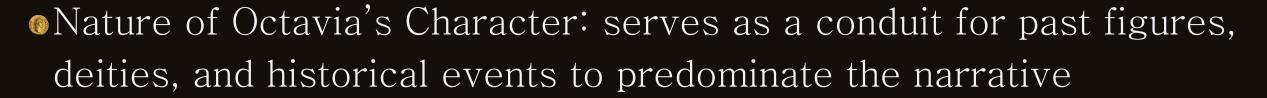


Background Details



- Work of Interest: Octavia, written in AD 69-75
- •Author: unknown, previously ascribed to Seneca
- •Key Characters:
 - © Claudia Octavia: empress of Rome, sister-wife of Nero who gets exiled and killed on Nero's orders
 - Nero: last Julio-Claudian emperor of Rome, commits suicide during a people's rebellion, dies on the 6th anniversary of Octavia's death
 - OPoppaea Sabina: Nero's mistress, who is with child
 - Seneca: Stoic politician, advisor to Nero, forced to commit suicide on Nero's orders

Octavia's Composite Characterization



Central Figures:

- Claudius, her father and late Roman emperor
- Juno, wife of Jupiter, king of the Gods
- Astraea, goddess of innocence and Justice
- Virginia and Lucretia, Republican heroines



Octavia as Astraea

- Astraea: "Away from the Earth where she was scorned, from the savagery of humans, from hands polluted with bloody *slaughter*, fled the virgin Astraea, great glory of the stars." Seneca, 422–4 (italics mine)
- Octavia: "I sadly wish that fate had granted me wings! With swift wings I could get away to escape my griefs, far from the dismal haunts of men and bestial *slaughter*." Octavia, 918-20 (italics mine)



Octavia as Lucretia & Virginia

•Key Quotes:

- Lucretia: "Civil war ensued from your death too, daughter of Lucretius, when you died by your own hand, pitiful woman, after suffering brutal tyrant's lust." Chorus, 300-3
- Virginia: "It was they who drove proud kings out of this city, and later avenged your spirit well and truly, maiden slain by your father's hand." 294-9



Why This Matters

My Theory:

Octavia forms a vital example of a hitherto ignored Roman trope –women as "points of inflection" in Roman history

©Examples:

- Rape of the Sabine Women: abduction allows Rome to flourish as a kingdom
- Lucretia: suicide leads to the end of the Roman monarchy
- Virginia: murder re-establishes the Roman republic
- Octavia: exile damns the first dynasty



Key Takeaway

Exploring the characterization of Octavia not only allows us to make inferences about the Neronian Era, but also to identify a crucial element of the way Romans viewed history – with women as points of inflection.

