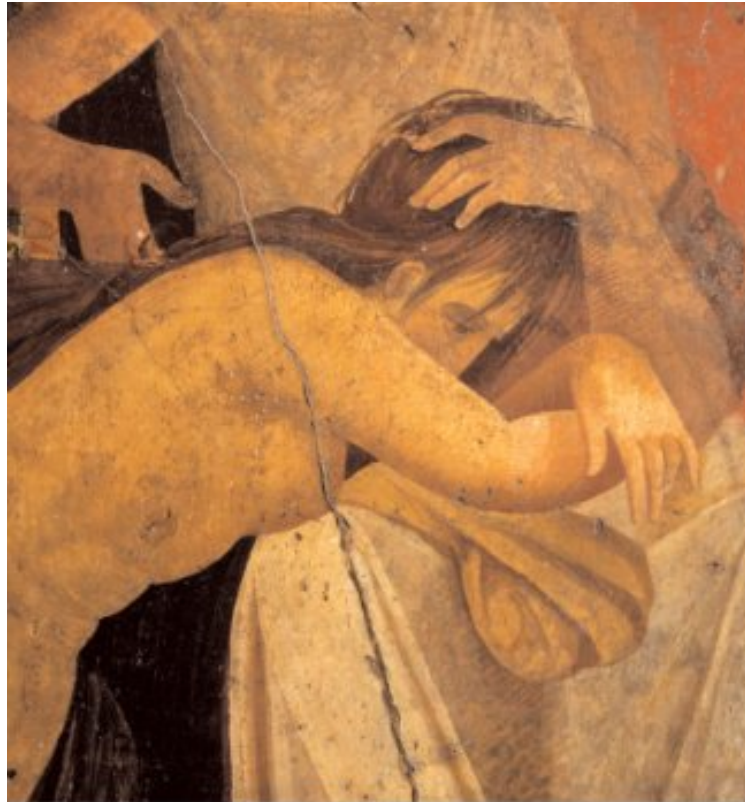


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Seneca : Four Tragedies and Octavia (Penguin Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Four Tragedies and Octavia (Penguin Classics):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. not for the faint of heartBy horse with no nameSeneca's tragedies are now regarded, if at all, as inferior imitations of ancient Greek tragedies, but during the Renaissance they loomed large indeed, helping to inspire the blossoming of Elizabethan drama that culminated in the works of Shakespeare. The scholarly consensus is that Seneca's tragedies were never meant to be performed, but I'm not sure: I suspect they were

written for Nero's private theater, since Nero considered himself an actor and the often lurid subject matter would have tickled his fancy. I am equally convinced that Seneca did not write "Octavia," which deals with the murder of Nero's first wife. Such a topic would have been far too sensitive while Nero was alive, and the play was probably written during the reign of Vespasian. It holds particular interest as the only tragedy of the ancient world, other than Aeschylus' "Persians," to be based on a contemporary subject rather than a story from Greek mythology. Even at a distance of 1900 years and in translation, these works can have a shattering emotional impact. What set Seneca apart from the Athenians was his dependence on rhetoric, his fascination with black magic and witchcraft, and the loving detail he gives to descriptions of the most horrendous atrocities. "Thyestes," with its cannibal banquet (a clear inspiration for Shakespeare's "Titus Andronicus"), is pretty nasty but the other plays are less macabre, though still exhibiting a fondness for playing on the reader's nerves. Seneca's tragedies have long been deemed unstageable, but I'm not sure: a good director can stage anything, and "Oedipus" received a notable production in 1968 by Peter Brook with Sir John Gielgud in the title role. I'm surprised Hollywood hasn't discovered Seneca, since his tragedies, though wordy, are full of the gore demanded by teenage audiences. It's a shame neither Verdi nor Puccini ever discovered "Octavia": it would have made a splendid opera libretto. T.S. Eliot compared the form of Seneca's tragedies to modern radio drama, but they also have affinities with Japanese no drama (particularly the reliance on ghosts). His influence in modern times can be seen in the works of dramatists as diverse as Richard Wagner, Eugene O'Neill, and Samuel Beckett. E.F. Watling's translations are mostly readable (though they contain occasional anachronisms) and have considerable poetic merit. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good! By Nick I bought this book specifically to look at the Phaedra: really good translation from the Latin in spite of the fact that this translation may be slightly liberal in its output. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Another great Penguin Classics translation... By Earl Cherry Jr Great translation of some of Seneca's best works. Well done Penguin Classics. Well done.

Based on the legends used in Greek drama, Seneca's plays are notable for the exuberant ruthlessness with which disastrous events are foretold and then pursued to their tragic and often bloodthirsty ends. Thyestes depicts the menace of an ancestral curse hanging over two feuding brothers, while Phaedra portrays a woman tormented by fatal passion for her stepson. In The Trojan Women, the widowed Hecuba and Andromache await their fates at the hands of the conquering Greeks, and Oedipus follows the downfall of the royal House of Thebes. Octavia is a grim commentary on Nero's tyrannical rule and the execution of his wife, with Seneca himself appearing as an ineffective counsellor attempting to curb the atrocities of the emperor. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Language Notes
Text: English (translation)
About the Author
Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c.4BC-AD65) was born in Cordoba, Spain, where he was brought up studying the traditional virtues of republican Roman life. He became a teacher of rhetoric but attracted attention for his incisive style of writing. Closely linked to Nero, his death was ordered by the emperor in AD65. Seneca committed suicide. E.F. Watling had translated many ancient classics for Penguin, including plays of Sophocles and Plautus. He died in 1990.