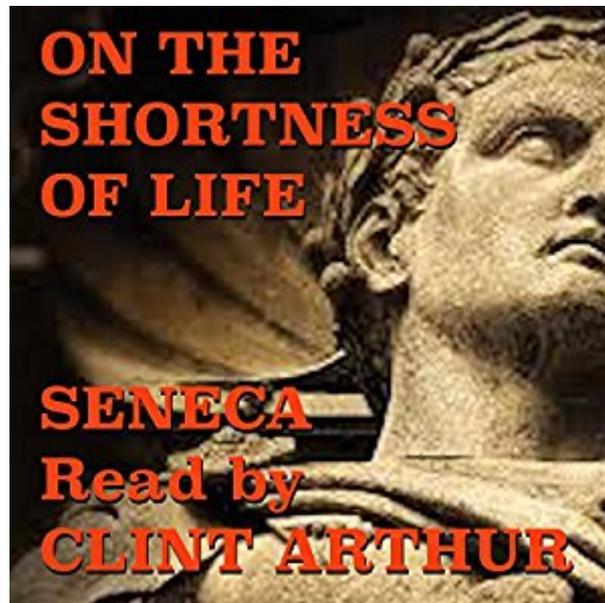


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On The Shortness Of Life



Synopsis

The majority of mortals, Paulinus, complain bitterly of the spitefulness of Nature, because we are born for a brief span of life, because even this space that has been granted to us rushes by so speedily and so swiftly that all save a very few find life at an end just when they are getting ready to live. Nor is it merely the common herd and the unthinking crowd that bemoan what is, as men deem it, an universal ill; the same feeling has called forth complaint also from men who were famous.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Seneca believes that many throw away many, and maybe most, of their days, which leads them at death to feel that life has been short and passed them by. For instance, they lose their days by pursuing their political ambitions, which makes them subject to the whims of others whose favor must be curried to win political office. Others lose their days in the pursuit of wine and lust; pursuits Seneca finds particularly wasteful. Other "engrossments" that waste one's days arise from the pursuit of the favor of what I would term "high society." Seneca's lists the ways in which one may waste one's days. It is in this waste that men come to believe that their days are short. The book is short and many of his observations ring true; for this, I recommend it. But, his prescription of pursuing philosophy as a more meaningful way to spend one's days and thereby lengthen one's life is, to me, unpersuasive.

Hard to believe we are separated by 2000 years. More like he is having a morning coffee with you,

discussing people and historical figures. Very perspicacious in his insights into people - more like a novelist - and a broad view. Have to remember he was a patrician, wealthy and in favour with the emperor Nero almost until the end of his life and had household slaves all of which may have given him a distorted view of the world. Talking to his household slaves would have been interesting too! Of course, his view that men show their character in the manner of meeting their death, is all very well but we're all full of bravado till we have our guts shot out! Being a coin collector, I particularly take to heart 'that man ... who arranges with anxious precision his Corinthian bronzes, the cost of which is inflated by the mania of a few collectors and spends most of the day on rusty bits of metal.' The Stoic philosopher can still teach us! I wonder how Seneca filled his days? Did he practice what he preached? Few preachers do!

This is a relatively short and easy read, as far as philosophical texts go. The book is thin with content on pages 3 to 54 with a larger print. I was able to read it in two days. I could have done it in 1 though my four year old was not making that easy. This is more of a summary of "On the Happy Life", a brief description of Seneca's major ideas and points he was making. It is thought provoking but not a life changer. You won't lose anything by reading this, being that it's so short and cheap. If you're looking to add substance to your library though I can't say this would be the one to add.

Too little time? Life's too short? Across the millennia the richest man in Rome and one of the sanest philosophers you will meet across the ages offers advice to get more out of your limited time span. Seneca rightly observes that someone who wastes your time steals the most precious commodity you have - time lost can never be restored. He describes first century Rome as if it is today, you never have time for friends, or they for you. You don't get to see anybody without an appointment. Time flies. But then comes some of the most beautifully true words in the history of advice on the art of living: The great philosophers of the past always have time for you Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, they are all at your disposal in the middle of the night. They are never too busy for you. Engage with them through their words. And as you read well into the past, you transcend the limitations of your own life, suddenly your own life stretches across the centuries. You gain longevity by living into the past, even if your future is limited! I came across this book of Seneca some ten years ago and I could never understand why it was never prescribed to us in academic philosophy! And then the potency of the insights are matched by the brevity of the writing. This book can rightly be called a source for a sane and inspirational life.

This classic work of literature by ancient philosopher Seneca has been hailed as one of the most important and profound essays of its type. To my knowledge, this is the first and only audio version of this work produced by an American. There's a free one done by a guy with a very heavy Irish brogue and it's hard to understand. Clint's all-American English version of the audio is clear, fast, and easy to understand. Very entertaining and thought-provoking. •Ali

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