

# Last Thoughts in LXXIX AD

by [Peter Dreyer](#) (July 2024)



Roman fresco, Third Pompeian Style, Pompeii. National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy

*The heat of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the year 79 CE turned the brain of one victim to glass. [\*] Employing deep silicon photon-counting quantum tomography and AI, scientists at La Sapienza (University of Rome) believe it may be actually be possible to decode some of his final thoughts.*—[News](#) report, *Corriere della Serra*,

**What would he in** that moment have thought,  
Imprinted on the lobes of his glassy brain?  
Vespasian died, becoming a god,  
And his son Titus is emperor now.  
He's banished Berenice, his Jewish princess, to please the Senate.  
Or was it something to do with the dreadful business in Gaza?[\[†\]](#)  
*Hoi polloi* would doubtless call that “antisemitism.”

Berenice! Mozart wrote an opera about her:  
*La clemenza di Tito*. (That's what they call “Italian”—  
Seems to me it's just bad Latin, the kind of thing  
Goth mercenaries speak on the frontier in Dacia.)  
Linus jokes that it's about Yugoslav partisans in World War II! Hah-hah!  
What would Wolfgang Amadeus have known about them—  
Unless, of course, he was in the Waffen SS, as some idiots claim.

What year is it again? I don't remember! Another damn senior moment.  
Oh, yes, 832—since the founding of Rome: *Ab urbe condita*.  
Well, Roman civilization is done for anyhow.  
There's red mullet for supper, Flavia says—with a salad of purslane.  
Good for you! Full of anti-oxidants, it seems,

And an amulet stuffed with it will infallibly avert evil. [‡]  
Damn, I never got to fuck Drusilla. How great would ...

[\*]

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/01/23/glass-brains-vesuvius>

[†] Perhaps a reference to the First Jewish-Roman War; see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Jewish%E2%80%93Roman\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Jewish%E2%80%93Roman_War).

[‡] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 20.210. The elder Pliny was killed himself attempting to view the eruption of Vesuvius more closely.

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Peter Richard Dreyer** is a South African American writer. He is the author of *A Beast in View* (London: André Deutsch), *The Future of Treason* (New York: Ballantine), *A Gardener Touched with Genius: The Life of Luther Burbank* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan; rev. ed., Berkeley: University of California Press; new, expanded ed., Santa Rosa, CA: Luther Burbank Home & Gardens), *Martyrs and Fanatics: South Africa and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Secker & Warburg), and most recently the novel *Isacq* (Charlottesville, VA: Hardware River Press, 2017).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)