

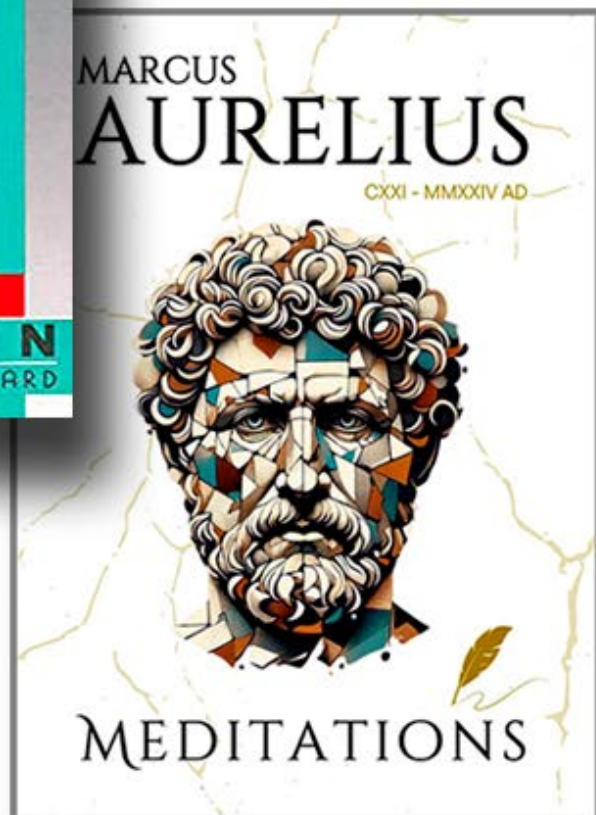
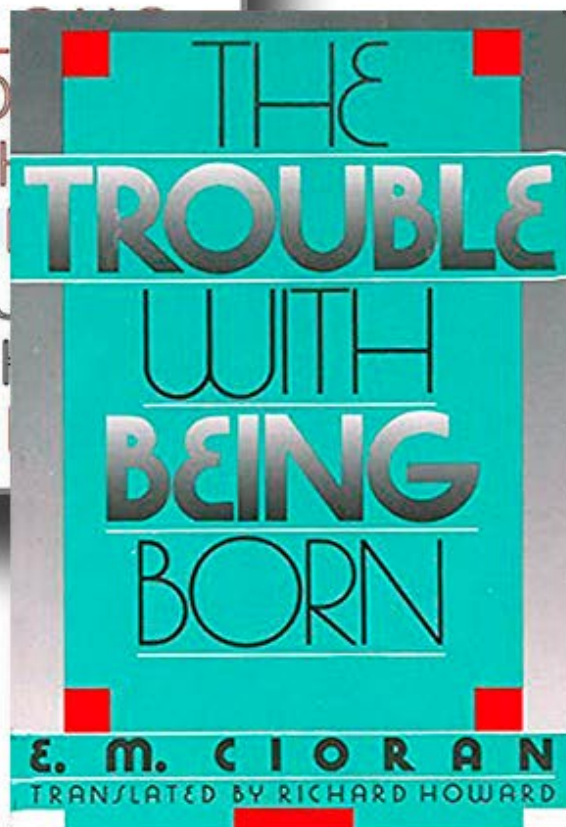
Life &/or Death

part 1 - SENECA (5 BC to 65 AD)

part 2 - E.M. CIORAN (1911-95)

part 3 - MARCUS AURELIUS (121 to 180 AD)

SENECA
ON THE
SHORTNESS
OF LIFE
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IF YO
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BOOK
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Life &/or Death – Part 1 of 3

SENECA (5 BC to 65 AD)

Dialogues and Letters
translated 1997 by C.D.N. Costa
edited & republished 2004 in a
Penguin Classics short paperback:
The Shortness of Life

selected & edited 2024 by MMB

- Life ceases for us just when we are getting ready for it.
- It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it.
- We are not given a short life, instead we make it short.
- Life is long if you know how to use it.
- A small part of a Lifetime is really lived. All the rest is not Life but merely Time.
- You are living as if destined to live forever.
- You act like mortals in all that you fear, and like immortals in all that you desire.
- Learning how to live takes a whole lifetime, and it takes a whole lifetime to learn how to die.
- You must not think a man has lived long because he has white hair and wrinkles. He has not lived long, just existed long.
- If each of us could have a tally of his future years set before him, as we can of our past years, how alarmed we would be to see only a few years ahead, and how carefully we would use them.
- Life is short and anxious for those who forget the past, neglect the present, and fear the future.
- Some men have been assailed by the gloomy thought that all their labors were for the sake of an epitaph.

Life &/or Death – Part 2 of 3

E.M. CIORAN (1911-95)

The Trouble with Being Born

French publication 1973, English translation 1976
selected & edited 1989 by MMB

This very second has vanished forever, lost in the anonymous mass of the irrevocable. Everything is unique -- and insignificant. (p.38)

We dread the future only when we are not sure we can kill ourselves. (p.77)

A book is a postponed suicide. (p.99)

When I torment myself too much for not working, I tell myself that I might just as well be dead and that then I would be working still less. (p.115)

In order to conquer panic or some tenacious anxiety, there is nothing like imagining your own burial. Pope Innocent IX, who, having commissioned a painting in which he was shown on his deathbed, glanced at it each time he had to make an important decision. (p.117)

My vision of the future is so exact that if I had children, I would strangle them. (p.130)

I was alone in that cemetery when a pregnant woman came in. I left at once, in order not to look at this corpse-bearer at close range, nor to ruminate upon the contrast between an aggressive womb and the time-worn tombs -- between a false promise and the end of all promises. (p. 151)

In the slaughterhouse, I watched the cattle being led to their death. Almost every animal refused to move forward. This scene often comes to mind when, ejected from sleep, I lack the strength to confront the daily torture of Time. (p. 159)

When someone complains that his life has come to nothing, we need merely remind him that life itself is an analogous situation. (p.168)

What is injustice compared to disease? If we find it unjust to be sick, we must speak of the injustice of existing. (pp.189-190)

The undeniable advantage of growing old is to be able to observe at close range the slow and methodical degradation of our organs. They become detached from the body, as the body becomes detached from us: it escapes us, no longer belongs to us. (p.206)

Man gives off a special odor: of all the animals, he alone smells of the corpse. (p.208)

Only to the degree that our moments afford us some contact with death do we glimpse on what insanity all existence is based. (p.209)

Life &/or Death – Part 3 of 3

MARCUS AURELIUS (121 to 180 AD)

Meditations

translated 1862 by George Long
prefaced, poeticized & edited 2024 by MMB

my PREFACE:

This translation in 1862 by George Long is included in the *Harvard Classics*. Many translations have been published in the past 160 years, including six just during the 21st century, and one as recently as 2024. Of the many older translations in the public domain that can be downloaded for free from the internet, George Long's is the most readable.

But first, my introductory poem written after I first read this book in 1985.

my POEM:

Third-grade girls in ponytails
nicknamed me Marcus Aurelius.

Yet not till thirty-three and a third
did I open his little book,
which will outlast my little life.

When the cuckoo tick-tocks
my final five o'clock,
waste not good food.

Row me to the Glades,
feed me to the gators.

As you watch me disappear
through their teeth of time,
offer these pages as paper napkins
for their crocodile smiles.

Between passage from rebirth to redeath
these passages peruse,
so you on your deathbed
might lastly gasp,
“What, again?”

my SELECTIONS across 3 pages:

Book II

12. How quickly all things disappear, in the universe the bodies themselves, but in time the remembrance of them.

14. No man loses any other life than this which he now lives, nor lives any other than this which he now loses. The longest and shortest are thus brought to the same. For the present is the same to all, though that which perish is not the same; and so that which is lost appears to be a mere moment. For a man cannot lose either the past or the future: for what a man has not, how can anyone take this from him?

17. Wait for death with a cheerful mind, as being nothing else than a dissolution of the elements of which every living being is compounded. But if there is no harm to the elements themselves in each continually changing into another, why should a man have any apprehension about the change and dissolution of all the elements?

Book III

3. Hippocrates, after curing many diseases, himself fell sick and died. The Chaldaei foretold the deaths of many, and then fate caught them too. Alexander and Pompeius, and Caius Caesar, after so often completely destroying whole cities, and in battle cutting to pieces many ten thousands of cavalry and infantry, themselves too at last departed from life.

Book IV

17. Do not act as if thou wert going to live ten thousand years. Death hangs over thee.

19. He who has a vehement desire for posthumous fame does not consider that every one of those who remember him will himself also die very soon; But suppose that those who will remember are even immortal, and that the remembrance will be immortal, what then is this to thee?

35. Everything is only for a day, both that which remembers and that which is remembered.

41. Thou art a little soul bearing about a corpse, as Epictetus used to say.

47. If any god told thee that thou shalt die tomorrow, or certainly on the day after tomorrow, thou wouldst not care much whether it was on the third day or on the morrow, unless thou was in the highest degree mean-spirited; for how small is the difference! So think it no great thing to die after as many years as thou canst name rather than tomorrow.

50. It is a vulgar, but still a useful help towards contempt of death, to pass in review those who have tenaciously stuck to life. What more then have they gained than those who have died early? For look to the immensity of time behind thee, and to the time which is before thee, another

boundless space. In this infinity then what is the difference between him who lives three days and him who lives three generations?

Book V

23. Often think of the rapidity with which things pass by and disappear. For substance is like a river in a continual flow, and the activities of things are in constant change, and the causes work in infinite varieties; and there is hardly anything which stands still. And consider this which is near to thee, this boundless abyss of the past and of the future in which all things disappear.

24. Think of the universal substance, of which thou hast a very small portion; and of universal time, of which a short and indivisible interval has been assigned to thee; and of that which is fixed by destiny, and how small a part of it thou art.

33. Soon, very soon, thou wilt be ashes, or a skeleton, and either a name or not even a name; but name is sound and echo.

Book VI

15. Some things are hurrying into existence, and others are hurrying out of it; and of that which is coming into existence part is already extinguished. It would be just as if a man should fall in love with one of the sparrows which fly by, but it has already passed out of sight. Something of this kind is the very life of every man.

49. Thou art not dissatisfied. I suppose, because thou weighs only so many litrae and not three hundred. Be not dissatisfied then that thou must live only so many years and not more; for as thou art satisfied with what has been assigned to thee, so be content with the time.

Book VII

19. How many a Socrates, how many an Epictetus has time already swallowed up!

21. Near is thy forgetfulness of all things; and near the forgetfulness of thee by all.

56. Consider thyself to be dead, and to have completed thy life up to the present time; and live according to nature the remainder which is allowed thee.

Book VIII

5. In a little time thou wilt be nobody and nowhere.

25. Antoninus saw Faustina die, and then Antoninus died. Celer saw Hadrianus die, and then Celer died. And anyone else? All ephemeral, dead long ago. Some indeed have not been remembered even for a short time, and others have become the heroes of fables, yet have disappeared even from fables.

37. Does Chaurias or Diotimus sit by the tomb of Hadrianus? Would the dead be conscious of it? and if the dead were conscious, would they be pleased? and if they were pleased, would that make them immortal? What then after these were dead? All foul smell and blood in a bag.

Book IX

3. Do not despise death, but be well content with it, since this too is one of those things which nature wills. For such as it is to be young and to grow old, and to increase and to reach maturity, and to have teeth and beard and gray hairs, and to beget and to be pregnant and to bring forth, and all the other natural operations which the seasons of thy life bring, such also is dissolution. Be neither careless nor impatient nor contemptuous with respect to death, but to wait for it as one of the operations of nature. As thou now wait for the time when the child shall come out of thy wife's womb, so be ready for the time when thy soul shall fall out of this envelope.

21. Termination of activity, cessation from movement and opinion, and in a sense their death, is no evil. Turn thy thoughts now to the consideration of thy life, thy life as a child, as a youth, thy manhood, thy old age, for in these also every change was a death. Is this anything to fear? In like manner, then, neither are the termination and cessation and change of thy whole life a thing to be afraid of.

33. All that thou sees will quickly perish, and those who have been spectators of its dissolution will very soon perish too. And he who dies at extreme old age will be brought into the same condition with him who died prematurely.

35. Loss is nothing else than change.

Book XI

34. When a man kisses his child, said Epictetus, he should whisper to himself, "Tomorrow perchance thou wilt die."

Book XII

7. Consider in what condition both in body and soul a man should be when he is overtaken by death; and consider the shortness of life, the boundless abyss of time past and future, the feebleness of all matter.

21. Consider that before long thou wilt be nobody and nowhere, nor will any of the things exist which thou now sees, nor any of those who are now living.

27. Constantly bring to thy recollection those who have been most conspicuous by the greatest fame or misfortunes or enmities or fortunes of any kind: then think where are they all now? Smoke and ash and a tale, or not even a tale.

32. How small a part of the boundless and unfathomable time is assigned to every man, for it is very soon swallowed up in the eternal! And how small a part of the whole substance; and how small a part of the universal soul; and on what a small clod of the whole earth thou creeps!

35. The man to whom it makes no difference whether he contemplates the world for a longer or a shorter time, for this man neither is death a terrible thing.