

# SELECT LETTERS

OF

# SENECA

EDITED WITH  
INTRODUCTIONS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY

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*Multa enim, ut dixi, probanda in eo,  
multa etiam admiranda sunt: eligere  
modo curae sit.*

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## VII

### EVIL COMMUNICATIONS

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 QUID tibi uitandum praecipue existimem, quaeris?  
turbam. nondum illi tuto committeris. I always feel the  
ego certe confitebor imbecillitatem meam: worse for going 25  
out.

numquam mores quos extuli refero. aliquid ex eo quod composui turbatur, aliquid ex iis quae fugavi redit. quod aegris evenit quos longa imbecillitas usque eo affecit ut nusquam sine offensa proferantur, hoc accidit nobis, quorum animi ex longo morbo 5  
2 reficiuntur. inimica est multorum conuersatio: nemo

The bigger the crowd, the greater the danger.

non aliquod nobis uitium aut commendat aut imprimit aut nescientibus allinit. utique quo maior est populus cui miscemur, hoc periculi plus est. nihil uero tam damnosum bonis moribus 10  
quam in aliquo spectaculo desiderare. tunc enim per 3 uoluptatem facilius uitia surrepunt. quid me existimas dicere? 'auarior redeo, ambitiosior, luxuriosior'? immo uero crudelior et inhumanior, quia inter homines fui.

I have in mind just now the butchery of the midday games.

casu in meridianum spectaculum incidi, 15  
Iulus exspectans et sales et aliquid laxamenti quo hominum oculi ab humano cruore acquiescant. contra est: quicquid ante pugnatum est, misericordia fuit; nunc omissis nugis mera homicidia sunt. nihil habent quo tegantur: ad ictum 20  
totis corporibus expositi numquam frustra manum 4 mittunt. hoc plerique ordinariis paribus et postulatitiis praeferunt. quidni praeferant? non galea, non scuto repellitur ferrum. quo munimenta? quo artes? omnia ista mortis morae sunt. mane leonibus 25  
et ursis homines, meridie spectatoribus suis obiciuntur. interfectores interfecturis iubent obici et uictorem in aliam detinent caedem: exitus pugnantium mors est. ferro et igne res geritur. haec fiunt, dum uacat 5  
harena. 'sed latrocinium fecit aliquis.' quid ergo? 30

occidit hominem? '*occidit hominem.*' quia occidit, ille meruit ut hoc pateretur: tu quid meruisti miser, ut hoc spectes? 'occide, uerbera, ure! quare tam timide incurrit in ferrum? quare parum audacter occidit? quare parum libenter moritur *et* plagis agitur in 5  
uulnera? mutuos ictus nudis et obuiis pectoribus excipiant. intermissum est spectaculum: interim iugulentur homines, ne nihil agatur.' age, ne hoc quidem intellegitis: mala exempla in eos redundare qui faciunt? agite dis immortalibus gratias, quod eum 10  
6 docetis esse crudelem qui non potest discere. subducendus populo est tener animus et parum tenax recti: facile transitur ad plures.

1. For my insertion of a second *occidit hominem* see the notes. I am also responsible for the insertion of *et* after *moritur* and the changes of punctuation which it entails: C.Q. 1908 p. 23.

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With this letter should be compared the *De Otio* and the letters in which Sen. urges Lucilius to retire (see on XXI). That Lucilius interpreted ours as having the same object appears from 8. 1, and Sen. does not contradict him. The picture in *Ot.* 1 is very similar to that drawn here: *in otio nemo interuenit qui iudicium adhuc imbecillum populo adiutore detorqueat*. Cowley's Essay 'On the dangers of an honest man in much company' handles the same theme, but does not seem to owe anything to Sen. In his references to gladiatorial exhibitions, it is not surprising that the author of XLVII should anticipate modern views. Cicero had no taste for these entertainments, but has also no very decided censure for their cruelty: see *Tusc.* 2. 41 *crudelis et inhumanum nonnullis uideri solet, et haud scio an ita sit ut nunc fit. cum uero sontes ferro depugnabant* (the very point Sen. meets at § 5) ... *nulla poterat esse fortior contra dolorem et mortem disciplina*; *Fam.* 7. 1 (a very interesting letter, written in reference to the very shows of Pompey against which Sen. is so bitter in B.V. 13. 7). The chief argument urged in defence of the institution was one which still does duty in support of less objectionable exhibitions: the sight was one *quod ad pulchra uulnera contemptumque mortis accenderet* (Plin. P. 33). Seneca's views are further expressed in some of the passages quoted in the note on § 3. Like Cicero he often draws examples from the gladiators, but in LXX his instances of the contempt they shewed for death all involve suicide committed in order to escape the arena. The influences of these exhibitions is clearly seen in the ghastly battle-scenes of Lucan. Celsus tells us (1. pr.) that many of the opponents of vivisection (i.e. the dissection of living human beings) urged that the knowledge necessary could be gained by watching the gladiatorial shows. For the 'generous boldness' of the monk Telemachus, which brought about the abolition of an institution against which Constantine had spoken in vain, see Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, chap. xxx.

§ 1. 1. 24. *quaeris*] Seneca does his best to make the *Epistulae* appear the outcome of a genuine correspondence: the words *ita fac* with which they open imply that Sen. has before him a letter from Lucilius, II begins '*ex eis quae mihi scribis*', III '*epistulas ad me perferendas tradidisti*', and so on.

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1. 1. *refero*] 'bring back home': *Ira* 2. 7. 1 *desinet ille Socrates posse eundem uultum domum referre quem domo extulerat*, Epict. 3. 5. 16 *τὸ αὐτὸ πρόσωπον αἰεὶ καὶ ἐκφέρειν καὶ εἰσφέρειν*. For the absolute use of *referre* cp. Quint. 2. 2. 8 *nulla cotidie dicat* (sc. the teacher) *quae secum auditores referant*. Gray, writing to Wharton, Dec. 11, 1746: 'It is no wonder then ... if my spirits, when I returned to my cell, should sink for a time. ... Besides, Seneca says (and my pitch of philosophy does not pretend to be much above Seneca) *numquam* etc.'

*ex eo quod composui*] 'the peace I have made for myself', *componere* being constantly used by Sen. to denote the effect of philosophic training in producing tranquillity and resignation (see on 11. 9, 55. 8). *Quod* is cognate acc.: cp. 110. 4 *quod gaudes, quod times contrahe*. For the sense cp. *Tranq.* 17. 3 *conuersatio dissimilium bene composita disturbat*.

1. 4. *offensa*] 'ill effects'; the word seems to belong to the colloquial sphere: this use seems to occur first in Celsus, and was probably technical: in *Tranq.* 2. 1, Petr. 131 the context is similar, and cp. *offensio* in Cic. *Fam.* 16. 10. 1. For the thought, cp. 28. 3 below.

1. 5. *morbo*] The conception of sin as a disease of the mind and of the philosopher as a physician was especially common with the Cynics: cp. Antisthenes in D.L. 6. 4 *ἐρωτηθεὶς διὰ τί πικρῶς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐπιπλήττει, καὶ οἱ ἰατροί, φησὶ καὶ 6 καὶ οἱ ἰατροί, φησὶ, μετὰ τῶν νοσοῦντων εἰσὶν, ἀλλ' οὐ πυρῆττοισιν*. But the germ of it appears already in Plato (*Gorg.* 36 *ὅπως μὴ ἐγχερονισθὲν τὸ νόσημα τῆς ἀδικίας ὑποῦλον τὴν ψυχὴν ποιήσει*) and even Epicurus adopts the illustration: Fr. 221 Us. *ὡσπερ ἰατρικῆς οὐδὲν ὄφελος μὴ τὰς νόσους τῶν σωματίων ἐμβαλλοῦσης, οὕτως οὐδὲ φιλοσοφίας, εἰ μὴ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκβάλλει πάθος*. Cp. Intr. p. lxxiii, and the passage from *de Ira* cited on *oderis* in § 8 below.

§ 2. 1. 6. *conuersatio*] 'intercourse', *ὁμιλία*. The word, like *conuersari* itself, is post-Augustan. Cic. uses *consuetudo* and *usus* with much the same force.

*nemo non*] a favourite expression of Seneca's; similarly *numquam non* (11. 4).

1. 7. *commendat*] 'makes attractive', as often in Cicero: cp. 55. 8.

l. 8. **imprimit]** 'stamps on us': 114. 20 *uitia quae alicui impressit imitatio*.

**allinit]** 'befouls us with it'; cp. *Epiot.* 3. 16, esp. § 3 ἀμήχανον τὸν συνανατριβόμενον τῷ ἡσβολωμένῳ μὴ καὶ αὐτὸν ἀπολαύσαι τῆς ἀσβολῆς. The word is rare, but occurs in one of Cicero's speeches.

**utique]** seems to have been a colloquial particle: it is common before Sen. only in Cicero's letters and Livy. I have noted over 40 exx. in the *Epistulae* alone, where it generally denotes 'necessarily' (so here: cp. 85. 21 *utique enim quo prudentior est, hoc magis se ad id quod est optimum extendet*), but the meanings 'at any rate' and 'especially' are also very common.

l. 12. **surrepunt]** of stealthy, insidious attack, not really very different from *fallere*: cp. ὑπελθεῖν. The use may have been common in the spoken language, as Catullus uses it (77. 3): in literature it is uncommon outside the Senecas and Quintilian.

§ 3. l. 14. **inhumanior, quia inter homines fui]** Cp. Thomas à Kempis, *Imit. Christ.* 1. 20 *dixit quidam 'quoties inter homines fui, minor homo redii'*. Sen. never wearies of the paradox: cp. e.g. 90. 45 below, 95. 33 *homo, sacra res homini, per lusum occiditur*, 115. 3 *in homine rarum humanitas bonum* (90 l.c. and 95 l.c. in conn. with gladiators). His master Fabianus indulges in it in Sen. *Contr.* 2. 1. 10 *quae causa hominem aduersus hominem in facinus coegit?*

l. 15. **meridianum spectaculum]** The *matutinum spectaculum* consisted mainly of wild beast hunts and fights (Ou. M. 11. 26, Sen. *Ep.* 70. 20, *Ira* 3. 43. 2, Mart. 13. 95 and cp. § 4 *mane leonibus obiciuntur*). Then, most people went home to the midday meal, so that the luncheon interval of modern cricket has its ancient parallel (Dio 37. 46). Our passage shews that the performances did not come to a complete standstill; to tide over the interval, it was arranged that there should be an encounter between not regular gladiators but condemned criminals, who had no defensive armour and often had to be driven by force to face their opponents. This quite tallies with what Suetonius says of Claudius (*Vita* 34): he took such pleasure in *bestiarum* (i.e. the performers at the *matutinum*) and these *meridiani, ut et prima luce ad spectaculum descenderet* (i.e. to see the *bestiarum*) *et meridie, dimisso ad prandium populo, persederet* (to see the convicts).

l. 17. **ab ... cruore acquiescant]** I have found this constr. of the verb besides only in Vell. 2. 99.

l. 18. **ante]** at the morning show.

l. 19. **mera homicidia]** 'plain and simple murder'. This use of *merus* was doubtless quite common in colloquial Latin, being found in Plautus, Cicero (Dial. and Corr.), Petronius and the *Apocolocyntosis*. Examples with plural abstract nouns are *mera monstra* (Cic.), *merae fugae* or *tricae* (Petr.), *mera hilaria* (Petr.). In Petr. 37 we have *mero meridie*; here the whole phrase is probably a play on *meridiana*: see Intr. p. lxxxii.

l. 21. **expositi]** They are at the mercy of their adversary, and themselves inflict a wound at every thrust. An *ipsi* after *expositi* would make the sense clearer.

§ 4. l. 22. **ordinariis]** consisting of regular gladiators.

**postulaticis]** These seem to have played in the arena much the same part as is played in modern farces by the 'encore' verses of the topical song: they were choice men kept in reserve for an audience that shewed itself appreciative. For similar prudence on the part of the 'management' cp. Sen. *Contr.* 4. pr. 1 *munerarii ad expectationem populi detinendam* ('keep up the interest') *noua paria per omnes dies dispensant, ut sit quod populum delectet et reuocet* (i.e. make them attend each day).

l. 23. **quidni praferant]** 'Of course they do.' Such phrases with *quidni* are very common in Sen.: they correspond to those with *πῶς οὐ* in Greek. The probability is that *ni* at one time existed side by side with *ne* as a negative particle. In 40. 8 and elsewhere the verb is not expressed: cp. *τί μή*; in e.g. Soph. *Aias* 668.

l. 24. **quo]** 'What is the use of', 'What do you want with': Intr. p. liv.

**munimenta]** 'defensive armour', as in 76. 14 and perhaps nowhere else in literature: it must however have been a technical term.

l. 27. **interfectores]** 'those who have slain their men'.

l. 29. **ferro et igne res geritur]** apparently means 'the whole business needs fire and steel to keep it going': these men are not regular gladiators, and have to be kept in the ring with brands, pikes and the lash (*uerbera* § 5). For the phrase *res geritur* 'it is a case of...' cp. B. 1. 5. 2 'a benefit is not tangible: *animo res geritur*', Liv. 10. 39. 12 (where Papirius

scoffs at the foe's gay armour, saying that white tunics grow red *ubi res ferro geritur*. *Vacat harena* means that the show is really at a standstill: see on § 3.

§ 5. 1. 30. *quid ergo* etc.] 'What of that? Did he kill a man?' (as you are doing in the amphitheatre). To this Sen.'s interlocutor says 'Well, for the matter of that this particular malefactor is more than a mere robber: he is a murderer.'

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1. 2. *tu quid meruisti ... ut*] 'What have you done to deserve having to ...' A very rare use of the verb, for which I can only quote Sen. *Med.* 646 *meruere cuncti | morte quod crimen tener expiauit* 'all committed the crime that the young Hylas atoned for with his life', Vell. 2. 130 *quid hic* (Tiberius) *meruit ut ... Libo iniret consilia* (sc. of assassinating him)? and perhaps Verg. *A.* 7. 307. In Plautus and Cic. we find the verb used with an acc. to denote the requiring a price in consideration of which one undertakes something (*quid merearis ut ... dicas?*): in our passage the idea is extended to that of committing a crime, in consequence of which one must be prepared to suffer something.

1. 3. *occide* etc.] said to the attendants with the spears etc.

1. 6. *obuiis pectoribus*] *Med.* 138 *debut ferro obuim | offerre pectus*.

1. 9. *mala exempla in eos redundare qui faciunt*] a favourite Senecan thought: cp. *Thy.* 311 *saepe in magistrum scelera redierunt sua*.

1. 10. *eum*] So far from being angry, the audience should be glad to find a man *qui parum audacter occidit* (§ 5) and is slow to learn the lesson they would teach him. The contrast of *docere* and *discere* is a favourite of Sen.'s.

§ 6. 1. 11. *subducendus*] 'saved from': 119. 11 *quem populo et fortunae subduximus*, Sen. *Contr.* 2. pr. 3 *subduc fortunae magnam tui partem*. The verb is rather a favourite with Sen.: this sense 'withdraw for protection', a very natural outcome of its use in reference to the drawing off of troops, seems mainly poetic or post-Augustan.

1. 12. *tener*] 'easily impressed', 'susceptible', as in 108. 12.