

SENECA

by Edward Mast
suggested by Seneca's *OCTAVIA*

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SENECA

If I am dead you may say this out loud.
If I am alive, be silent.

What follows might have been written by me.
Or maybe by others. I had many imitators.
In either case, publication would be my death.
If you value my life, keep this to yourselves.

I have included myself as a character.
My name is Lucius Anneaus Seneca.
I wrote in my time philosophy and plays.
In my elder years I was called from retirement
to counsel the head of state.
It is year 90 of the Imperium,
which you from your vantage in time call the Empire.

SEVERAL VOICES

Iam uaga caelo sidera fulgens
Aurora fugat

AGRIPPINA

Dawn sucks away the stars

VOICES

surgit Titan radiante coma.

AGRIPPINA

and the Titan dominates the sky.
But the heavens are growing old
and crumbling down toward blind chaos.
Maybe a new universe will be born
better than this one, a cosmos ruled
by the goddess Justice, as of old
when we lived in a world with no walls, no wars,
and the fertile earth opened her bosom
to gentle creatures who worshipped her.
Maybe that will come to be
after this race of greedy degraded
sacrilegious cunning beasts
is crushed beneath the collapsing sky.
Seneca.

SENECA

Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA

Fortune has dragged you out of seclusion
and raised you up once more to power.
Why? For a better view of our horrors?

SENECA

I was more content on the rocky island
where all my thoughts were my own.

AGRIPPINA

That's dead.
Your thoughts bruise the world now.

SENECA

You exaggerate my position.

AGRIPPINA

Coward.
You have the ear and you carry the conscience
of him that grips the world, my son,
I was his mother before I was killed
and I say it still, he is the worst,
you know it, he is the bottom of the pit.

SENECA

It is not as simple as that.

AGRIPPINA

For his next victim it is.
You think if she cowers and grovels and hides
Octavia may survive.

SENECA

She has powerful allies.

AGRIPPINA

So did I, when I was alive.
What will you pretend, Seneca?
But look.

VOICES

Sed ecce.

AGRIPPINA

What he plans I consider with horror.

SEVERAL VOICES

Quid ferat menta horreo.
Caeli tyrannum. Caeli tyrannum.

EMPEROR

Tyrant of the sky, tyrant of the sky.
Even the lord of thunderbolts is helpless
before him, he banishes gods to earth.

SENECA

What tyrant is that, Your Majesty?

EMPEROR

Amor of course, Love, Love.
I bow, I grovel, I am filled with his might.

SENECA

This little god is a human fiction
with his bow and arrows and little wings,
invented by human lust to give
respect and license to its own depravity.

EMPEROR

Amoris in me maximum regnum puto.
Love over me has the greatest of power.
Love is the primal cause, love
is the spring of happiness. The human race
is kept alive only through love.
Even the wild beasts obey him.
And now that very tyrant of love
has joined with Fate to bring together
all the virtues in a single woman
born for me, made for me,
and Love will carry the torches himself
to bring this paragon to share my bed.

SENECA

Be careful of blind faith in your tyrant.
Love is a power of the mind and a heat
that swells the heart. Love must be cherished
and cared for. Stop feeding love, it will fade.
You have a wife already. Daughter of a god
since you granted her father divinity. Octavia
will fill your house with children if you let her.

EMPEROR

Octavia's heart and soul have never
been truly one with mine.

SENECA

She's young. She's modest. You must give time
before you judge her affection or fidelity.

EMPEROR

Of course I did allow such thoughts
to frustrate my needs for a while. But her face
betrays a heart so full of hate

I've finally chosen to retaliate.
I've found a woman of beauty and breeding
more worthy of the imperial bed.
The Queen of Heaven would give the crown
to my Poppeia, and the Queen of Love
and the Queen of Wisdom too.

SENECA

The people will give no crown to this match.
It undermines the laws of marriage.

EMPEROR

Everyone does it. Am I forbidden?

SENECA

People demand example from the great.

EMPEROR

If that's the case, we will change their opinions.

SENECA

How?

EMPEROR

By whatever means we need.

SENECA

Why not listen to your citizens instead?

EMPEROR

A ruler should not be ruled by his subjects.

SENECA

Deny the people and they may get angry.

EMPEROR

And force their will on the head of state?

SENECA

Why not yield and avoid the conflict?

EMPEROR

Yield and rumor will say I am weak.

SENECA

Rumor's a chatterer.

EMPEROR

Whom many hear.

SENECA

You are the strong one. You can crush rumor.
Be guided now by your obligations.

Be guided now by your duty to father
and your faithful wife and her good name.
Be guided now by your better self.

EMPEROR

Be guided by YOU, you mean.
Stop pressing this point. I'm losing patience.
You can't always be my nanny, you know.
You're just an old man. You don't understand
how a young man feels. Be calm, papa Seneca.
The world is at peace. I have brought them peace
for almost ten years. Our people are thriving.
And they want what I've been denying them for years:
a son to carry on the peace.
Poppa will bring to consummation
my desires and theirs. The wedding
is tomorrow.

CAPTAIN OF GUARDS

Godlike Imperator, hear me.

EMPEROR

What is it?

CAPTAIN

We are bringing cohorts back to protect
the city. The citizens rise in revolt.

EMPEROR

Nonsense. My subjects? They're not unhappy.
What can they possibly have to complain about?

CAPTAIN

Love and partisanship for your wife
Octavia. They hear you plan divorce
and they're running wild with crimes
tearing down the statues you built
to your mistress Poppa, long may she live.

EMPEROR

My bronze and marble statues?

CAPTAIN

Both.
They topple the figures with steel, and then
they tear the limbs off with rope and trample them
till they are mud. They call out words
I won't repeat, but some of them say
they will ring the Imperator's house with fire
until you hand over Poppa to them
and return Octavia to her rightful place.
Their words, Great Imperator, not mine.

EMPEROR

Foolish impotent tiny creatures.
 They defy the gods of Love and Art
 at once. Don't they understand
 the God of Love will overwhelm
 their tiny fires with his mighty flame?
 He has hauled Jupiter down from heaven
 more than once. Do they think he'll fail
 to squash their insolent squeaking noise?
 Offend the God of Love, you'll pay
 a grim price in your own blood.
 Don't they know that? Poor simple people.
 And that woman who is the cause of this --

CAPTAIN

We'll protect your home of course, Imperator.

EMPEROR

Protect my home? Will they come so close?
 They will be dead by then, I trust.
 Their torches will by then be quenched
 in their own blood. These sacrilegious
 insects who threaten my very bed
 and my dear beautiful wife-to-be
 who sleeps gently inside, they will pay.

SENECA

The leaders must pay.

EMPEROR

They ALL must pay.

SENECA

Not all, of course. You don't mean that.

EMPEROR

Yes ALL, I mean just what I say.

SENECA

Don't let anger muddle your judgement.
 They are your people, after all.

EMPEROR

And they will remember this day forever
 for the punishment they receive.

SENECA

Moderate your outrage. Don't act in haste.

EMPEROR

They are not threatening you or your wife.

SENECA

Mercy is a great antidote to fear.

EMPEROR

Fear? You think I'm afraid of rebels?
The greatest virtue of any leader
is to conquer his enemies.

SENECA

The greatest virtue
of an Imperator is to safeguard the lives
of his citizens.

EMPEROR

Save your lessons for boys.

SENECA

You have no reason to fear my judgement,
of course. I'm just a soft old man.
But the gods look down and will judge your actions.

EMPEROR

And why should I have fear of gods
when I create them? My predecessor
Octavia's father was made a god
by my decree. I think he owes me a favor.
Fortune has treated me well, and will continue
to do so.

SENECA

Do not put faith in Fortune.
She is a fickle goddess.

EMPEROR

She's my friend.
The mob must learn to respect their leader
and steel will give them their lesson

SENECA

The mob
will not respect a leader who shows fear.

EMPEROR

How does action demonstrate fear?

SENECA

By unconsidered needless attack,
the way a little boy lashes out.
Be calm. Be strategic. Respond with confidence.
Captain, can the leaders of this revolt
be sorted out?

CAPTAIN

We can find them.

SENECA

Bring in the leaders and we'll find out
just how this nuisance came about.
The mob will not continue to act
without a head.

EMPEROR

Alright, nanny.
Lopping the head off rebellion makes sense.
But don't waste time asking them "why".
Cut their heads off, each one. Do you hear?

SENECA

We hear.

CAPTAIN

We hear.

EMPEROR

And as for Octavia who caused all this

SENECA

She not guilty.

EMPEROR

She stands accused
by this mob's frenzy. Why doesn't she stop them?

SENECA

You have ordered her not to leave the palace.

EMPEROR

Reasons, reasons, nanny, nanny.

SENECA

Wait until you are over your rage
before you act.

EMPEROR

Be careful, tutor.
You're a smart old nanny and I take your advice.
But don't forget my dearest mother.
She also told me what to do.
Once too often, in her case.
She learned better.

CAPTAIN

The Emperor goes.

SENECA

Idiot rebels. They endanger us all.
Bring their leaders to me when you find them
I'll question them before you carry out
the Emperor's orders.

CAPTAIN

Yes, my lord.

SENECA

Be quick.

CHORUS

Where are the people of our great nation?
We were a great people once.
Our leaders carried out our will.
But now our leader betrays us.
Octavia daughter of Claudius the God
is banished from the Emperor's bed
and her name stained and her father's great name.
Where is our anger? Where is our strength!
We drove the tyrants out of our city
and swore they would never rule here again!
But now we are led by corruption once more.
Our leader flaunts his disconcert,
his arrogance puts up statues everywhere
to Poppeia his prostitute.
This is the man who poisoned his brother!
This is the man who sent his own mother
aboard a ship and had her killed!
This is no leader for free citizens!
Our beloved Octavia sobs and wails!
We will pull down these pedestaled prostitute statues
and drag the prostitute herself
from her exalted bed! With flames and weapons
we will overwhelm the Emperor's palace
and bring this cruel madness to an end!

VOICES

Tellure rupta Tartaro gressum extuli.

AGRIPPINA

From the deeps of Tartarus I break the earth
to come here holding a Stygian torch
in my bloody hand. Let the whore Poppeia
marry my son by the light of this fire.
The dead remember. Even the dead.
You knew.

SENECA

No.

AGRIPPINA

How could you not?

SENECA

There were only stories. It seemed too much.
Not even he would do such a thing.

AGRIPPINA

I wanted to weep for the shipwreck's victims
but my son's soldiers gave me no chance.
The shipwreck didn't finish the job
so they had to use their swords after all.
On me, his mother, who poisoned his father
and helped him murder his own half-brother
all to give him the helm of imperium.
Point the sword at my womb, I told them.
Here is where you must bury your blade,
where I brought into light the tiny baby
who should have died at once, innocent,
we should have died together then
and found some quiet corner of Hell
to cling together among our famous
forebears. But instead of that, he grew up,
and with my help he ripped me apart,
and himself and his infinite future as well
in everlasting shame and sorrow.
Point your sword at my womb, I said.

VOICES

Hic est

AGRIPPINA

Here it is.

VOICES

Hic est.

AGRIPPINA

Here it is, the root, the place you must stab.

SENECA

What do you want from me?

AGRIPPINA

Even this mistress Poppeia will die.
You know that. He'll kill her too.
He'll be murdered himself. You know all that.

SENECA

In the future I know it. I live in the present
and navigate in ignorance like the rest.
What moderating voice would still be here
if I were gone?

AGRIPPINA

Tell her yourself then.
Here is the wife Octavia coming,
kicking against her doom.
Tell her yourself what you can't do
to save her.

OCTAVIA

Seneca.

SENECA

Octavia.

OCTAVIA

I am bothered by ghosts. I don't sleep anymore.
My brother's shadow comes in my sleep
with a rusted sword in his hand. He looks
for his murderer of course, the Great Emperor.
But he never finds him, and he wails and shouts
and asks me for comfort. But he can't hear me
so nothing I do can help. You write
we should bear our sorrows with calm and repose.
Tell me whose sorrows compare with mine?
My father murdered and his first wife
my mother, murdered as well, by him
who murdered his own mother later. My brother
who should have inherited power, poisoned.
And I myself against my will
married off to the murdering criminal
himself, and barred even from mourning.

SENECA

I am afflicted by your suffering, Octavia.

OCTAVIA

He must kill me, you know. Or fall by my hand.

SENECA

Do not say such things out loud.

OCTAVIA

I have tried being quiet. It has not worked.
 You have told me to win my husband over
 with sweet submission and wifely calm.
 I would rather win over a brutal tiger.
 Would any submission restore my brother?

SENECA

My advice was to keep you safe, and restore
 your father's line with children of your own.

OCTAVIA

Now he chooses other children
 and I await my brother's fate.
 I have one small source of hope: the people.
 They rise up in my name.

SENECA

The people
 will be your death, if you are not careful.

OCTAVIA

The people have power

SENECA

The imperator has more.
 We must hope he shows some regard for his wife.

OCTAVIA

His prostitute mistress forbids it.

SENECA

He's young.
 Desire for a mistress is a flame that will pass.
 Love for a faithful wife will endure.
 He's had others before this. Where are they now?

OCTAVIA

Where I will be soon. He's declared her his wife.

SENECA

If you will accommodate, you will survive.

OCTAVIA

Let fire accommodate water first.
 Let heaven accommodate hell. Let Tartarus
 drag the sky to the underworld,
 let Jupiter send his thunderbolts down
 to accommodate all this palace of crime
 before I will bend to his slimy filth.
 Citizens take back their rightful place.
 You know they are right, you know they are just.
 Will you join them?

SENECA

Me? Betray the imperium?

OCTAVIA

The citizens are the imperium. Seneca,
 you have power. You can help them.
 Others will turn and join if you join.

SENECA

I can't turn my back on civilization
 and give it over to revolt.

OCTAVIA

This leader
 is not your civilization. You write
 about justice and truth and integrity.
 Does this leader embody any of those?
 Does any of your philosophy survive?

SENECA

I am not a philosopher here.

OCTAVIA

Then stand aside. Do nothing at all.
 Do not betray your Imperator
 but do not help him commit more crimes.
 His guards all look to you. Let him
 organize his own defense.
 He'll be helpless without you. If your good right hand
 will not take action against his guilt
 then at least stay out of the way. You know
 his oppression and degradation tarnish
 the royal name of Imperator.
 You know what I say is true. There is little time.
 May I tell the citizens you'll stand aside?

SENECA

You talk to the rebels?

OCTAVIA

We have servants whom we trust.
 The citizens mention your name.

SENECA

My name? Why?

OCTAVIA

Because you are with them, Seneca. They know it.

SENECA

What?

OCTAVIA

They know you believe in justice.
Everything good from this regime
they attribute to you. You are the conscience
of our time. Seneca, you are the conscience
of our republic, what was a republic
once, at least. Do you want that back?

SENECA

The republic again, of course I do.

OCTAVIA

Then give them a word. One word. May I tell them?
Seneca. You are silent. You see
what has to happen. Nod. Give a sign.
Your smallest move and the world will change.

CAPTAIN

The city is burning!

OCTAVIA

What?

CAPTAIN

The city
is on fire. The worst fire we've seen.

SENECA

What happened?

CAPTAIN

It broke out behind the Stadium,
near the Palatine and Skyback Hills.
The wind is fanning it. None of our measures
are slowing it down. The whole city
will burn.

SENECA

How did it start? Do you know?

CAPTAIN

Religious fanatics colluding with rebels.

SENECA

Are you certain?

CAPTAIN

We think so.

SENECA

Find out for certain.

CAPTAIN

Yes sir. We will confirm and report.

SENECA

This is not part of what I wrote,
or what I was reputed to have written,
or what was written by my mimic.
This enters dangerous territory now

OCTAVIA

Nothing has changed, but faster now.
This blood-stained palace will fall at last
or else the people will fall. Which is it?
Seneca, make your choice.

SENECA

They have gone too far. The people of the city
will never join this rebellion now,
not when their houses and shops are burning.
This was the worst they could have done.

OCTAVIA

They had no choice. They were driven to it.

SENECA

You sympathize with the burning of cities?
This house is your house too, and can burn.
Where will you live when civilization
is crushed? Will you live in poverty with them?
Carry your water and feces like a peasant?
Where do the flames stop, do you think?
Will you burn down our city and all our world
to overturn your disgusting husband?

OCTAVIA

What else can I do?

SENECA

Stop them. Do you think
these religious fanatics are part of your cause?
They are using the rebels to bring down the city
and create the empire of their god.
Are these your allies? If you join them now,
all is lost, for you, for me,

for all those upright citizens of yours.
Is that what you want?

OCTAVIA

No. Of course not.

SENECA

Then you must stop them. The rebellion is over.
They have brought an apocalypse instead.

OCTAVIA

You make me
ashamed because I'm afraid. I listen
to your words. I hope they are wisdom.

SENECA

This holocaust brings no future. Help me
stop it.

OCTAVIA

I will wait a little time.

CAPTAIN

The fire climbed the seven hills
and swept down ravaging level places,
swirling through the winding streets
and ancient irregular blocks with nothing
to stop it. Terrified shrieking women,
helpless children and old people,
people trying to save themselves
and people trying to save others,
all outflanked by towering flames.
When they escaped the flames followed,
even the outlying districts weren't safe.
People ran screaming from the city
and crumpled exhausted on country roads
or fields, having lost whatever they owned.
Some lay down who could have escaped
but decided to die instead.
Of the fourteen districts in our city
four remained intact.
Three were levelled to the ground.
The rest were mangled blackened ruins.
The destruction of Troy was like this.
Only the destruction of Troy.

SENECA

Have the traitors been apprehended?

CAPTAIN

Yes.

SENECA

Good. Make certain you have them all.
This is a war on civilization.

CAPTAIN

We will find them all.

SENECA

Good. Go to it.

CAPTAIN

Yes sir.

AGRIPPINA

Seneca.

SENECA

Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA

Seneca, are you feeling this?
Are you thinking, or only writing it down?
Do you live your life or just record it?

SENECA

Away from here, on my rocky island
I was free for a time. I had freedom to gaze
on the great creations of Nature who made us,
the architect of this infinite fabric.
The sky, the sacred path of the sun,
the recurring cosmos of day and night,
the wandering stars, the far-shining glory
of the deep universe, lifting my mind
to look on this sorrowing earth from afar

AGRIPPINA

You know what happens. Why pretend
you don't?

SENECA

I don't know yet. In the present.

AGRIPPINA

Fate built that fire.

SENECA

Change is possible.
Just as nobility passes away,
corruption passes too.
Some will wait for better times
and better times will arrive.
If you make the future by murder and flame,
what kind of future will you bring?

AGRIPPINA

Here is your moderate action then
Here is your leader full of mercy.
Here is Octavia bound and bound
for her doom.

VOICES

Quid tegere cesso Tartaro bultus meos?

AGRIPPINA

I see the world now. Why should I wait
to hide my face in Tartarus?

EMPEROR

Seneca, you may say goodbye.
I know you liked my former wife.

SENECA

Octavia, where are they taking you?

EMPEROR

Someplace safe and far away.

OCTAVIA

How deadly all my allies have proved.
If I am to die, why grudge me even
to die in my native land?

SENECA

You're not
to die. She's not to die, is she?

EMPEROR

No need for that. Exile for her crimes.
Even though she was apprehended
in flagrant communication with rebels.

OCTAVIA

They will send me aboard the same ship
that bore his mother once.
There is no god of righteousness.
No gods exist. If they did, they would hate us.
The furies rule the world, and they should.
Will you write a lament for me, Seneca?
A philosophical dialogue maybe?

SENECA

Strengthen your heart. Exile and death
are two different places.

OCTAVIA

Not this exile.
Why the delay? Spare your prayers.
Rig the boat, set sail at once,
let the helmsman steer with the winds
till the ship return without me.
Witness, Tartarus. Witness, Furies.
Father. Mother. And his mother, his.
Witness the death this Imperator brings
on all around him, and on himself.

EMPEROR

Away now. Thank you, thank you, goodbye,
take her.

CAPTAIN

Come, madam. This way.

SENECA

She will not be killed.

EMPEROR

Of course she will.

We will finally be free of this long-condemned criminal
and maybe my heart can find some rest
at last.

SENECA

She did not start the rebellion.

EMPEROR

She was the cause, she was the cause,
do not philosophize with me.
I will not tolerate these endless attempts
to rob me of life and power and command.
Exile did not break Plautus and Sulla
of their attempts to assassinate me.

SENECA

Your fathers refrained from slaughter when they could.

EMPEROR

My ancestor Caesar pardoned Brutus,
that's true, and paid the price of his mercy.
The birds and beast have long been feasting
on slaughtergrounds of my ancestors' battles.
They built security with blades of steel
and so will I.

SENECA

But there is no need for this.
The rebellion has been put down. The fanatics
who set the fire have all been caught --

EMPEROR

What fanatics? Christians, you mean?

SENECA

Yes.

EMPEROR

Never mind them. They're harmless.
They were not the cause of this trouble.

SENECA

But the fire.

EMPEROR

The fire, oh that. Do not

be naive. I set the fire myself.

SENECA

What do you mean?

EMPEROR

Well not my own hand.
I ordered the city set on fire.
We needed decisive action. I acted.
If I had acted sooner instead of listening
to you, we might have averted this all.

SENECA

You ordered the city burnt?

EMPEROR

I did.
My soldiers were just too slow. I was too
tolerant, too patient and reasonable.
The masses have grown unruly and spoiled
by the blessings I have brought in my reign.
They don't appreciate mercy or peace,
they don't feel a spark of gratitude.
When people get soft and corrupt, they must be
tamed by hardship. You know that.
Fire and smashed homes and starvation,
cruel poverty will be their teacher.
They will not dare such outrage again.
They will lower their eyes at the godlike gaze
of my lovely Poppeia. They will learn to obey.
It wasn't only the leaders, you know.
The people were subject to infestation
by rebels, easily hid or masked.
How could we ever sift them out?
They would have done this to me if they could.
The time had come to draw a line
and burn our city back to peace.
Peace forever. Love forever.
The power is back now where it belongs.
I use the cruel sword to remove
all that is hostile to me, as I must,
and my destiny is in the stars.

VOICES

Nos quoque manebunt astra.

SENECA

Imperator.

EMPEROR

Yes, my tutor. Yes, my philosopher.
Yes, my teacher of righteousness.

SENECA

It is many years since I came to your service.
 You have showered me always with measureless favors
 and I have been all too unworthy of your praise.
 I am old now. I am no longer equal
 to the burden of power. You have grown beyond me.
 Allow me in unending loyalty and love
 to retire to private life once again.

EMPEROR

Yes I think so. You have given me much
 and I will not forget the gifts of art
 and eloquence I have learned at your knee.
 You have been, I think, my closest of friends
 and I see my virtues reflected in you.
 But everything passes, as you have taught me.
 The time has come for you to retire
 and reap the rewards of all your work.

SENECA

You are too generous.

EMPEROR

You are too modest.

SENECA

I am grateful, Imperator.

EMPEROR

I am grateful, Magister.

SENECA

Farewell then.

EMPEROR

Farewell.
 It is too bad your name was mentioned.

SENECA

Mentioned?

EMPEROR

Yes.

SENECA

How? By whom?

EMPEROR

The rebels, of course.
 They seemed to believe you were on their side.

SENECA

That's outrageous.

EMPEROR

Of course it is.
Your books are everywhere, you know.
Any can pick one up and read,
and interpret however they will.

SENECA

Of course they can.

EMPEROR

You cannot be held
at fault for that.

SENECA

Of course not.

EMPEROR

Of course not.
However of course, you'll nonetheless have to

SENECA

What?

EMPEROR

We have no choice.

SENECA

Oh.

EMPEROR

By your own hand, of course.

SENECA

Of course.

EMPEROR

You cannot know how sorry I am.

SENECA

But why?

EMPEROR

Come come. You can't expect me
to take such chances. Can you? No.
I'm not some kind of god. Well I am,
but that doesn't mean I know everything.
Divinity is limited, after all.
What if my trust in you were mistaken?
And of course it would be. I know you think
I'm crazy and stupid. That is your right.
And this is my right: to blot you out.
If I let you keep living, the people will think

I allow sedition inside my own palace.
 I was going to have to ask you to do this
 anyway, sooner or later.
 The revolt was convenient in that regard.
 And in your heart you knew this would come.
 It is for the best. With an Emperor
 who's crazy and stupid, the best thing is
 to withdraw as far as you can, is it not?
 Watch the stars pass overhead,
 join them perhaps. It's what you've taught me.
 You know I really will be sad.
 Who will write my Iliad now?
 Or my Aeneid? Who will write
 the epic poem to make me immortal?
 But there are no Iliads anymore.
 We don't have the poets for it. Poets
 don't know how to capture nobility.
 They've lost the skill, the belief, the vision.
 Where are the poets? Where is my Aeneid?
 Seneca, Seneca, you have broken my heart.
 Prefect.

CAPTAIN

Yes, Great Emperor.

EMPEROR

Escort my noble and beloved teacher
 home to his estates in comfort.
 Make sure he has whatever he needs.
 Give him time to write. A consolation.
 Another dialogue or two.
 Maybe even start that epic.
 No dramas, I think. They take too long.
 Stay with him, if you will, and be
 inconspicuous until it is time
 for him to take his leave of this
 our little restricted world. Then come back
 and report to me.
 Seneca? No words?
 Are you afraid? I'm sure you're not.
 You taught me to scorn the fear of death.
 Death is nothing but not being.
 A lamp doesn't suffer when it is not lit.
 What was that wonderful phrase you wrote?
 The day we fear is not our last
 but only the birthday of eternity.
 Seneca, I will miss you so sweetly.

CAPTAIN

When you are ready sir. I wait outside.

SENECA

I see then. The time to be silent has passed.

But the time to speak has passed as well.
 The time for inaction has certainly passed
 and so has the time for action.
 There is no time for love or pity
 or truth or justice or righteousness.
 Time has shortened and shortened till Time
 has disappeared and died.
 I wish I were not alive to witness
 this death, and this death and this death.
 Do not remain silent. You do not need to.
 But do not expect to be heard.
 Your voice will only scatter like smoke
 and the sky will be deaf, and the stars, and all space.
 A wall has been built across the sky.
 We are shut with ourselves for all of the time
 that no longer exists.
 And the stones of that wall across the sky
 are rotting. They drip contagion on us.
 Bits of falling stone crush brains.
 The air fills up with black.
 All the green plants turn black.
 Land becomes mud becomes stone becomes sand
 becomes dust.
 One by one the sounds go out.
 The sun withers red then gray then black.
 The crust of the ground crumbles
 and one by one we tumble to darkness.

I'm sorry to be alive for this.
 I'm still more sorry for you who witness.
 You who will live to see it.
 You who believe your lives can go on
 just as they did before.
 You who believe you still have time.
 You who believe you still have time.

VOICES

Qui credis tempus manet

SENECA

Who believe you still have time.