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Translation
of "Octavia,"
A Latin Tragedy

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A TRANSLATION OF OCTAVIA, A
LATIN TRAGEDY, WITH NOTES
AND INTRODUCTION

BY

ELIZABETH TWINING HALL, A. B., 1900

THESIS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Translation of Octavia, a

Latin Tragedy with notes and Introduction

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF

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INTRODUCTION

Octavia is the only extant tragedy in *fabula praetexta* or historical Roman tragedy in Roman scene and setting. It is remarkably true to fact, and almost every statement may be verified by reference to the ancient historians.

It deals with the sad story of Octavia, the daughter of Claudius and Messalina. Married against her will when only twelve years old to Nero, a lad of sixteen, she was after five years divorced by her husband on a charge of barrenness in favor of Poppaea Sabina, and in 62 A.D. was banished to a desert island there to be executed.

The play is a well rounded whole, all the parts are well worked out, and the characters are vivid and lifelike. There is a force and majesty in the tragedy which carries the reader through without pause. The sad story of Octavia forms the plot, but the poet has interwoven political motives and represents the people as taking Octavia's part. This only serves to hasten her death, for Nero eagerly seizes upon this as a pretext to condemn her.

There are five acts in the play, and each is closed by chants from the chorus which serve to explain the action further. There are many references to history and mythology, but the atmosphere is distinctly Roman. At no time do three actors appear on the stage in the same scene. The characters are exactly as one would expect from a close study of history and are delineated with marvelous skill and fidelity.

The versification is confined to iambic meters in the dialogues, while the choruses, though they form a very prominent feature, are restricted to anapestic systems somewhat loosely constructed.

The play is really a bitter impeachment of Nero and was composed shortly after his death in 68 A.D. The tragedy of Octavia for a long time was supposed to be written by Seneca and was handed down to posterity with his genuine dramas, but later authorities ascribe its authorship possibly to Curiatius Maternus. There is unmistakable evidence in the words of the play that it was composed after Nero's death, and this would render the authorship of Seneca entirely out of the question since he died three years before Nero.

There is perceptible the strong influence of Greek tragedy, but the plot and setting are distinctly original. Octavia has the characteristics of tragedy as laid down by Aristotle, that the aim is to purify the passions by means of action exciting pity for the actors and fear for the hearers, and that the leading characters must partly occasion their own misfortunes. Octavia conforms to the old Greek idea of the unities of time, place, and action. The place of action is confined to the palace of Nero; the action may be considered as taking place in

one day and night; and the action forms a whole of which each part has its proper place and the parts follow one another in logical order.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NERO, THE EMPEROR

SENECA, THE TUTOR OF NERO

PREFECT

MESSENGER

OCTAVIA, THE DIVORCED WIFE OF NERO

POPPAEA, THE MISTRESS OF NERO

NURSE OF OCTAVIA

NURSE OF POPPAEA

AGRIPPINA, MOTHER OF NERO

CHORUS

OCTAVIA, A TRAGEDY.

OCTAVIA: Already glorious Aurora (1) chases the wandering stars from the sky. Titan, (2) with radiant hair, rises and returns a clear day to the world. Come, thou (3) who art burdened by so many great misfortunes, utter once more thy sad lamentations. Surpass the kingfishers (4) and the swift nightingales, for thy fate is more grievous than theirs. O, mother, for whom I have always mourned, the first cause of my misfortunes, (if any consciousness exists in the shades) hear the sad lamentations of thy daughter. Would that Clotho (5) had broken my threads with her own aged hand before I saw thy features sprinkled with leathern blood. (6) O, day always fatal to me, from that time thou hast been to me more hateful than the lower regions. I have endured commands, hostility, and fierce glances from my cruel stepmother. (7) That gloomy Erinyes (8) has brought to my bridal room Stygian (9) fires and has destroyed thee, wretched father, (10) whom recently the whole world beyond the Ocean obeyed, before whom retreated

the Britains, (II) ignorant of our leaders and their own rights. Woe to me, father, that I am overwhelmed by the treachery of thy wife, and that thou liest prostrate, and that thy country, land and daughter obey the tyrant.

- (1) Goddess of the dawn.
- (2) The sun.
- (3) Messalina, third wife of Claudius and mother of Octavia and Britannicus. She acquired the most infamous celebrity of all the Roman matrons.
- (4) Alcyone threw herself into the sea when Ceyx, her husband, was shipwrecked, and the gods in compassion changed the two into kingfishers. Ovid Book XI 1.533-748.
- (5) The spinner among the Parcae.
- (6) Murder of Messalina
- (7) Agrippina
- (8) One of the Furies.
- (9) Styx, river in the lower world.
- (10) Claudius, fifth Caesar, reigned 41-54 A.D. He was distinguished among the Roman emperors by his politic munificence in founding empires.
- (11) Claudius determined to carry into effect the plan which Augustus had prematurely announced of an invasion of

the great island of Britain. He conquered magnificently and was accorded a triumph at Rome.

NURSE: If anyone is captivated, astonished, and stupefied by the first gleam of deceptive royalty, he will see, overthrown by a sudden attack of concealed Fortune, a recently powerful home and the progeny of Claudius who ruled the world and commanded the ocean which reluctantly received his fleets. (1) Behold, he who first placed the yoke upon the Britains (2) and covered unknown seas with such great fleets, and was safe among barbarous tribes and savage seas, perished by his wife's crime. (3) Soon she died by the hand of her own son whose brother met death by poison. The unhappy sister and wife sorrows; restrained indignation cannot conceal the grievous affliction of a cruel husband whom she in her innocence always escapes, while the passionate husband burns with a mutual hatred. In vain my fidelity and loyalty to soothe her sorrowing mind. Pitiless grief frustrates my plans; the mind's generous ardor cannot be subdued but gathers strength for evils. Alas, what an infamous crime our terror foresees. O, may the gods avert it.

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- (1) Referring probably to the construction of Portus Romanus and the extension of maritime power.
- (2) Claudius was the first emperor who really conquered the Britains.
- (3) Tiberius Claudius Drusus who succeeded Caligula obtained with his infant son the name of Britannicus in honor of his British victories. After the death of his third wife Messalina, he married his own niece Agrippina 49 A.D. She influenced him to set aside his own son Britannicus and to adopt her son Domitius

Ahenobarbus giving him the name of Nero. Having afterward shown a disposition to return the succession to Britannicus, Claudius was poisoned by Agrippina 54. Britannicus was poisoned in 55 and Agrippina murdered in 59 by order of Nero.

OCTAVIA: My fortunes are comparable to no evils, (1) *even if*

I should recall thy sorrows. Electra, (2) Thou wast permitted to mourn thy father and to avenge the crime by the vengeance of a brother whom thy loyalty rescued and thy fidelity protected. Fear prevents me from lamenting my parents removed by a cruel destiny, and forbids me to weep for the death of a brother who had been my only hope and the brief solace for so many misfortunes. Now I remain in my sorrow the shadow of a great name. (3)

(1) To Octavia her marriage was a funeral in a house where her father and soon afterward her brother had been poisoned, where a maid had become more powerful than her mistress, where a paramour had supplanted the lawful wife, and where she had been branded with a crime more hateful to her than the worst of deaths.

(2) Electra, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra and sister of Orestes. Her sad story has formed the basis of three extant plays, the Choephoroi of Aeschylus and the Electra of Sophocles and Euripides.

(3) Orestes

(4) Lucan Bk I. 135

(12)

NURSE: Listen, I hear the voice of my sad fosterdaughter. Does slow old age hesitate to go the wedding chamber?

OCTAVIA: O, nurse, thou faithful witness of my grief, see my tears.

NURSE: What day, wretched daughter, will free thee from such sorrow?

OCTAVIA: The day which will send me to the Stygian shades:

NURSE: I hope that these forebodings of thine may be long in realization.

OCTAVIA: Not thy prayers but the fates rule my destiny.

NURSE: A pitying god will give better opportunities to thee in thy sorrow. Soon thou wilt quietly win over thy husband with caressing obedience.

Octavia I could conquer the savage lion and the fierce tiger sooner than the merciless heart of a barbarous tyrant. He hates men of noble descent, he scorns both gods and men, and not yet does he meet the fate which his infamous mother by a dreadful crime bestowed upon him. Although he may be ashamed to have gained this unacknowledged empire by the kindness of his ill-omened mother, yet she will bear this title of honor (I) after death for for endless generations.

NURSE: Restrain the thoughts of thy raging mind; repress those rashly spoken words.

OCTAVIA: However much I may endure the inevitable, never can my misfortunes be ended except by sorrowful death. With a mother murdered and a father removed through crime, deprived of a brother, overwhelmed by my woes and grief, distasteful to my husband, and submissive to my slaves, I do not enjoy a pleasant life. My heart is always trembling, not from fear of death-- to die would be a joy-- but from dread of crime (1) of which I hope I may never be accused. For it is a punishment worse than death for me in my misery to see those swollen features and to endure the fierce glances of a tyrant (2) and the kisses of an enemy, not even whose courteous nod I cannot endure after the murder of my brother (3) whose empire the wicked assassin rules and over which he rejoices. How often the sorrowful apparition of my brother appears to my vision when quiet relaxes my limbs and sleep weighs down my eyes wearied by weeping. Now he arms his feeble hands with smoky torches and with hostile intent seeks the presence of his own brother; (4) now in fear and trembling he flees into my apartment; his enemy follows and violently pierces us with his sword as we cling together.

(1) Evidently the fear of suicide.

(2) Nero.

(3) Britannicus

(4) Nero

Then tremulous dread drives away sleep and renews my wretched sorrow and fear. Besides all these woes, there is the haughty mistress (1) resplendent with the spoils of our home_ the mistress whose son rewarded her by placing her upon that fatal bark, (2) More cruel than the waves of the sea, he destroyed (3) her by his sword after the failure of the shipwreck in the peaceful waters. After such a great crime, how can I hope to escape? A victorious and unfriendly woman (4) threatens my marriage couch. Burning with hatred toward me, she demands, as a reward for her dishonor, the head of the lawful wife. Come forth from the shades and aid thy appealing daughter, father, ⁽⁵⁾ or open the Stygian depths to the Sundered earth whither I may be borne headlong.

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- (1) Agrippina.
- (2) The attempt by Nero to dispose of his mother by shipwreck.
- (3) Murder of Agrippina
- (4) Poppaea.
- (5) Claudius.
- (6) The adoption of Nero and Octavia's forced betrothal to him.

NURSE: In vain, wretched daughter, dost thou invoke the spirit of thy father who in the lower world has no thought for his child. He could prefer the progeny of foreign blood (1) to his own son and he married in disgraceful nuptials the daughter of his own brother. (2) From thence is begun a long series of crime, murder, treachery, desire for dominion, and thirst for royal blood. The noble son-in-law(3) was betrayed by his wife's father and perished in the bridal chamber lest he become powerful by his union with thee. Alas, that such a crime should be! Silanus, given as a reward to Agrippina who falsely accused him, has taken his own life. Then there entered the conquered home the hostile son-in-law(4) and yet an own son, a youth of infamous genius, capable of any crime, and influenced by the wily stepmother who gave him to thee in marriage although thou wast timid and reluctant.

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- (1) The adoption of Nero and Octavia's forced betrothal to him.
- (2) Agrippina was the niece of Claudius and their marriage was contrary to law. The senate gave permission.
- (3) Appius Silanus to whom Octavia was affianced. Agrippina by a pretended charge of immorality caused him to be disgraced and the betrothal to be rescinded. At the marriage of Agrippina and Claudius, Silanus put an end to his own life.
- (4) Nero.

This fierce and victorious woman, carried away by her great success, has dared to menace the sacred empire of the world. Who can recall the many crimes, and infamous desires, and beguiling treachery of a woman who seeks power through the steps of every crime? Then sacred Loyalty fled with trembling step; cruel Erinyes with deadly tread entered the deserted halls, polluted with baneful fires the sacred Penates, violated Justice, and broke every law of Nature. The unnatural wife mixed poison for her husband; he perished; then soon, she, too, fell by the hand of her own son. Thou, too, art fallen, Britannicus, unhappy youth whom we forever mourn, recently the star of the universe and the protector of a mighty home; now, woe to me, thou art only light ashes and a sorrowful shade. Even the cruel stepmother shed tears when I placed thy body upon the funeral pyre and when the cruel frame played round thy godlike limbs and features (1)

OCTAVIA: Let it destroy me too lest this tyrant perish by my hand.

NURSE: Nature has not given such strength to thee.

OCTAVIA: Grief, sadness, misery, anguish, and mourning will give it.

NURSE: Thou hadst better conquer pitiless Nero by obedience.

(1) Agrippina was innocent of the death of Britannicus. The simple pyre had been prepared before and the corpse was consumed that very night in the midst of a sudden tempest.

OCTAVIA: For what purpose? That he may restore to me my brother whom he has murdered?

NURSE: That thou, thyself, mayst be safe; that thou by thy progeny, mayst keep from ruin the former home of thy father.

OCTAVIA: The home of the emperor desires another offspring. The dreadful death of my brother distracts me.

NURSE: Such great favor of the citizens toward him should soothe thy mind(1).

OCTAVIA: It alleviates my sorrows but does not free me from them.

NURSE: The power of the people is great.

OCTAVIA: But the power of the ruler is greater.

NURSE: He will have regard for his wife.

OCTAVIA: His mistress forbids this (2)

NURSE: But as everyone knows, she is hated by all.

OCTAVIA: But dear to my husband.

NURSE: Not yet his wife, however.

OCTAVIA: Soon she will be a wife and at the same time a mother.

(1) The sympathy of the people was with Britannicus. The superiority of natural over legal descent seems to have been generally acknowledged.

(2) Poppaea who became Nero's wife in 62 A.D.

NURSE: Youthful ardor rages at first but easily languishes just as the warmth of a little flame;not long does it continue in disgraceful love, but unceasing love for a chaste wife remains. The first slave(1) who dared to dishonor thy couch long swayed the emperor's mind, but now she fears ___

OCTAVIA: Undoubtedly someone preferred to herself.

NURSE: Humble, submissive, and confessing her fault, she heaps up votive offerings by which she shows her own fear. Cupid, the fickle god of love, will abandon her, and although beautiful in form and haughty in her resources she will enjoy but brief happiness. Juno, the queen of the gods, endured sorrows similar to thine when Jupiter, the lord of the heavens and father of the gods, changed himself into every form; now he took the wings of the swan(2); now, the horns of the Sidonian bull;(3)

(1) Acto, the favorite concubine of Nero. Originally a slave from Asia Minor, after Nero's infatuation she was claimed to be a descendant of King Attalus and at one time he even thought of marrying her. See Quo Vadis.

(2) Leda bore by Jupiter, who visited her in the form of a swan, two eggs from one of which came Pollux and Helen and from the other Castor and Clytemnestra.

(3) Europa was carried off to Crete by Jupiter in the form of a bull.

now he flowed in golden showers. (1) The stars of Leia shine in the sky; Bacchus (2) resides on paternal Olympus; the god Alcides (3) is the husband of Hebe, (4) nor fears the wrath of Juno although she has been his lifelong enemy. Yet the wise compliance and suppressed rage of the proud wife conquered. Great Juno alone now retains the Thunderer securely on the heavenly couch, nor allured by mortal beauty does Jupiter leave the lofty halls. Thou, too, a second Juno on earth, sister (5) and wife of Augustus, mayst thus vanquish thy heavy sorrows.

OCTAVIA: The cruel seas will be united with the stars; fire with water; the heavens with the gloomy under world; genial light with darkness; day with dewey night, before my spirit, always mindful of my murdered brother, will be united with the abandoned soul of my infamous husband.

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- (1) Danae was mother of Perseus by Jupiter who visited her in the form of a shower of gold.
- (3) Hercules, son of Jupiter and Alcmena, was pursued by Juno's hatred.
- (2) Bacchus, god of wine, son of Jupiter and Semele.
- (4) Hebe was daughter of Juno, cupbearer to the gods, and wife of Hercules after his deification.
- (5) After Nero's adoption by Claudius, he became Octavia's brother.

May the ruler of the heaven dwellers who often shakes the world with his deadly thunderbolts and terrifies our mind with sacred lightning, __may he prepare to overwhelm the head of the impious chief with flames. (1) We have seen in the sky, where Bootes (2) stiff with cold slowly draws his wagons in the eternal change of night, the glowing splendor of the comet expand its baneful light. (3) Behold, even the very atmosphere is contaminated by the ominous breath of the savage chief; (4) the stars foretell new calamities to the nations which the impious leader rules.



- (1) Whole passage similar to Vergil.
- (2) The Great Bear Constellation.
- (3) The appearance of a comet was considered a herald of misfortune. A comet appeared at this time and was generally supposed to portend the fall of the reigning prince.
- (4) In 63, a comet, great tempests, pestilence, the partial destruction of Pompei by an earthquake, and the news of the evacuation of Armenia by the Roman legions seemed to confirm the belief that the blessing of the gods was no longer with the emperor.

When long ago Tellus, furious at Jove, was a mother, (1) she did not produce a monster as fierce as this infernal Nero. This curse, more dreadful than Typhon, this enemy of gods and man, has driven the celestial deities from their temples and the citizens from their fatherland; he has deprived my brother of life; he has shed the blood of his own mother; yet he sees the light, he enjoys life, and continues to draw his deadly breath. (2) Alas, Jupiter, thou noble father of the world, why dost thou vainly hurl with thine own royal hand so many times at random? Why dost thou hesitate to act against such a baneful monster? May Nero, the pretender, the true descendant of Domitius (3) pay the penalty for his crimes— Nero, the tyrant of the world which he burdens with a disgraceful yoke— Nero, who defiles the very name of Augustus with his blenished character.

(1) Typhon was the youngest son of Tartarus and Tellus who was angry at Jupiter's giving birth to Minerva. Typhon was a monster with one hundred heads, fearful eyes, and terrible voices, who wished to obtain dominion over gods and men but was subdued by Jupiter.

(2) Life of Nero by Suetonius.

(3) The Domitian gens was noted for its cruelty.

NURSE: I acknowledge that he is unworthy of thee but submit to fate and fortune, daughter, and do not, I implore thee, arouse the wrath of thy angry husband. Perhaps some avenging god will appear and a joyful day will dawn.

OCTAVIA: For a long time our home has been beset with the heavy wrath of the gods. Pitiless Venus first exacted punishment for the madness of my wretched mother who was united in incestuous marriage, regardless of me, of her husband, and forgetful of the laws. (1) With her hair flowing and entwined with serpents, that avenging Erinyes came to the fatal marriage couch and quenched in blood the torches snatched from the marriage chamber. Anger aroused the heart of the fierce leader to disgraceful murder. Our unhappy mother perished by the sword, and her death continually saddens me. She has led forth to death her own husband and son; she has betrayed and destroyed our home.

NURSE: Cease renewing filial sorrows by thy weeping. Do not disturb the spirit of thy mother who has paid heavy penalties for her own madness.

Chorus: What rumor do we now hear? Falsely believed and repeated in vain so many times, may it lose credence; may the new wife not enter the bridal apartments; may the former wife, the child of Claudius, retain her own Penates; may she give birth to pledges of love in which a peaceful universe may rejoice and Rome preserve an eternal glory.

(1) Tacitus affirms that Messalina was actually married with the most formal ceremonies to her lover, Gaius Silius, during the lifetime of Claudius, her lawful husband.

Great Juno, chosen by lot, occupies the bridal apartment of her brother. Why is the wife and sister of Augustus driven from her ancestral halls? What does sacred pity avail her? What, a divine father? What, chastity and virtuous modesty? We, too, are forgetful of ourselves after the death of a leader whose son we betrayed since his life caused fear. (1) Once there was genuine Roman valor of the ancestors and the true race and blood of Mars in these men. They drove the haughty kings from Rome, and well did they avenge thy wrongs, Lucretia, thou, dishonored by the cruel tyrant and killed by thy own wretched hand (2). Tullia, the wife of Tarquinius, paid the penalty for her dreadful crimes: Tullia who wickedly drove the cruel chariot over the body of her murdered father and refused a funeral pyre to the mangled old man. (3)

(1) Britannicus

(2) Sextus, son of Tarquinius committed an outrage upon Lucretia who, after informing her husband Collatinus and father Lucretius, stabbed herself. The people then arose and drove out the Tarquins.

(3) Tullia, wife of Tarquinius, urged her husband to the murder of her father. She drove her chariot over the mangled body and her father's blood spirted over her and her carriage.

This generation has seen the infamous crime of a son who sent into the Tuscan seas his mother enticed into the fatal boat by treachery. (1) The sailors are ordered to leave the peaceful port; the waves resound with the measured beat of the oars. the ship is borne along upon the deep seas; sinking slowly, it suddenly divides and sucks in the waters. A great clamor mingled with women's wailing is raised to the stars; a dreadful death threatens them; each one seeks for himself escape from death; some cling to the planks of the shattered stern; their naked bodies cleave the waves; others swim for the shore; the fates plunge many to the depths of the sea. Augusta rends her clothing; she tears her hair and weeps. After she has given up hope of escape, burning with wrath and overcome by her misfortunes, she exclaims, "Dost thou reward me, thus, for my great services, my son? I confess that I am worthy of this ship since I gave birth to thee, and in my madness gave thee life, dominion, and the royal name of Caesar.

(1) Nero attempted to shipwreck his mother on her return from Baiae to Bauli, but the empress was picked up by boats from the shore and carried to Lucrine villa. Nero immediately sent Aricetus with a band of soldiers to complete the crime. As she lay dying from her many wounds, she exclaimed, "Strike the womb which bore a monster."

Lift thy face from the lower world, husband, and feast upon my punishment. The cause of thy death, Claudius, and the instigator of thy son's funeral pyre, I shall be borne to Tartarus, deservedly unburied and overwhelmed by the savage waters of the sea." As she spoke, the waves beat her face, she rises again from the waters; in terror, she beats the billows with her palms but finally exhausted she yields to the struggle. Loyalty still remained in silent hearts though scorned even in the hour of bitter death. Many hasten to aid their mistress whose strength is broken by the force of the sea. With shouts they encourage her as she slowly but persistently waves her arms. Eagerly they lift her into their boat. What did it profit thee to escape the waters of the cruel sea? Thou art destined to die by the sword of thy son whose infernal crime posterity will scarcely believe and to which succeeding generations will always be slow to give credence. The unnatural son is furious at his mother's escape, he grieves that she is saved from the sea, and he commits a greater crime by hastening her death. The servant sent to commit the murder lays open the breast of the mother with his sword. The unhappy woman, while dying, commands the slave to bury the fierce sword in her womb. "Here, here is the place. The sword must pierce the womb which bore such a monster." Then, passionately weeping, she breathed her last.

SENECA: O, thou powerful Fortune with beguiling but treacherous countenance! Why didst thou elevate me when I was content with my lot? Didst thou hope that, received into a lofty citadel, I might see afar so many causes for anxiety and therefore fall most heavily?(1)

(1) L. Annaeus Seneca was a senator and philosopher in the

in the reign of Caligula. Incurring the displeasure of Messalina, the wife of Claudius, he was banished in 41 A.D. to Corsica. He was recalled in 48 by Agrippina to be the tutor of Nero. After the accession of his pupil to the throne, Seneca was for a long time the ruling power, but being implicated in the Pisonian conspiracy, he was driven to suicide 65 A.D.

Rather would I, removed far away from serious misfortunes, lie concealed among the rocks of the Corsican sea where I might find freedom and leisure to pursue my studies. (1) O how delightful it was to watch the sky with its as great as anything Mother Nature, the builder of the universe, has produced, to gaze upon the alternating changes of the sun and moon surrounded by wandering stars, the far shining glory of the lofty firmament. If this world wanes, if, although so great, it returns again to gloomy chaos, be thou present to the world, that last day which overwhelmed the wicked race of the world with ruin so that rising again, it produced a new and better generation. Such a people (2) Jupiter brought forth when Saturn held the dominion of the universe. (3)

(1) Eight weary years of waiting were relieved by study and authorship. He is said to have written his extant tragedies during his exile.

(2) When Jupiter ordered the flood to come, Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha alone found refuge on Mt. Parnassus. They were ordered by the oracle to cast behind them the bones of their mother which they interpreted to be the stones of the earth. As they threw the stones, those thrown by Deucalion became men and those by Pyrrha became women.

(3) Saturn was the father of all the gods. His reign was the Golden age, the age of innocence and happiness.

The maiden Justice, the goddess of divine majesty, sent with sacred Piety from heaven, mercifully ruled the human race. The nations had not known wars, nor the fierce blasts of the trumpets, nor arms; they did not surround their cities with walls; everything was held in common. Mother Earth herself, blessed and happy in her devout foster sons, voluntarily opened her fruitful bosom. But a second race less skilled and gentle appeared; then a third, practical in new arts but not wicked yet (1). Soon this age was restless. It dared to follow the swift wild beasts in their course, to draw out with heavy net the fish concealed in the depths, to catch the birds in lime twig snares, to hold a trap-X-X X, (2) make the fierce bulls submissive to the yoke, to plow the earth before untouched by a plowshare, the land which concealed its fruits far within its sacred bosom. But a worse age pierced the vitals of its own parent.

(1) Second was the Silver Age when good Saturn was banished from above and Jove reigned.

" To this came next in course the Brazen Age;

A warlike offering prompt to bloody rage;

Not impious yet!

Hard steel succeeded then;

And stubborn as the metal were the men."
Ovid's Metam-Book I Dryden's Translation.

(2) Evidently something omitted.

It dug up heavy iron and gold and soon armed its cruel hands. The land was divided; kingdoms were established; new cities were built; it defended its own walls or, intent upon pillage, sought the property of a stranger. Astraea, now the great glory of the stars, fled from the earth and the cruel customs of men defiled with bloody carnage. (1) Desire for war and thirst for gold increased throughout the entire world. The greatest misfortunes had their origin in luxury, that beguiling evil, which gained strength from time and serious error. Vices acquired during so many long ages abound in us. We are oppressed by an infamous age in which crime rules, raging impiety grows furious, and passionate lust and disgraceful love conquer. With avaricious hands, victorious Luxury grasps the immense resources of the world to destroy them. But, lo, with a frenzied step and fierce glance Nero enters (2). I fear what he brings.

(1) Astraea was goddess of purity and innocence and daughter of Justice. After she was driven from earth, she was placed among the stars where she became the constellation Virgo.

(2) Nero Claudius Caesar, the sixth of the Roman emperors, born 37 A.D. was the son of Domitius Ahenobarbus and Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus. He was originally named Lucius Domitius. After the death of Ahenobarbus and a second husband, Crispus Passienus, Agrippina married Claudius who gave his daughter Octavia to Nero in marriage and subsequently adopted him with the formal sanction of the senate.

NERO: Fulfil my commands! Send a man who can bring back to me the severed heads of Plautus and Sulla. (1)

PREFECT: I shall not delay your commands. I will seek the camp immediately.

SENECA: It is best to decide nothing rashly against relatives.

NERO: It is easy for him to be just whose heart is free from fear.

SENECA: Clemency is a great cure for fear.

NERO: To destroy an enemy is the greatest virtue of a leader.

SENECA: It is a greater virtue to preserve the citizens for the father of the fatherland(2).

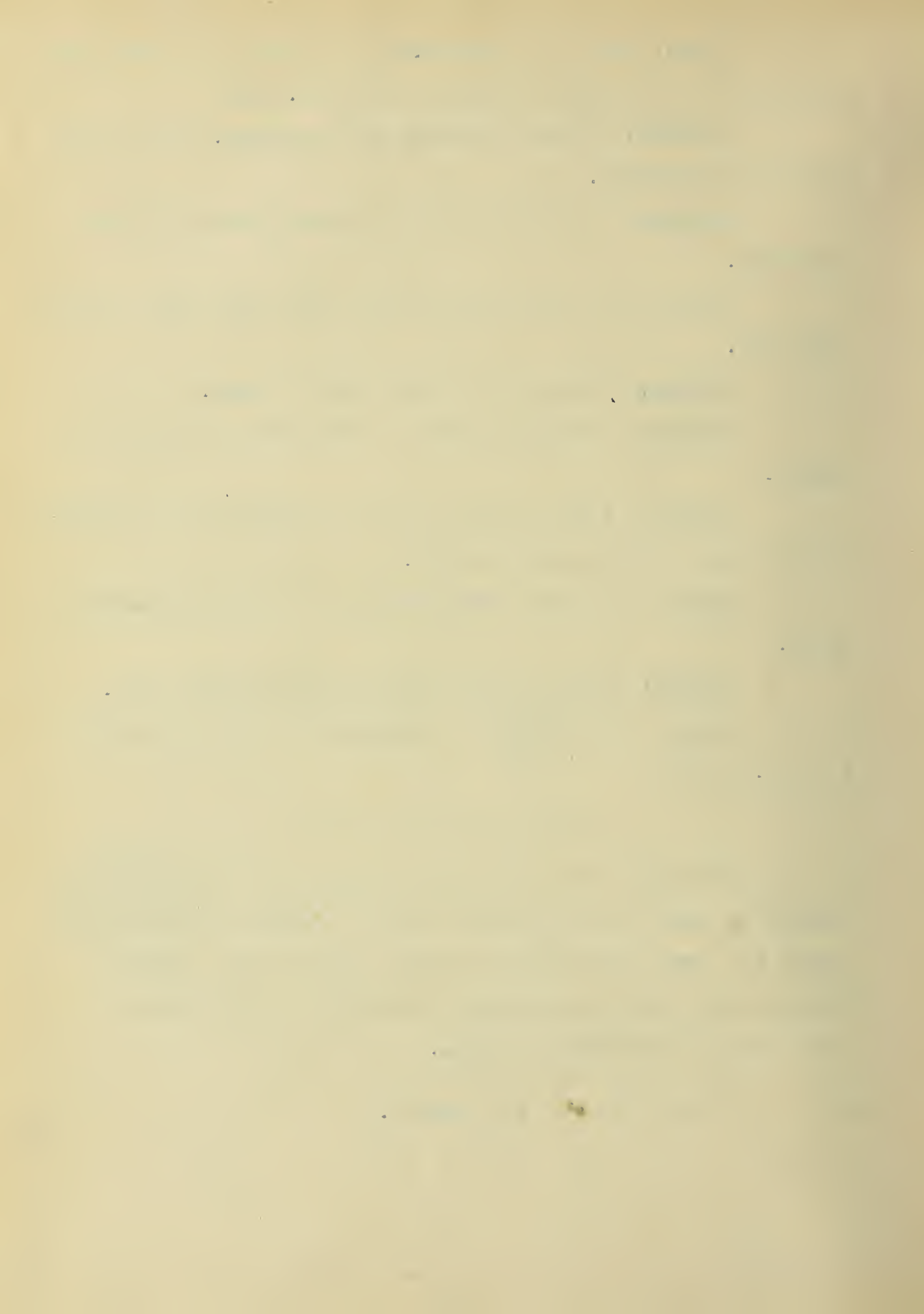
NERO: It is right for a merciful old man to admonish youth.

SENECA: Glowing young manhood must be guided more.

NERO: I think there is enough advice for this period of life.

(1) Cornelius Sulla who had been banished to Massila in 58 was put to death on the grounds that his residence in Gaul was likely to arouse disaffection in that province, and a similar charge proved fatal to Rubellius Platus who had for two years been living in retirement in Asia.

(2) Formal title of the emperor.



SENECA: May the gods always sanction thy policy.

NERO: I should be foolish to fear the gods for what I myself have done.

SENECA: Thou shouldst fear them all the more since they have given so much power to thee.

NERO: Fortune bestows all upon me.

SENECA: Trust not too much to her compliance. The goddess is fickle.

NERO: He is incompetent who does not know what he may do.

SENECA: It is commendable for a ruler to do what is right, not what he may.

NERO: The crowd tramples upon the humble.

SENECA: But it crushes the object of its hatred.

NERO: The sword guards the emperor.

SENECA: But loyalty better.

NERO: It is imperative that they fear__

SENECA: Compulsion is dangerous.

NERO: And that they obey my commands.

SENECA: Grant privileges.

NERO: I will be master.

SENECA: This procedure may breed conspiracies.

NERO: That the sword may destroy this object of contempt?

SENECA: May this crime never happen!

NERO: Shall I suffer my life, besides, to be sought so that, unavenged and despised, I may suddenly be overwhelmed. Even far distant exile did not subdue Plautus or Sulla whose persistent wrath arms the servants of crime for my death, since there exists in our city great partiality for these absent men and

many foster the hopes of the exiles. May all my possible enemies be put to the sword! May my hated wife perish and follow her beloved brother! May whatever is noble cease to be!

SENECA: It is glorious for a man to be eminent among illustrious men, to plan for the fatherland, to spare affliction, to refrain from fierce carnage, to control wrath, to give quiet to the world and peace to his own generation. This is the greatest virtue; by this path Heaven is gained. Augustus, the first father of the fatherland, thus attained the stars and is worshiped as a god in the temples. (1) Yet Fortune long tossed him about on land and sea, through all the vicissitudes of war until he crushed the enemy of his father. He bequeathed to thee his own divinity without bloodshed; he held the reins of empire with skillful hand; he made submissive to thy will the land and sea. Bitter envy disappears conquered by blessed harmony. The applause of the equestrian order and of the senate is aroused. Thou, the author of peace and the arbiter of the human race, chosen by the plebeians' entreaties and the judgment of the senate, (2) now by a sacred resemblance art ruling the world as father of the fatherland.

(1) Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor, originally Gaius Octavius—After his adoption by his great uncle, C. Julius Caesar, he was called Augustus by the senate. He defeated Brutus and Cassius, his adopted father's murderers at Philippi B.C. 42.

(2) In Nero's first speech, he placed the authority of the senate on the same footing with the consent of the soldiers.

Rome implores thee to guard this appellation and entrusts to thee her own citizens.

NERO: It is the gift of the gods since Rome herself and the senate are devoted to me and since fear of me has wrested prayers and submissive words from reluctant citizens. For a ruler to save men hostile to him and to the fatherland and proud of their royal race is madness, when with a word he can command his enemies to die. Brutus armed his hands to kill a leader from whom he had received prosperity. (1) Unconquerable in battle, father of nations and equal to Jove, Caesar crowned with honors fell by the wicked crime of the citizens. How many murders of her own citizens has Rome seen? How many noble men have been killed by divine Augustus who deserved Heaven by his sacred virtue? How many youths and old men has he scattered over the world and destined to bitter death when from fear of death they fled from their own homes and the sword of the triumvirate. (2) Sorrowing fathers saw their sons' heads exposed on the Rostra, but they could neither weep nor groan for their own children, even when the forum was defiled by dreadful corruption and the thick blood dripped over the putrid countenances. There was no end to bloodshed and murder.

(1) Brutus murdered Caesar, his patron.

(2) Augustus, Antony, and Lepidus formed a triumvirate and made a proscription of all their enemies. More than two thousand knights and three hundred senators were thus put to death and their property confiscated.

Gloomy Philippi long frightened the birds and savage wild beasts. The Sicilian Sea engulfed the fleets and men often abandoning their fellow countrymen, and the world was shaken by the mighty power of the triumvirate. Conquered, with his ships prepared for flight, and soon to die, Antony sought the Nile. (1) The Egyptian Cleopatra a second time drained the blood of a Roman leader. (2) Now he has reached the lower world. Yonder is buried civil war which long and wickedly has been carried on. Finally the wearied victor sheathed his sword dulled by fierce wounds, and fear held the empire. By the arms and fidelity of the soldiery he was safe; he was pronounced a god by the noble piety of the son, defied after death, and worshipped in the temples. Stars will be destined for me, too, if I shall be the first to attack with a cruel sword whatever is hostile to me and shall establish a home for a noble offspring.

SENECA: The glory of the Claudian house, the daughter of a god, and chosen like Juno for the bridal couch of a brother, will fill thy home with divine progeny.

(1) Marcus Antonius, the triumvir, received Asia as his share and there met Cleopatra. He followed her to Egypt, a victim of her charms. At the battle of Actium, her flight and Antony's subsequent pursuit changed the destiny of the Roman empire.

(2) Pompeius had fallen victim to the charms of the beautiful Egyptian.

NERO: The vile mother withheld confidence from her daughter's husband, and never has the soul of Octavia been united with mine. (1)

SENECA: Love is scarcely intelligible in youthful years; overcome with shame it conceals its passion.

NERO: I, too, long made this same mistake, but the unmistakable signs of her lonely heart and features revealed her hatred for me. Yet burning indignation has determined to avenge this. I have found a wife worthy of my couch, a woman of noble family and magnificent bearing. (2) She is more beautiful than Venus, or the wife of Jove, or the stately goddess of war.

SENECA: Let the goodness, fidelity, modesty, and character of the wife please the husband. The good alone continue to be second to none in mind and spirit. The days, one by one, rob the flower of its beauty. (3)

(1) Agrippina embraced the cause of the wretched Octavia and declared herself to be the protectress of her injured innocence.

(2) Poppaea Sabina, a very beautiful but licentious woman. She was the daughter of T. Ollius but assumed the name of her maternal grandfather, Poppaeus Sabinus. She was first married to Rufius Crispinus and afterward to Otho from whom she was divorced in order to marry Nero. She persuaded Nero to murder his mother who was opposed to the marriage. She was killed by a kick from Nero.

(3) Similar to Catullus and Vergil.

NERO: The gods have bestowed every gift upon one woman, and the fates have decreed her for me.

SENECA: Love will abandon thee. Do not trust rashly.

NERO: Can Jove himself keep away this tyrant of the heavens who penetrates the savage waves of Neptune and the kingdoms of Pluto and draws the celestial deities from their home above?

SENECA: The mind of man assumes that swift Love is a pitiless god. It arms his divine hands with bow and arrow; it gives him a cruel torch and believes him to be the son of Venus and Vulcan. Love is the powerful force of the mind and the caressing warmth of the spirit. It is fostered in youth and nourished in extravagance and idleness, among the joyful blessings of Fortune. If thou shalt cease to nourish and to cherish this Love, it falls in a short time and destroys its own strength.

NERO: I consider Love to be the greatest reason for existence; through it, passions spring up. Love is harmless; the human race is always refreshed by pleasing love which soothes the fierce wild beasts. May Cupid bring to me nuptial torches, and may he join Poppaea to me in wedlock.

SENECA: The grief of the people can hardly endure these nuptials, nor can sacred loyalty consent. (1)

NERO: Shall I alone be forbidden what is permitted to all?

SENECA: The people always exact greater deeds from the emperor. .(2)

(1) The Romans were very indignant at this marriage.

(2) Noblesse oblige.

NERO: It pleases me to test whether good will rashly harbored in their minds dies overpowered by my strength.

SENECA: Thou hadst better calmly gratify thy subjects.

NERO: It is bad government when the common people rule the leader.

SENECA: When the people can obtain no redress, they justly mourn.

NERO: It is right to extort by force what entreaties can not accomplish?

SENECA: It is difficult to refuse.

NERO: It is a crime for an emperor to be forced.

SENECA: Let him yield.

NERO: Rumor will report him conquered.

SENECA: Rumor is light and airy.

NERO: Although that may be, it brands many people.

SENECA: It fears men in lofty positions.

NERO: Yet not less does it censure.

SENECA: Rumor can easily be suppressed. Let the favors of divine Claudius, and the youth, fidelity, and modesty of Octavia appease thee.

NERO: Yet cease to urge me. Already thou hast threatened me too much. I have power to do even what SENECA condemns. Too long have I delayed my solemn vows to Poppaea since she is soon to become the mother of my child. Why do I ^{not} appoint tomorrow for our nuptials?

AGRIPPINA: I have come from the lower world to this wicked bridal, carrying the Stygian torch in my blood-stained hand. Poppaea as a bride veils herself with these fires of passion which

my vengeance and anguish will turn to bitter destruction. Even among the shades, the memory of my unnatural murder haunts me, and I am oppressed by my unavenged spirit. Deservedly I recall the deadly reward of the ship, the recompense for my ambition, and the night when I deplored my shipwreck. I had vowed to lament the violent death of my companions and my son's cruel crime__ he gave me no opportunity to weep but repeated his wicked crime. Saved from a watery grave, slain by the sword, defiled by wounds, among my own household gods, I breathed my last, nor did I quench with my blood my son's hatred. The fierce tyrant rages at the very name of mother. He desires to forget benefits; he destroys his mother's statues and titles of honor throughout the entire empire which her ill-fated love gave to him to control for her punishment. My murdered husband disturbs and threatens me even after my death, and with flames seeks my hated features. He approaches and menaces me; he imputes to me his son's death and cenotaph; he demands the assassin's punishment. Cease thy entreaties. Expiation will soon be made. Avenging Erinyes prepare for the impious tyrant the lash, disgraceful flight, a worthy death, and punishments which surpass the thirst of Tantalus, (1)

(1) Tantalus was admitted to the feasts of the gods, but having disclosed their secrets he was sent for punishment to the lower world where he stood up to his chin in water under an overhanging fruit tree, both of which retreated whenever he attempted to satisfy the hunger and thirst which tormented him.

the dreadful labor of Sisyphus,(1) the bird of Tithys,(2) and the wheel that whirls the body of Ixion(3). Although the haughty tyrant may fill the hall with marble statues and cover it with gold,(4) Although an exhausted world may send riches,although the suppliant Parthians may bow before his blood-stained hands,(5) although empires may bestow their treasures,yet the day will come when abandoned ,ruined,and deprived of everything,he will turn his wicked thoughts to his own crimes and surrender his life to his enemies. (6)

- (1) Sisyphus' task in the lower world was to roll up hill a huge stone which constantly rolled back again.
- (2) A vulture was constantly feeding upon Tityos' liver which as constantly grew again.
- (3) Ixion was bound to an ever - revolving wheel.
- (4) Life of Nero by Suetonius.
- (5) In 66 occurred the visit of the Parthian prince,Tiridates to Italy to receive his crown from the hands of the Roman emperor.
- (6) Compare with curse of Dido in Vergil when Aeneas went below.

Alas, how have my vows resulted? whither have fury and the fates led thee, my son, that the wrath of thy mother who perished by thy crime may yield to such great misfortunes? Would that the savage wild beasts had torn my vitals before I brought thee, a little child, into the world and nourished thee. Would that guiltless and without consciousness, my son, thou hadst perished. Would that with me thou hadst seen the peaceful home of the lower world, thy father, and thy ancestors, men of great renown. Now disgrace and unending grief await them from thee, wicked son, and from me who gave birth to such a monster. Why do I hesitate to hide my face in Tartarus, stepmother, wife and parent who have brought misfortune to all my kinsfolk and friends?

OCTAVIA: Cease thy weeping on such a joyful holiday (1) of the city lest thy great love for me excite the fierce wrath of the emperor and be a source of misfortune to thee. This is not the first wound my heart has known. I have felt deeper sorrows. Today will end my anguish by death. I shall not be forced to see the face of my cruel husband nor to enter the hated bridal chamber of a slave. Sister of Augustus I shall be but not his wife. Let only bitter punishment and fear of death be far from me. When thou dost remember the crimes of this wicked man, canst thou in thy misery hope for mercy? Long saved for these nuptials, an unfortunate victim at last thou wilt fall. But why dost thou with tear-stained cheeks look so often in terror at thy father's palace? Hasten to the city walls. Leave the blood-stained hall of the chief.

CHORUS: See, a day, long foretold by any rumor, dawns.

Claudia is forced to leave dread Nero's bridal room which now victorious Poppaea occupies. Our loyalty and indignation are oppressed by foreboding fear. Where now is the power of the Roman people which often destroyed noble leaders, which once gave laws to an invincible fatherland and fasces to worthy citizens, which commanded war and peace, which conquered fierce tribes and imprisoned royal captives? Behold the images of Poppaea and Nero gleam every where before our sight(1). May the angry people dash to the ground the exquisitely carved statues of the mistress, and may it drag her -from the royal couch. (2) May it soon seek the palace of the emperor with hostile flames and fierce weapons.

NURSE OF POPPEAE: Where art thou going from thy husband's bridal chamber, trembling daughter? why in terror dost thou seek concealment? Why dost thou weep? Surely the day dawns for which we have sought by prayers and vows. Thou art married to Caesar whom thy beauty captivated. Although thou art despised by Seneca, (3) Venus, the mother of Love and greatest of all divinities, has charmed the emperor and given him over to thee.

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- (1) Poppaea's head appeared on the coins side by side with Nero, and her statues were erected in the public places of Rome.
- (2) Sejanus. Juvenal's Satires.
- (3) Seneca and Burrhus were both opposed to the marriage.

Thou hast sat in lofty halls; thou hast rested upon royal couches. The astonished senate saw thee with thy head adorned with the red bridal veil, offering incense to the gods and sprinkling the sacred altars with fragrant wine. (1) Close by thy side, honored among the many happy omens of the citizens, showing joy in his haughty bearing, the chief advanced. Thus did Peleus receive his wife Thetis from the foaming waves. They say the Heaven dwellers and every divinity of the sea united to celebrate their nuptials. (2) What has changed thee so suddenly? Tell me why thou dost grow pale and weep?

POPPAEA: O, nurse, confused by the sad and fearful sights of the past night, disturbed in mind, and deprived of feeling, I am borne along. When joyful day gave place to gloomy stars and heaven to night, clasped in the embrace of Nero, I could not sleep nor rest for a long time. For a sad throng seemed to celebrate my nuptials (3) Roman matrons with flowing hair made doleful lamentations. Often amid the terrible blasts of trumpets, my husband's cruel mother shook the blood-stained torch. When resistless fear compelled me to follow her, the sundered earth opened before me in a vast chasm.

(1) Similar to Catullus.

(2) The wedding of Peleus and Thetis was honored by the presence of all the gods with the exception of Discord who was not invited and who took revenge by throwing among the assembled gods the golden apple which was the source of so much misery.

(3) Poppaea's dream.

Borne headlong, I see the marriage couches and I marvel at mine in which, wearied, I reclined. I see my former husband and son coming with a crowd of attendants. (1) Crispinus hastens to embrace and kiss me. Just as he entered my dwelling, trembling Nero buried the savage sword in his throat. Then overwhelming terror seized me. Horrible fear shakes my body and brings anguish to my heart. Anxiety has kept me speechless, but now thy faithful loyalty induces me to speak. Alas, why do these departed spirits come from the lower world to threaten me? Why have I witnessed the death of my husband?

NURSE: Whatever the restless activity of the mind considers, divine consciousness silently and swiftly recalls in sleep. (2) Dost thou wonder that, clasped in the embrace of a new husband, thou hast dreamed of thy former one, of the bridal room, and nuptial couch? But on such a happy day, does it disturb thee that matrons with flowing hair beat their breasts? They mourn the divorce of Octavia among the sacred Penates of her brother and in the home of her own ancestors. That torch which thou didst follow, borne aloft by the hand of Augusta, predicts to thee a royal and sacred name. It foretells that the temples of the lower world will be thy eternal couches.

(1) Poppaea's first husband was Rufius Crispinus.

(2) Attempt of the nurse to explain the dream.



It does not predict war that thy chief buried the sword in his throat, but it meant that he sheathed his sword in peace. Collect thy thoughts, accept thy good fortune, I implore thee, and casting aside all fear return to thy bridal apartments.

POPPAEA: I have determined to seek the shrines and sacred altars, to propitiate the gods with sacrifices that terror and astonishment may return upon my enemies. Offer up vows for me and honor the god with devout prayers that the present state of affairs may continue.

CHORUS: If gossiping rumor which now rules and again abandons the stars, should tell of the true stratagems of Jove and his pleasing loves__ Jove who disguised as a swan had slept upon the breast of Leda, and who, as a fierce bull, had carried the stolen Europa through the waves he will seek thy embraces, Poppaea, whom he prefers to Leda and to Danae to whom he once descended in a golden shower. Although Sparta may boast of Helen's beauty and Paris, the shepherd of Phrygia, may tell of his reward, Poppaea is more beautiful than the Spartan Helen who caused such fierce wars and overthrew the kingdom of Priam. But who rushes in with astonished step, and what news does he bring with gasping breath?

MESSENGER: May the soldiers who guard the palace of the emperor defend the hall which the furious people threaten. Behold, the anxious cohorts bear aid to the city. The anger of the people rashly aroused does not yield to fear but gathers strength and force.

CHORUS: What madness and terror distract his mind?

MESSENGER: The crowds of people are strongly attached to Octavia, and frenzied by her great wrongs and persecutions they

surge in turmoil everywhere. (I)

CHORUS: Tell what they have dared to do and by what counsel?

MESSENGER: The gods prepare to return to Claudia, her brother's penates and couch, the empire which was her dowry.

CHORUS: Whom does Poppaea now hold in allegiance?

MESSENGER: This rash favor inflames the mind of the people and drives them headlong into raging madness. All the costly marble and shining bronze images of Poppaea are broken and lie prostrate overthrown by their savage swords. They drag her dismembered statues along and after trampling them in the filthy mire, finally destroy them entirely. My fears conceal their plans and fierce deeds. They prepare to burn the palace of the emperor unless he surrenders the new wife to their wrath and submissively returns to Claudia her own penates. I shall not delay to carry out the commands of the prefect, that Nero may know the movements of his citizens.

(I) Twelve days after Nero divorced Octavia, he married Poppaea who brought a false accusation against the former wife, and Octavia was imprisoned in Campania. When the citizens murmured against such an unjust decree and Nero recalled her, they rushed tumultuously to the capital to offer sacrifice. They overthrew all the statues of Poppaea within reach and crowned Octavia's. They surged around the palace until the emperor dispersed them with an armed force.

CHORUS: Cupid carries invincible weapons with which thou dost vainly excite fierce wars. He will overwhelm thee with the fires of passion with which he has often destroyed thunderbolts and has drawn captive Jove from the sky. Thou wilt pay the penalty with thy life. Glowing with passion, he is not patient nor easily controlled. He commanded fierce Achilles to play the lyre; He shattered the Greeks and Menelaus; he overturned the kingdom of Priam; he destroyed royal cities. Now the mind fears what the relentless power of the pitiless god brings.

NERO: O, too lenient is the hand of my soldiers and my anger after such a great wrong, since civilian blood has not quenched the torches burning for us and since Rome which produced such a monster does not reck with the blood of the people. The wicked crime of the common people deserves more severe punishment. But let that woman who has stirred up rebellion among the citizens and whom I have always suspected though she was wife and sister, too__ let her die by my wrath and let her extinguish my anger in her own blood. Let the walls of the city soon perish in my flames. Let disgraceful poverty, hunger, and cruel sorrow destroy a hated nation. Great crowds corrupted by the prosperity of the times run riot; moderation loses its place and it can't endure a peaceful reign, but it is borne hither by restless audacity, and is hurled thither by its own temerity. Misfortune must govern it; a heavy yoke must always crush it down lest it should dare to compare me with former rulers and to conspire against my wife. Crushed by fear of punishment, the people will learn to obey the will of its own leader. But I see a man coming whose singular loyalty and remarkable fidelity have placed him in command of my legions.

PREFECT: I announce that the uprising of the people is checked by the death of a few who long rashly resisted.

NERO: And is this all? Dost thou, a soldier, thus obey thy leader's commands? Why dost thou cease thy endeavors? Is this the vengeance due me?

PREFECT: The leaders of the rebellion have fallen.

NERO: Why have not all perished who dared to seek my palace with torches, to lay down the law to the emperor, to remove such a wife from my couch, and to dishonor her in everyway? Shall they escape richly deserved punishment?

PREFECT: Will thy indignation prepare punishment for thy own citizens?

NERO: It will prepare a punishment which will never be forgotten.

PREFECT: Let thy wrath, not our fear, restrain us.

NERO: The first age which has deserved my wrath shall expiate it.

PREFECT: Disclose what thy anger demands so that we may punish the culprit.

NERO: It demands my sister's death and her severed head.

PREFECT: Chilling horror holds me spellbound.

NERO: Dost thou hesitate to obey?

PREFECT: Why dost thou doubt my loyalty?

NERO: Because thou art merciful to an enemy.

PREFECT: Should a woman receive this name?

NERO: She incites crime.

PREFECT: Who is it who accuses her?

NERO: The wrath of the people against me.

PREFECT: Who can rule the frenzied crowd?

NERO: She who influenced it.

PREFECT: I do not think anyone could.

NERO: A woman whose mind is naturally inclined to evil has inflamed their hearts with evil plans to injure me.

PREFECT: But she refused their aid.

NERO: But only that she might not be accused and that fear of punishment might not overcome her weak strength. Retribution will finally overtake the long condemned criminal. Hear my plans and carry out my commands. (1) Order Octavia to be placed on a ship and carried far away to a desert isle. There let her be killed that the fear in my heart may subside.

CHORUS: Indignation at the present instance forbids mention of many examples of fickle fortune. The woman upon whom the citizens wished to bestow the empire of the world, now they see led weeping to bitter punishment and death. Well does contented poverty conceal itself in humble dwellings. Often tempests shake the homes or fortune overwhelms them.

OCTAVIA: Where dost thou lead me? What exile does the tyrannical queen counsel for me, if, touched by my many misfortunes, she grants me life? But if she intends to end my sorrow by death, why does she begrudge me the pleasure of dying in my own native land?

(1) Rebellion against Nero.

But now I cannot hope to escape. In my misery, I see my brother's boat prepared for me. (I) Borne along by this vessel, once a wife, now only a sister, driven from my own palace, sorrowfully I shall drift away. Loyalty now has no divinity, nor are there gods above. Gloomy Erinyes rules in the world! What nightingale can return soft plaintive notes to my weeping? I would like to escape my sorrows on the uplifted pinions of a bird and borne aloft and far away flee from the gloomy crowds of men and fierce dangers. Alone in a deserted forest and suspended on a slender bough, I would utter sad and mournful murmurs.

CHORUS: Mortals are ruled by fate, and no one can depend upon the certainty of human life. A single portentous day brings forth varying fortunes. May the many misfortunes which thy home has endured strengthen thy mind. What is more cruel to thee than destiny, Octavia? Thou, a mother worthy of many sons, daughter of Agrippa, daughter-in-law of Augustus, and wife of Caesar whose royal name is illustrious in the entire world, soon a barren wife, thou wilt endure exile, the scourge, cruel fetters, gloomy sights, sorrows, long continued torture, and finally death itself.

(I) Octavia was banished to the island of Pandataria where she was murdered by order of Nero. Her head was severed from her body and carried to the cruel Poppaea. Vows and sacrifices were offered to the gods by order of the senate.

Livia, blessed in the couch and sons of Druses, committed a great sin and received punishment. (1) Julia followed her mother's fortunes (2). Yet after a time, although innocent, she falls by the sword. Why was not thy former mother victorious who dear to her husband and rich in children ruled the palace of the emperor? She was submissive to her own servant and fell by the sword of a rough soldier (3). Why was such a mother of Nero permitted to hope for divinity? Injured by the blows of the oarsmen but not fatally, mangled by the sword, she perished, the victim of her cruel son.

OCTAVIA: Alas, the cruel tyrant sends me to the sorrowing shades in the lower world. Why do I in my misery vainly hesitate? Hasten to the death which fate has bestowed upon thee. I call to to witness the immortal gods—What art thou doing in thy madness? Cease to supplicate the gods who hate thee— I call to witness Tartarus, the avenging possessor of Erebus, and thee, father, who art worthy of such a death and punishment.

() Nero.

(1) Livilla, the wife of the younger Druses son of the emperor Tiberius, was persuaded by her lover, Sejanus, to poison her husband.

(2) Julia, daughter of Caligula and Milonia Caesaria, suffered death with her mother after the assassination of her father.

This dreadful death was not unforeseen by me. Equip and launch the ship. Let the pilot set sail for the shores of Pandataria.

(1)

CHORUS: Gentle breezes and light zephyrs which bore away Iphigenia from the cruel altars of the Virgin and covered her with a heavenly cloud, we beseech thee, wait this maiden far away from bitter punishment to the temples of Trivia. (2) The harbor of Aulus⁽⁴⁾ and the barbarian land of the Tauri are more merciful than our own city. The gods above are propitiated by the sacrifice of a stranger, but Rome rejoices in the murder of her own citizen.

(1) Messalina.

(2) Now Veulabere; a small island off the coast of Campania to which political offenders were sometimes banished.

(3) Iphigenia was daughter of Agamemnon who offered her up to appease the gods. She was rescued by Diana and carried off in a cloud to the land of the Tauri where it fell to her lot to offer up as victims all strangers who were shipwrecked on the coast.

(4) Aulus, a harbor in Beotia where Iphigenia was offered in sacrifice.





