

Digesting Impressions: The Speeches of Attalus and Sotion in Seneca's 108th *Epistle*
Scott Lepisto (lepisto@usc.edu)
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1. *Ep. 108.2*¹: Nec passim carpenda sunt nec avide invadenda universa: per partes pervenietur ad totum. Aptari onus viribus debet nec plus occupari quam cui sufficere possimus. Non **quantum** vis sed **quantum** capis **hauriendum est**. Bonum tantum habe animum: capies **quantum** voles. **Quo plus** recipit animus, hoc se **magis** laxat.

Complete things should neither be snatched at random nor greedily taken into possession: one will arrive at the whole through the parts. The burden ought to suit our strength and no more should be seized than what we are capable of managing. Not as much as you wish, but as much as you can take should be drunk up. Have only a good mind: you will seize as much as you wish. The more the mind receives, the more it expands.

2. *Ep. 108.3*: Haec nobis praecipere Attalum memini...
I recall Attalus teaching us these things...

3. *Ep. 108.3-4*: 'Idem' inquit, '**et docenti et discenti** debet esse propositum, ut **ille** prodesse velit, **hic** proficere.' Qui ad philosophum **venit** cotidie aliquid secum boni ferat: aut sanior domum **redeat** aut sanabilior. **Redibit** autem: ea philosophiae vis est ut non **studentes** sed etiam **conversantes** iuvet. Qui in solem venit, licet non in hoc venerit, colorabitur; qui in unguentaria taberna resederunt et paullo diutius commorati sunt odorem secum loci ferunt; et qui ad philosophum fuerunt traxerint aliquid necesse est quod prodesset etiam negligentibus. Attende quid **dicam**: negligentibus, non repugnantibus.

"The purpose of the instructor and the student should be the same," he said, "so that the one wishes to benefit, the other to progress." He who comes to a philosopher carries back with him something good every day; either he returns home healthier or more curable. He will return however; this power of philosophy is such that it helps not only students, but also their companions. He who comes out into the sun will become tan, even if he did not come out for that reason. Those who remain in a perfume shop and linger a little too long carry the scent of the place away with them. And those who have been near philosophy, by necessity have taken something away, which has benefited even the negligent. Pay attention to what I say: the negligent, not the opposed.

4. *Ep. 108.19*: At Pythagoras omnium inter omnia cognationem esse dicebat et **animorum** commercium **in alias atque alias formas** transeuntium. Nulla, si illi credas, **anima** interit, ne cessat quidem nisi tempore exiguo, dum **in aliud corpus transfunditur**.

But Pythagoras used to say that there was an affinity of all things with all things and an intercourse of souls passing from one form into another. No soul perishes, if you can believe him, unless it passes away if but for a short time, while it is poured into another body.

¹ All Latin quotations follow Reynolds' edition of the *Oxford Classical Text* (1965).

5. *Ep.* 108.7: Adficiuntur illis et sunt, quales iubentur, si illa **animo forma** permaneat, si non impetum insignem protinus populus, honesti dissuasor, excipiat.

They are affected by them (those words) and become the sort of people they are ordered to be, if that stamp should remain in their mind, if the populace, the opponent of the good, should not straightaway intercept this noble impulse.

6. *Ep.* 108.20-21: ‘**non credis**’ inquit ‘**animas in alia corpora atque alia** describi et migrationem esse quod dicimus mortem? Non credis in his pecudibus ferisve aut aqua mersis illum quondam hominis animum morari? Non credis nihil perire in hoc mundo, sed mutare regionem? nec tantum caelestia **per certos circuitus** verti, sed animalia quoque **per vices** ire et animos **per orbem** agi? Magni ista crediderunt viri. Itaque iudicium quidem tuum sustine, ceterum omnia tibi in integro serva. Si vera sunt ista, abstinuisse animalibus innocentia est; si falsa, frugalitas est. Quod istic credulitatis tuae damnum est? alimenta tibi leonum et vulturum eripio.’

“Do you not believe,” he said, “that the soul is assigned to one body and then to another and that what we call death is a migration? Do you not believe that among cattle, beasts, or those sunk in water, a formerly human soul resides? Do you not believe that nothing dies in this world, but rather changes region? And that not only heavenly bodies turn through fixed circuits, but that living beings also go through exchanges and souls are driven through a cycle? Great men have believed those things. And so also maintain your judgment, but yet preserve your own impartiality in all things. If they are true, to have abstained from animals is harmless. If they are false, to have abstained is frugal. On this occasion what is the penalty for your cruelty? I am taking food for lions and vultures from you.”

Select Bibliography

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