**The Death of Seneca: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.60-64**

There followed the murder of Annaeus Seneca, a joyful event to the sovereign: not that he had established his connection with the plot, but, as poison had not worked, he was anxious to proceed by the sword. Only Natalis, in fact, mentioned Seneca; nor did his statement go further than that he had been sent to visit him when sick and to make a complaint:— "Why did he close his door on Piso? It would be better if they cultivated their friendship by meeting on intimate terms." Seneca's answer had been that "spoken exchanges and frequent interviews were to the advantage of neither; still, his own existence depended on the safety of Piso." Gavius Silvanus, tribune of a praetorian cohort, was instructed to take this report and ask Seneca if he admitted Natalis' words and his own reply. By accident or design, Seneca that day had returned from Campania and broke his journey at one of his country-houses four miles out of Rome. Evening was near when the tribune arrived and surrounded the villa with pickets of soldiers: then he delivered the imperial message to the owner, who was dining with his wife Pompeia Paulina and two friends.

61 1 Seneca rejoined that "Natalis had been sent to him, and had remonstrated in Piso's name against his refusal to receive his visits. By way of excuse, he had pleaded considerations of health and love of quiet. He had had no reason for ranking the security of a private person higher than his own safety, and his temper was not one which was quick to flattery: no one was better aware of that than Nero, who had more often experienced the frankness of Seneca than his servility."[**18**](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15C%2A.html#note18) When the tribune made his report in the presence of Poppaea and Tigellinus — the emperor's privy council in his ferocious moods — Nero demanded if Seneca was preparing for a voluntary death. The officer then assured him that there were no evidences of alarm, and that he had not detected any sadness in his words or looks. He was therefore directed to go back and pronounce the death-sentence. Fabius Rusticus[**19**](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15C%2A.html#note19) states that, instead of returning by the road he had come, the tribune went out of his way to the prefect Faenius, and, after recapitulating the Caesar's orders, asked if he should obey them; only to be advised by Faenius to carry them out. Fate had made cowards of them all. For Silvanus, too, was numbered with the plotters; and now he was engaged in adding to the crimes he had conspired to avenge. However, he was so far considerate of his voice and his eyes as to send one of his centurions in to Seneca, to announce the last necessity.

62 1 Seneca, nothing daunted, asked for the tablets containing his will. The centurion refusing, he turned to his friends, and called them to witness that "as he was prevented from showing his gratitude for their services, he left them his sole but fairest possession — the image of his life. If they bore it in mind, they would reap the reward of their loyal friendship in the credit accorded to virtuous accomplishments." At the same time, he recalled them from tears to fortitude, sometimes conversationally, sometimes in sterner, almost coercive tones. "Where," he asked, "were the maxims of your philosophy? Where that reasoned attitude towards impending evils which they had studied through so many years? For to whom had Nero's cruelty been unknown? Nor was anything left him, after the killing of his mother and his brother, but to add the murder of his guardian and preceptor."

63 1 After these and some similar remarks, which might have been meant for a wider audience, he embraced his wife, and, softening momentarily in view of the terrors at present threatening her, begged her, conjured her, to moderate her grief — not to take it upon her for ever, but in contemplating the life he had spent in virtue to find legitimate solace for the loss of her husband. Paulina replied by assuring him that she too had made death her choice, and she demanded her part in the executioner's stroke. Seneca, not wishing to stand in the way of her glory, and influenced also by his affection, that he might not leave the woman who enjoyed his whole-hearted love exposed to outrage, now said: "I had shown you the mitigations of life, you prefer the distinction of death: I shall not grudge your setting that example. May the courage of this brave ending be divided equally between us both, but may more of fame attend your own departure!" Aforesaid, they made the incision in their arms with a single cut. Seneca, since his aged body, emaciated further by frugal living, gave slow escape to the blood, severed as well the arteries in the leg and behind the knee.[**20**](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15C%2A.html#note20) Exhausted by the racking pains, and anxious lest his sufferings might break down the spirit of his wife, and he himself lapse into weakness at the sight of her agony, he persuaded her to withdraw into another bedroom. And since, even at the last moment his eloquence remained at command, he called his secretaries, and dictated a long discourse, which has been given to the public in his own words, and which I therefore refrain from modifying.

64 1 Nero, however, who had no private animosity against Paulina, and did not wish to increase the odium of his cruelty, ordered her suicide to be arrested. Under instructions from the military, her slaves and freedmen bandaged her arms and checked the bleeding — whether without her knowledge is uncertain. For, with the usual readiness of the multitude to think the worst, there were those who believed that, so long as she feared an implacable Nero, she had sought the credit of sharing her husband's fate, and then, when a milder prospect offered itself, had succumbed to the blandishments of life. To that life she added a few more years — laudably faithful to her husband's memory and blanched in face and limb to a pallor which showed how great had been the drain upon her vital powers. Seneca, in the meantime, as death continued to be protracted and slow, asked Statius Annaeus, who had long held his confidence as a loyal friend and a skilful doctor, to produce the poison — it had been provided much earlier — which was used for despatching prisoners condemned by the public tribunal of Athens.[**21**](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15C%2A.html#note21) It was brought, and he swallowed it, but to no purpose; his limbs were already cold, and his system closed to the action of the drug. In the last resort, he entered a vessel of heated water, sprinkling some on the slaves nearest, with the remark that he offered the liquid as a drink-offering to Jove the Liberator.[**22**](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15C%2A.html#note22) He was then lifted into a bath, suffocated by the vapour, and cremated without ceremony. It was the order he had given in his will, at a time when, still at the zenith of his wealth and power, he was already taking thought for his latter end.

(from [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15C\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15C%2A.html))