captae in se translato nomine Messana appellatus est paulatimque vulgo permutante litteras Messala dictus.	By all means, let this too be to the point: that Valerius Corvinus was the first to conquer Messana, and the first of the Valerian family to be called Messana, taking the name of the city he had captured; and that later, as common speech gradually changed the letters, he came to be called Messala.[23]
13.6	Num et hoc cuiquam curare permittes, quod primus L. Sulla in circo leones solutos dedit, cum alioquin alligati darentur, ad conficiendos eos missis a rege Boccho iaculatoribus? Et hoc sane remittatur: num et Pompeium primum in circo elephantorum duodeviginti pugnam edidisse commissis more proeli noxiis hominibus ad ullam rem bonam pertinet? Princeps civitatis et inter antiquos principes, ut fama tradidit, bonitatis eximiae memorabile putavit spectaculi genus novo more perdere homines. Depugnant? Parum est. Lancinantur? Parum est: ingenti mole animalium exterantur!	Will you also allow anyone to care that Lucius Sulla was the first to present lions loose in the Circus, when previously they had been shown tied up, and that King Bocchus sent javelin throwers to kill them? Well, let that pass too. But does it serve any good purpose to know that Pompey was the first to put on a fight of eighteen elephants in the Circus, pitting criminals against them as if in battle? The leading man of the state, and one who, as tradition has it, was outstanding for his goodness among the leading men of old, thought it a memorable kind of spectacle to kill human beings in a novel way. Do they fight to the death? Not enough. Are they torn to pieces? Not enough: let them be crushed by the enormous bulk of animals![24]
13.7	Satius erat ista in oblivionem ire, ne quis postea potens disceret invideretque rei minime humanae. O quantum caliginis mentibus nostris obicit magna felicitas! Ille se supra rerum naturam esse tunc credidit, cum tot miserorum hominum catervas sub alio caelo natis beluis obiceret, cum bellum inter tam disparia animalia	It would have been better for these things to be forgotten, so that no powerful man later on would learn of them and envy an act so utterly inhuman. Oh, what darkness great prosperity casts over our minds! He believed himself above nature at the moment when he threw so many troops of

21 Duilius defeated the Carthaginian fleet at Mylae in 260 BC; Curius Dentatus paraded elephants captured from King Pyrrhus in his triumph of 275 BC.
22 Appius Claudius Caudex, consul in 264 BC, took the first Roman army across to Sicily, beginning the First Punic War.
23 Messana is Messina in Sicily, taken in 263 BC by Manius Valerius Maximus, the first of his family to bear the name Messala.
24 Sulla, later dictator, gave these games in 93 BC; Bocchus was king of Mauretania. Pompey's elephant fight was staged in 55 BC.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	committeret, cum in conspectum populi Romani multum sanguinis funderet mox plus ipsum fundere coacturus. At idem postea Alexandrina perfidia deceptus ultimo mancipio transfodiendum se praebuit, tum demum intellecta inani iactatione cognominis sui.	wretched men to beasts born under another sky, when he set such mismatched creatures to war with each other, when he shed so much blood before the eyes of the Roman people—he who would soon force them to shed more. But the same man was later betrayed by Alexandrian treachery and offered himself to be stabbed by the lowest of slaves, understanding only then the empty boast of his surname.[25]
13.8	Sed ut illo revertar, unde decessi, et in eadem materia ostendam supervacuam quorumdam diligentiam: idem narrabat Metellum victis in Sicilia Poenis triumphantem unum omnium Romanorum ante currum centum et viginti captivos elephantos duxisse; Sullam ultimum Romanorum protulisse pomerium, quod numquam provinciali, sed Italico agro adquisito proferre moris apud antiquos fuit. Hoc scire magis prodest, quam Aventinum montem extra pomerium esse, ut ille adfirmabat, propter alteram ex duabus causis, aut quod plebs eo secessisset, aut quod Remo auspicante illo loco aves non addixissent, alia deinceps innumerabilia, quae aut farta sunt mendaciis aut similia?	But to return to where I left off, and to show some people's pointless diligence on the same subject: this same man was telling how Metellus, celebrating his triumph after defeating the Carthaginians in Sicily, alone of all Romans led a hundred and twenty captured elephants before his chariot; and how Sulla was the last of the Romans to extend the pomerium, which the ancients customarily extended only when territory had been acquired in Italy, never in the provinces. Is it more useful to know this than that the Aventine Hill lies outside the pomerium, as he claimed, for one of two reasons—either because the plebs had withdrawn there, or because the birds had not given a favorable sign when Remus took the auspices on that spot—and countless other things that are either stuffed with lies or very like them?[26]
13.9	Nam ut concedas omnia eos fide bona dicere, ut ad praestationem scribant, tamen cuius ista errores minuent? Cuius cupiditates prement? Quem fortiorem, quem iustiorem, quem liberaliorem facient? Dubitare se interim Fabianus noster aiebat, an satius esset nullis studiis admoveri quam his implicari.	For even if you grant that they say all this in good faith, that they write it with a guarantee of its truth, whose errors will these facts lessen? Whose desires will they curb? Whom will they make braver, more just, more generous? Our friend Fabianus used to say that he sometimes wondered whether it would be better not to take up any studies at all than to get entangled in these.

CHAPTER 14: ONLY THOSE WHO STUDY PHILOSOPHY TRULY LIVE

Those who give their time to wisdom add every past age to their own and keep the best company.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
14.1	Soli omnium otiosi sunt qui sapientiae vacant, soli vivunt; nec enim suam tantum aetatem bene tuentur. Omne aevum suo adiciunt; quidquid annorum ante illos actum est, illis adquisitum est. Nisi ingratissimi sumus, illi clarissimi sacrarum opinionum conditores nobis nati	Of all people, only those who make time for wisdom are at leisure; only they are alive. For they do not merely keep good watch over their own lifetime: they add every age to their own. All the years that have gone before them are added to

25 Pompey was murdered in Egypt in 48 BC, betrayed by the court of Ptolemy XIII; his surname was Magnus, "the Great".
26 The pomerium was the sacred boundary of the city of Rome. Lucius Caecilius Metellus defeated the Carthaginians at Panormus (Palermo) in 250 BC.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	sunt, nobis vitam praeparaverunt. Ad res pulcherrimas ex tenebris ad lucem erutas alieno labore deducimur; nullo nobis saeculo interdictum est, in omnia admittimur et, si magnitudine animi egredi humanae imbecillitatis angustias libet, multum, per quod spatiemur, temporis est.	their store. Unless we are utterly ungrateful, those illustrious founders of revered doctrines were born for us; they prepared a way of life for us. Through the labor of others we are led to the finest things, brought out of darkness into light. No age is closed to us; we are admitted to all. And if we choose, by greatness of mind, to pass beyond the narrow confines of human weakness, there is a vast stretch of time for us to roam in.
14.2	Disputare cum Socrate licet, dubitare cum Carneade, cum Epicuro quiescere, hominis naturam cum Stoicis vincere, cum Cynicis excedere. Cum rerum natura in consortium omnis aevi patiatur incedere, quidni ab hoc exiguo et caduco temporis transitu in illa toto nos demus animo, quae immensa, quae aeterna sunt, quae cum melioribus communia?	We can debate with Socrates, doubt with Carneades, find peace with Epicurus, overcome human nature with the Stoics, go beyond it with the Cynics. Since nature allows us to enter into partnership with every age, why should we not turn from this brief and fleeting passage of time and give ourselves with all our mind to the things that are boundless, eternal, and shared with better men?[27]
14.3	Isti, qui per officia discursant, qui se aliosque inquietant, cum bene insanierint, cum omnium limina cotidie perambulaverint nec ullas apertas fores praeterierint, cum per diversissimas domos meritoriam salutationem circumtulerint, quotum quemque ex tam immensa et variis cupiditatibus districta urbe poterunt videre?	Those people who rush around on their social duties, disturbing themselves and others—when they have properly run themselves mad, when they have tramped every day across everyone's threshold and passed by no open door, when they have carried their mercenary morning greetings around the most different houses—how few will they manage to see in a city so vast and so torn by conflicting desires?[28]
14.4	Quam multi erunt, quorum illos aut somnus aut luxuria aut inhumanitas summoveat! Quam multi qui illos, cum diu torserint, simulata festinatione transcurrant! Quam multi per refertum clientibus atrium prodire vitabunt et per obscuros aedium aditus profugient, quasi non inhumanius sit decipere quam excludere! Quam multi hesterna crapula semisomnes et graves illis miseris suum somnum rumpentibus ut alienum expectent, vix adlevatis labris insusurratum miliens nomen oscitatione superbissima reddent!	How many will there be whose sleep or self-indulgence or rudeness shuts them out! How many who, after keeping them in torment for a long time, will rush past them pretending to be in a hurry! How many will avoid coming out through an atrium packed with clients and slip away through hidden back passages—as if it were not ruder to deceive than to shut out! How many, half asleep and heavy from yesterday's drinking, will barely part their lips for those poor wretches who break off their own sleep to wait on someone else's, and with a most arrogant yawn will return the name that has been whispered to them a thousand times!
14.5	Hos in veris officiis morari licet dicamus, qui Zenonem, qui Pythagoran cotidie et Democritum ceterosque antistites bonarum artium, qui Aristotelen et	We may say that those are engaged in true duties who want to have Zeno, Pythagoras, Democritus and the other high priests of the liberal arts, and

27 Carneades (second century BC) was the leading skeptic of Plato's Academy.
28 The morning greeting (*salutatio*) was the daily call that clients paid on their patrons.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	Theophrastum volent habere quam familiarissimos. Nemo horum non vacabit, nemo non venientem ad se beatiorem, amantiorem sui dimittet, nemo quemquam vacuis a se manibus abire patietur; nocte conveniri, interdiu ab omnibus mortalibus possunt.	Aristotle and Theophrastus, as their closest companions every day. None of these will be too busy to see you; none will fail to send his visitor away happier and fonder of him; none will let anyone leave him empty-handed. All mortals can meet them, by night or by day.[29]

CHAPTER 15: ADOPTED BY GREAT MINDS

The philosophers of the past share their years with us and offer the only road to immortality.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
15.1	Horum te mori nemo coget, omnes docebunt; horum nemo annos tuos conteret, suos tibi contribuet; nullius ex his sermo periculosus erit, nullius amicitia capitalis, nullius sumptuosa observatio. Feres ex illis, quidquid voles; per illos non stabit, quominus quantum plurimum cupieris haurias.	None of them will force you to die, but all will teach you how. None will wear out your years; each will contribute his own to you. No conversation with any of them will be dangerous, no friendship with any of them fatal, no attendance on any of them costly. You will take from them whatever you like; it will not be their fault if you do not draw from them as much as you could possibly want.
15.2	Quae illum felicitas, quam pulchra senectus manet, qui se in horum clientelam contulit! Habebit, cum quibus de minimis maximisque rebus deliberet, quos de se cotidie consulat, a quibus audiat verum sine contumelia, laudetur sine adulatione, ad quorum se similitudinem effingat.	What happiness, what a fine old age awaits the man who has made himself their client! He will have friends with whom to deliberate on the smallest and greatest matters, whom he can consult about himself every day, from whom he can hear the truth without insult and receive praise without flattery, and on whose likeness he can model himself.
15.3	Solemus dicere non fuisse in nostra potestate, quos sortiremur parentes, forte hominibus datos; nobis vero ad nostrum arbitrium nasci licet. Nobilissimorum ingeniorum familiae sunt; elige in quam adscisci velis; non in nomen tantum adoptaberis, sed in ipsa bona, quae non erunt sordide nec maligne custodienda; maiora fient, quo illa pluribus diviseris.	We often say that it was not in our power to choose the parents we were allotted, that they were given to us by chance. But we can be born as we choose. There are families of the noblest minds: choose the one you would like to be adopted into. You will be adopted not only into its name but into its very property, which you will not have to guard meanly or grudgingly: the more people you share it with, the greater it will grow.
15.4	Hi tibi dabunt ad aeternitatem iter et te in illum locum, ex quo nemo deicitur, sublevabunt. Haec una ratio est extendendae mortalitatis, immo in immortalitatem vertendae. Honores, monimenta, quidquid aut decretis ambitio iussit aut operibus extruxit, cito subruitur; nihil non longa demolitur vetustas et movet. At iis, quae consecravit sapientia, nocere non potest; nulla abolebit aetas, nulla deminuet; sequens ac deinde semper ulterior	These men will give you a road to eternity and lift you to a place from which no one is thrown down. This is the only way to extend mortality—indeed, to turn it into immortality. Honors, monuments, whatever ambition has ordered by decree or built in stone, are quickly brought down; there is nothing that the long passage of time does not demolish and shift. But it cannot harm what wisdom has

29 Zeno of Citium founded the Stoic school; Pythagoras and Democritus were early Greek philosophers.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	aliquid ad venerationem conferet, quoniam quidem in vicino versatur invidia, simplicius longe posita miramur.	consecrated. No age will abolish it, no age will diminish it; each age that follows, and each one after that, will add something to the reverence paid it, since envy works on what is close at hand, and we admire more honestly what is far away.
15.5	Sapientis ergo multum patet vita, non idem illum qui ceteros terminus cludit. Solus generis humani legibus solvitur; omnia illi saecula ut deo serviunt. Transit tempus aliquod? Hoc recordatione comprendit. Instat? Hoc utitur. Venturum est? Hoc praecipit. Longam illi vitam facit omnium temporum in unum conlatio.	So the wise man's life extends far; he is not confined by the same boundary as everyone else. He alone is exempt from the laws of the human race; all ages serve him as they serve a god. Has some time passed? He holds it in memory. Is it here? He uses it. Is it still to come? He anticipates it. What makes his life long is the gathering of all times into one.

CHAPTER 16: BUSY DOING NOTHING

Those who forget the past, neglect the present and fear the future have the shortest and most anxious lives.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
16.1	Illorum brevissima ac sollicitissima aetas est, qui praeteritorum obliviscuntur, praesentia neclegunt, de futuro timent; cum ad extrema venerunt, sero intellegunt miseri, tam diu se, dum nihil agunt, occupatos fuisse.	Shortest and most anxious is the life of those who forget the past, neglect the present and fear the future. When they come to the end, the poor wretches realize too late that they have been busy all this time doing nothing.
16.2	Nec est, quod hoc argumento probari putes longam illos agere vitam, quia interdum mortem invocant. Vexat illos imprudentia incertis adfectibus et incurrentibus in ipsa, quae metuunt; mortem saepe ideo optant, quia timent.	Nor should you think it proves that they live a long life that they sometimes call on death. Their folly torments them with unsettled passions that rush headlong into the very things they fear; they often wish for death precisely because they fear it.
16.3	Illud quoque argumentum non est quod putes diu viventium, quod saepe illis longus videtur dies, quod, dum veniat condictum tempus cenae, tarde ire horas queruntur; nam si quando illos deseruerunt occupationes, in otio relicti aestuant, nec quomodo id disponant aut extrahant sciunt. Itaque ad occupationem aliquam tendunt et quod interiacet omne tempus grave est; tam me hercules, quam cum dies muneris gladiatorii edictus est, aut cum alicuius alterius vel spectaculi vel voluptatis expectatur constitutum, transilire medios dies volunt.	Nor should you take it as proof that they live long that the day often seems long to them, that they complain the hours pass slowly until the time fixed for dinner comes. For whenever their occupations desert them, they are left at leisure and fret, not knowing how to arrange it or make it pass. So they strive for some occupation, and all the time in between is a burden. Truly, just as when a day has been announced for a gladiator show, or when the appointed date of some other spectacle or entertainment is awaited, they want to leap over the days in between.
16.4	Omnis illis speratae rei longa dilatio est. At illud tempus, quod amant, breve est et praeceps breviusque multo suo fit vitio; aliunde enim alio transfugiunt et consistere in una cupiditate non possunt. Non sunt illis longi dies, sed invisi; at contra quam exiguae noctes videntur, quas in complexu scortorum aut vino exigunt!	For them any postponement of what they hope for is long. But the time they love is short and fleeting, and made much shorter by their own fault; for they flee from one thing to another and cannot settle on a single desire. Their days are not long but hateful. And yet how short the nights seem

	LATIN	ENGLISH
		that they spend in the arms of prostitutes or in drinking!
16.5	Inde etiam poetarum furor fabulis humanos errores alentium, quibus visus est Iuppiter voluptate concubitus delenitus duplicasse noctem. Quid aliud est vitia nostra incendere quam auctores illis inscribere deos et dare morbo exemplo divinitatis excusatam licentiam? Possunt istis non brevissimae videri noctes, quas tam care mercantur? Diem noctis expectatione perdunt, noctem lucis metu.	Hence, too, the madness of the poets, who feed human failings with their stories, and who have imagined Jupiter, beguiled by the pleasure of love-making, doubling the length of a night. What else is this but inflaming our vices—to name the gods as their authors, and to give the disease a license excused by divine example? Can the nights not seem very short to these people, when they pay so dearly for them? They lose the day waiting for the night, and the night fearing the dawn.[30]

CHAPTER 17: ANXIOUS PLEASURES

Even the pleasures and successes of the busy are fearful, and each occupation only gives way to another.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
17.1	Ipsae voluptates eorum trepidae et variis terroribus inquietae sunt subitque cum maxime exsultantis sollicita cogitatio: "Haec quam diu?" Ab hoc affectu reges suam flevere potentiam, nec illos magnitudo fortunae suae delectavit, sed venturus aliquando finis exterruit.	Even their pleasures are fearful and disturbed by various terrors, and at the very height of their rejoicing an anxious thought creeps in: "How long will this last?" This feeling has made kings weep over their power: the greatness of their fortune did not delight them, but the end that would one day come terrified them.
17.2	Cum per magna camporum spatia porrigeret exercitum nec numerum eius sed mensuram conprenderet Persarum rex insolentissimus, lacrimas profudit, quod intra centum annos nemo ex tanta iuventute superfuturus esset. At illis admoturus erat fatum ipse qui flebat perditurusque alios in mari, alios in terra, alios proelio, alios fuga et intra exiguum tempus consumpturus illos, quibus centesimum annum timebat.	When the most arrogant king of the Persians was deploying his army over vast stretches of plain, and could grasp not its number but only the ground it covered, he burst into tears because within a hundred years not one of so many young men would be left alive. Yet the very man who wept was about to bring their doom upon them: he would destroy some at sea, some on land, some in battle, some in flight, and within a short time wipe out those for whom he feared their hundredth year.[31]
17.3	Quid, quod gaudia quoque eorum trepida sunt? Non enim solidis causis innituntur, sed eadem qua oriuntur vanitate turbantur. Qualia autem putas esse tempora etiam ipsorum confessione misera, cum haec quoque, quibus se attollunt et super hominem efferunt, parum sincera sint?	What of the fact that even their joys are fearful? For they do not rest on solid grounds, but are thrown into turmoil by the same emptiness from which they spring. And what do you think those times are like that are wretched even by their own admission, when even the things that exalt them and raise them above humanity are far from pure?
17.4	Maxima quaeque bona sollicita sunt nec ulli fortunae minus bene quam optimae creditur; alia felicitate ad	All the greatest blessings bring anxiety, and no fortune is less to be trusted than the best. To pro-

30 In myth, Jupiter lengthened the night he spent with Alcmena, when Hercules was conceived.
31 Xerxes, during his invasion of Greece in 480 BC; the story is told by Herodotus.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
	tuendam felicitatem opus est et pro ipsis quae successere votis vota facienda sunt. Omne enim quod fortuito obvenit instabile est, quoque altius surrexerit, opportunius est in occasum. Neminem porro casura delectant; miserrimam ergo necesse est, non tantum brevissimam, vitam esse eorum, qui magno parant labore, quod maiore possideant.	tect prosperity you need more prosperity, and for the very prayers that have been answered you must offer more prayers. For everything that comes by chance is unstable, and the higher it has risen, the more liable it is to fall. And no one takes pleasure in what is bound to fall; so the life of those who acquire with great toil what they must keep with greater is bound to be not only very short but very wretched.
17.5	Operose adsecuntur quae volunt, anxii tenent quae adsecuti sunt; nulla interim numquam amplius redituri temporis ratio est. Novae occupationes veteribus substituuntur, spes spem excitat, ambitionem ambitio. Miseriarum non finis quaeritur, sed materia mutatur. Nostri nos honores torserunt? Plus temporis alieni auferunt. Candidati laborare desiimus? Suffragatores incipimus. Accusandi deposuimus molestiam? Iudicandi nanciscimur. Iudex desiit esse? Quaesitor est. Alienorum bonorum mercennaria procuratione consenuit? Suis opibus distinetur.	They toil to get what they want, and anxiously hold on to what they have got; meanwhile they take no account of time, which will never return. New occupations take the place of old ones; hope stirs up hope, ambition ambition. They do not look for an end to their miseries; they only change the material. Have our own offices tormented us? Other people's take up more of our time. Have we stopped toiling as candidates? We start canvassing for others. Have we laid aside the burden of prosecuting? We take on that of judging. Has a man stopped being a juror? He becomes presiding judge. Has he grown old managing other people's property for pay? He is kept busy by his own wealth.
17.6	Marium caliga dimisit? Consulatus exercet. Quintius dictaturam properat pervadere? Ab aratro revocabitur. Ibit in Poenos nondum tantae maturus rei Scipio; victor Hannibalis, victor Antiochi, sui consulatus decus, fraterni sponsor, ni per ipsum mora esset, cum Iove reponeretur; civiles servatorem agitabunt seditiones et post fastiditos a iuvene diis aequos honores iam senem contumacis exili delectabit ambitio. Numquam derunt vel felices vel miserae sollicitudinis causae; per occupationes vita trudetur. Otium numquam agetur, semper optabitur.	Has the soldier's boot released Marius? The consulship keeps him busy. Is Quintius hurrying to get through his dictatorship? He will be called back from the plough. Scipio will march against the Carthaginians before he is ripe for so great a task; conqueror of Hannibal, conqueror of Antiochus, the glory of his own consulship and guarantor of his brother's, he would have been set beside Jupiter had he not himself prevented it. Yet civil strife will hound the savior of his country, and after spurning, as a young man, honors equal to the gods', as an old man he will take pleasure in the ambition of a defiant exile. There will never be a lack of reasons for anxiety, whether happy or wretched; life will be shoved along through one occupation after another. Leisure will never be lived, only forever longed for.[32]

32 Marius rose from the ranks to seven consulships; Quintius (Cincinnatus) was called from his plough to be dictator. Scipio Africanus, victor over Hannibal in 202 BC, ended his days in self-imposed exile.

CHAPTER 18: ADVICE TO PAULINUS

Seneca urges Paulinus to leave the grain supply, recalling the famine Caligula nearly caused.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
18.1	Excerpe itaque te volgo, Pauline carissime, et in tranquilliorem portum non pro aetatis spatio iactatus tandem recede. Cogita, quot fluctus subieris, quot tempestates partim privatas sustinueris, partim publicas in te converteris; satis iam per laboriosa et inquieta documenta exhibita virtus est: experire, quid in otio faciat. Maior pars aetatis, certe melior rei publicae data sit; aliquid temporis tui sume etiam tibi.	So tear yourself away from the crowd, my dearest Paulinus, and at last withdraw into a calmer harbor, after being tossed about more than your years deserve. Think how many waves you have faced, how many storms you have weathered—some private, others public that you drew upon yourself. Your virtue has been shown clearly enough through toilsome and restless trials; find out what it can do at leisure. The greater part of your life, and certainly the better part, has been given to the state; take some of your time for yourself as well.
18.2	Nec te ad segnem aut inertem quietem voco, non ut somno et caris turbae voluptatibus quidquid est in te indolis vividae mergas. Non est istud adquiescere; invenies maiora omnibus adhuc strenue tractatis operibus, quae repositus et securus agites.	I am not inviting you to a lazy or idle rest, or to drown whatever lively talent you have in sleep and the pleasures the crowd holds dear. That is not what repose means. You will find tasks greater than all those you have so energetically handled up to now, tasks to pursue in retirement and free from care.
18.3	Tu quidem orbis terrarum rationes administras tam abstinenter quam alienas, tam diligenter quam tuas, tam religiose quam publicas. In officio amorem consequeris, in quo odium vitare difficile est; sed tamen, mihi crede, satius est vitae suae rationem quam frumenti publici nosse.	You manage the accounts of the whole world as scrupulously as if they were someone else's, as carefully as if they were your own, as conscientiously as if they were the state's. You win affection in an office where it is hard to avoid hatred. And yet, believe me, it is better to know the accounts of your own life than those of the public grain.
18.4	Istum animi vigorem rerum maximarum capacissimum a ministerio honorifico quidem sed parum ad beatam vitam apto revoca et cogita non id egisse te ab aetate prima omni cultu studiorum liberalium, ut tibi multa milia frumenti bene committerentur; maius quiddam et altius de te promiseras. Non derunt et frugalitatis exactae homines et laboriosae operae; tanto aptiora portandis oneribus tarda iumenta sunt quam nobiles equi, quorum generosam pernicitatem quis umquam gravi sarcina pressit?	Call back that vigor of mind, so capable of the greatest things, from a post that is honorable, certainly, but hardly suited to a happy life. And reflect that it was not for this that you devoted yourself from your earliest years to every liberal study —so that many thousands of measures of grain might safely be entrusted to you. You had promised something greater and loftier of yourself. There will be no lack of men of meticulous thrift and hard-working diligence. Slow pack animals are far better suited to carrying loads than thoroughbred horses: who ever weighed down their noble speed with a heavy pack?

THE HUNGRY CITY

Feeding Rome is a heavy burden; under Caligula the city came within days of famine.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
18.5	Cogita praeterea, quantum sollicitudinis sit ad tantam te molem obicere; cum ventre tibi humano negotium est. Nec rationem patitur nec aequitate mitigatur nec ulla prece flectitur populus esuriens. Modo modo intra paucos illos dies, quibus C. Caesar perit, si quis inferis sensus est, hoc gravissime ferens, quod sciebat populo Romano superstiti septem aut octo certe dierum cibaria superesse, dum ille pontes navibus iungit et viribus imperi ludit, aderat ultimum malorum obsessis quoque, alimentorum egestas; exitio paene ac fame constitit et, quae famem sequitur, rerum omnium ruina furiosi et externi et infeliciter superbi regis imitatio.	Think, too, how much anxiety there is in shouldering so huge a burden: you are dealing with the human belly. A hungry people neither listens to reason, nor is softened by fairness, nor swayed by any plea. Only just recently, in the last few days of Gaius Caesar's life—and if the dead feel anything, he is taking it very hard that the Roman people outlived him, since he knew there was food left for seven or at most eight days—while he was building bridges of boats and playing with the might of the empire, the worst of evils even for people under siege was upon us: a shortage of food. His imitation of a mad, foreign, disastrously arrogant king nearly cost us destruction and famine, and the collapse of everything that follows famine.[33]
18.6	Quem tunc animum habuerunt illi, quibus erat mandata frumenti publici cura, saxa, ferrum, ignes, Gaium excepturi? Summa dissimulatione tantum inter viscera latentis mali tegebant, cum ratione scilicet. Quaedam enim ignorantibus aegris curanda sunt; causa multis moriendi fuit morbum suum nosse.	What state of mind were they in then, those entrusted with the public grain supply, when they were about to face stones, swords, fire—and Gaius? With the utmost concealment they hid the great evil lurking in the vitals of the state—and with good reason, of course. For some illnesses must be treated without the patients knowing; for many, knowing their disease has been the cause of their death.

CHAPTER 19: HIGHER STUDIES

Seneca contrasts managing granaries with studying god, the soul and the universe.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
19.1	Recipe te ad haec tranquilliora, tutiora, maiora! Simile tu putas esse, utrum cures, ut incorruptum et a fraude advehentium et a neglegentia frumentum transfundatur in horrea, ne concepto umore vitietur et concalescat, ut ad mensuram pondusque respondeat, an ad haec sacra et sublimia accedas sciturus, quae materia sit dei, quae voluptas, quae condicio, quae forma; quis animum tuum casus expectet; ubi nos a corporibus dimissos natura componat; quid sit quod huius mundi gravissima quaeque in medio sustineat, supra levia suspendat, in summum ignem ferat, sidera vicibus suis excitet; cetera deinceps ingentibus plena miraculis?	Retreat to these calmer, safer, greater things! Do you think it is all the same whether you see to it that the grain is poured into the granaries unspoiled by the fraud or carelessness of the shippers, that it does not absorb moisture and rot and overheat, that it tallies in measure and weight—or whether you take up these sacred and sublime studies, to learn what god's substance is, what his pleasure, his condition, his form; what fate awaits your spirit; where nature places us when we are released from our bodies; what it is that holds up the heaviest elements of this universe at the center, suspends the light ones above, carries fire to

33 Gaius Caesar is the emperor Caligula (AD 37–41). His bridge of boats across the bay of Baiae was seen as an imitation of Xerxes.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
		the highest region, and rouses the stars to their successive changes—and all the other things that follow, full of tremendous wonders?
19.2	Vis tu relicto solo mente ad ista respicere! Nunc, dum calet sanguis, vigentibus ad meliora eundum est. Expectat te in hoc genere vitae multum bonarum artium, amor virtutium atque usus, cupiditatium oblivio, vivendi ac moriendi scientia, alta rerum quies.	You really must leave the ground behind and turn your mind to these things! Now, while the blood is warm and we still have our vigor, we must move on to better things. In this kind of life much that is good awaits you: the liberal arts, the love and practice of the virtues, forgetfulness of desires, the knowledge of how to live and how to die, a deep tranquility.
19.3	Omnium quidem occupatorum condicio misera est, eorum tamen miserrima, qui ne suis quidem laborant occupationibus, ad alienum dormiunt somnum, ad alienum ambulant gradum, amare et odisse, res omnium liberrimas, iubentur. Hi si volent scire quam brevis ipsorum vita sit, cogitent ex quota parte sua sit.	The condition of all the busy is wretched, but most wretched is that of those who do not even toil at their own occupations, who sleep by someone else's sleep, walk at someone else's pace, and are ordered to love and to hate—the freest things of all. If these people want to know how short their life is, let them consider how small a part of it is their own.

CHAPTER 20: DYING BUSY

Officials who work until they die, like Turannius, deserve the funerals given to those who lived the shortest lives.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
20.1	Cum videris itaque praetextam saepe iam sumptam, cum celebre in foro nomen, ne invideris; ista vitae damno parantur. Ut unus ab illis numeretur annus, omnis annos suos conterent. Quosdam antequam in summum ambitionis eniterentur, inter prima luctantis aetas reliquit; quosdam cum in consummationem dignitatis per mille indignitates erepsissent, misera subit cogitatio laborasse ipsos in titulum sepulcri; quorundam ultima senectus, dum in novas spes ut iuventa disponitur, inter conatus magnos et improbos invalida defecit.	So when you see a man who has often worn the purple-bordered toga, or a name famous in the forum, do not envy him: these things are bought at the cost of life. To have one year dated by their names, they will squander all their years. Some have been abandoned by life while still struggling at the start, before they could climb to the height of their ambition. Some, after crawling through a thousand indignities to reach the crowning dignity, are struck by the wretched thought that they have toiled for an epitaph. Some, in extreme old age, while it is being fitted out with new hopes as if it were youth, have given out in weakness amid great and shameless efforts.[34]
20.2	Foedus ille, quem in iudicio pro ignotissimis litigatoribus grandem natu et imperitae coronae assensiones captantem, spiritus liquit; turpis ille, qui vivendo lassus citius quam laborando inter ipsa officia conlapsus est; turpis, quem accipiendis immorientem rationibus diu tractus risit heres.	Disgraceful is the man who breathes his last in court, advanced in years, pleading for utterly obscure litigants and angling for the applause of an ignorant crowd of bystanders. Shameful is the man who, worn out more by living than by working, collapses in the middle of his duties. Shameful is the man who dies going over his accounts, to

34 The purple-bordered toga was worn by senior magistrates; each Roman year was officially named after its two consuls.

	LATIN	ENGLISH
		the amusement of the heir he has kept waiting so long.
20.3	Praeterire quod mihi occurrit exemplum non possum. S. Turannius fuit exactae diligentiae senex, qui post annum nonagesimum, cum vacationem procurationis ab C. Caesare ultro accepisset, componi se in lecto et velut exanimem a circumstante familia plangi iussit. Lugebat domus otium domini senis nec finivit ante tristitiam, quam labor illi suus restitutus est. Adeone iuvat occupatum mori?	I cannot pass over an example that comes to mind. Sextus Turannius was an old man of meticulous diligence who, after his ninetieth year, when Gaius Caesar had released him from his post as procurator without his asking, had himself laid out on his bed and mourned as if dead by the household standing around him. The house lamented its old master's leisure, and did not end its mourning until his work was restored to him. Is it really such a pleasure to die busy?[35]
20.4	Idem plerisque animus est; diutius cupiditas illis laboris quam facultas est; cum imbecillitate corporis pugnant, senectutem ipsam nullo alio nomine gravem iudicant, quam quod illos seponit. Lex a quinquagesimo anno militem non legit, a sexagesimo senatorem non citat; difficilius homines a se otium impetrant quam a lege.	Most people feel the same way: their desire for work lasts longer than their ability to do it. They fight against their bodily weakness, and they judge old age itself a burden for no other reason than that it sets them aside. The law does not enlist a soldier after fifty or summon a senator after sixty; people find it harder to obtain leisure from themselves than from the law.
20.5	Interim dum rapiuntur et rapiunt, dum alter alterius quietem rumpit, dum mutuo miseri sunt, vita est sine fructu, sine voluptate, sine ullo profectu animi. Nemo in conspicuo mortem habet, nemo non procul spes intendit; quidam vero disponunt etiam illa, quae ultra vitam sunt, magnas moles sepulcrorum et operum publicorum dedicationes et ad rogum munera et ambitiosas exequias. At me hercules istorum funera, tamquam minimum vixerint, ad faces et cereos ducenda sunt.	Meanwhile, as they are dragged along and drag others, as each one breaks another's peace, as they make one another wretched, life passes without profit, without pleasure, without any progress of the mind. No one keeps death in view; everyone aims his hopes far ahead. Some even arrange things that lie beyond life: massive tombs, dedications of public buildings, shows at their funeral pyres, and ostentatious funerals. But truly, such people's funerals ought to be held by the light of torches and wax tapers, as though they had lived the shortest of lives.[36]

35 Turannius had been prefect of the grain supply—Paulinus's own post—under Augustus and Tiberius.
36 Children's funerals were held at night by torchlight.