



Volume 13
Issue 1 Fall/Winter 2004-05

Article 8

1-1-2005

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Recommended Citation

Seneca, Lucius Annaeus and Thomas, Michael (2005) "Letter 61: Live Each Day as Your Last," *The Promethean*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol13/iss1/8>

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LETTER 61: LIVE EACH DAY AS YOUR LAST

Lucius Annaeus Seneca; trans. Michael Thomas

Let us stop wanting that which we have always wanted. Certainly, I am doing this now. As an old man I do not desire the same things that I wanted as a child. Both days and nights pass for a single purpose—this is my task and I think constantly of this—to impose an end upon my old life. I do this so that every day may be to me like an entire life. I do not grasp each day as if it is the end, but I look at it as if it possibly could be the last day of my life. It is in this spirit that I write this letter to you, as if just now while writing, death were about to call for me. I am prepared to exit this life; therefore, I will enjoy life because I am not overly anxious to know how long this life will last. Before I reached old age, I paid attention to living well. In old age, however, I shall pay attention to dying well. To die well means to die willingly. See to it that you never do anything unwillingly. Whatever you oppose will become for you a necessity, but if you desire something, it will not be a necessity. By this saying, I mean, that he who receives orders willingly, escapes the harshest part of slavery: to do what he does not wish to do. It is not someone who does something that has been commanded who is miserable, but the one who does it against his will. Therefore, let us arrange our inward spirit so that we might desire any thing that is demanded of us. Above all, let us contemplate our end without sorrow. We must prepare ourselves for death before we prepare ourselves for life. Life is sufficiently supplied; however, we are too greedy in regard to its provisions. It seems to us that something is lacking, and undoubtedly it will always seem this way. To believe that we have lived long enough depends neither on the number of years nor on the number of days, but upon our mindset. I have lived, my dear friend Lucilius, long enough. In light of the fullness of life, I look forward to death. Farewell.