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Four Tragedies and Octavia (Penguin Classics) Seneca
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.

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