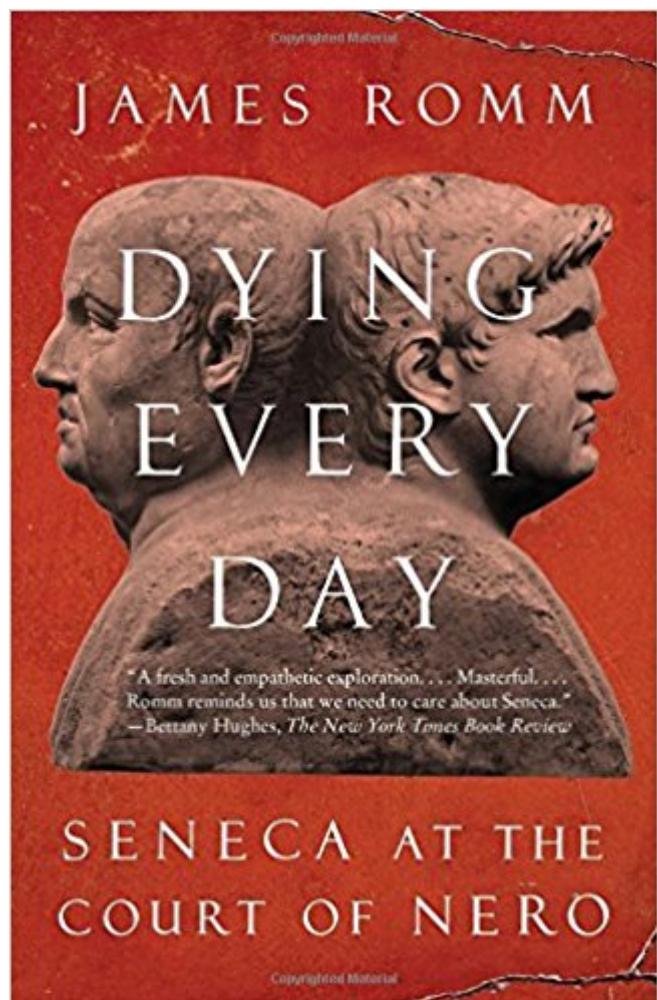


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Dying Every Day: Seneca At The Court Of Nero



Synopsis

From acclaimed classical historian, author of *Ghost on the Throne* a high-stakes drama full of murder, madness, tyranny, perversion, with the sweep of history on the grand scale. At the center, the tumultuous life of Seneca, ancient Rome's preeminent writer and philosopher, beginning with banishment in his fifties and subsequent appointment as tutor to twelve-year-old Nero, future emperor of Rome. Controlling them both, Nero's mother, Julia Agrippina the Younger, Roman empress, great-granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus, sister of the Emperor Caligula, niece and fourth wife of Emperor Claudius. James Romm seamlessly weaves together the life and written words, the moral struggles, political intrigue, and bloody vengeance that enmeshed Seneca the Younger in the twisted imperial family and the perverse, paranoid regime of Emperor Nero, despot and madman. Romm writes that Seneca watched over Nero as teacher, moral guide, and surrogate father, and, at seventeen, when Nero abruptly ascended to become emperor of Rome, Seneca, a man never avid for political power became, with Nero, the ruler of the Roman Empire. We see how Seneca was able to control his young student, how, under Seneca's influence, Nero ruled with intelligence and moderation, banned capital punishment, reduced taxes, gave slaves the right to file complaints against their owners, pardoned prisoners arrested for sedition. But with time, as Nero grew vain and disillusioned, Seneca was unable to hold sway over the emperor, and between Nero's mother, Agrippina "thought to have poisoned her second husband, and her third, who was her uncle (Claudius), and rumored to have entered into an incestuous relationship with her son" and Nero's father, described by Suetonius as a murderer and cheat charged with treason, adultery, and incest, how long could the young Nero have been contained? Dying Every Day is a portrait of Seneca's moral struggle in the midst of madness and excess. In his treatises, Seneca preached a rigorous ethical creed, exalting heroes who defied danger to do what was right or embrace a noble death. As Nero's adviser, Seneca was presented with a more complex set of choices, as the only man capable of summoning the better aspect of Nero's nature, yet, remaining at Nero's side and colluding in the evil regime he created. Dying Every Day is the first book to tell the compelling and nightmarish story of the philosopher-poet who was almost a king, tied to a tyrant "as Seneca, the paragon of reason, watched his student spiral into madness and whose descent saw five family murders, the Fire of Rome, and a savage purge that destroyed the supreme minds of the Senate's golden age.

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Customer Reviews

When I bought this book, I thought it was a novel--something along the line of Robert Graves' "I Claudius." Instead, I discovered this to be a fascinating work of history written by a first-class classicist teaching at Bard College, with all the suspense of an exciting novel. The central actor is Seneca the Younger (4 BC-65 AD), a leading Stoic philosopher. Exiled by Claudius to Corsica, where he proceeds to write several works on ethics and morality, Seneca is yanked back to Rome by Claudius' widow Agrippina, to tutor her 13 year old son, Nero, whom she is maneuvering to make the successor to Claudius. Beginning as Nero's ghostwriter, Seneca over the next decade becomes his tutor and then ally as Nero assumes the role of "princeps." Interestingly, the Roman ruler during this period is not referred to as "rex" or king, but as a princeps in order to spare those Romans still enamored of the Republic that had died with Caesar. The central issue presented by Seneca's involvement with Nero is how could a Stoic seemingly dedicated to the moral life, eschewing great wealth, and denouncing tyranny, end up becoming wealthy, holding high office (consul) in a corrupt tyrannical government, and perhaps be an accessory to corruption and murder? This has been quite a hot topic apparently for students of Roman history for many generations. In approaching his examination of Seneca's conduct and activities, versus the image he tried to project, we learn a number of interesting things about how these Roman emperors and the ruling class operated.

Avant-Garde Politician: Leaders for a New Epoch This highly recommended book can be read in two ways: Rapidly, as a real life power-and-crime drama, more fascinating than the "House of Cards" TV series. Or as a serious study posing one of the most fundamental problems of politics, namely the

relations between a ruler and his advisors - in this case the Roman percepts Nero, as increasingly becoming deranged, and his stoic philosopher advisor Seneca. Every ruler depends on advisors, both formal and informal ones. Therefore providing senior political leaders with morally and cognitively high-quality advisors serves as a main way to try and improve governance. Such advisors can be prepared by systematic study, such as at modern public policy schools, while the quality of politicians is largely a chance matter, depending on dynastic inheritance, elections, or party cliques. But this book demonstrates that this is very inadequate: The quality of politicians is critical and no advisor can serve as a substitute for it. Nero was an immoral and in part evil ruler. Efforts by Seneca, while serving as teacher of young Nero, to shape his character failed, as was to be expected. But he continued as a main advisor of Nero, whose behavior contradicted the moral percepts of Stoicism. This created a harsh dilemma for Seneca, faced in real life by most of the few (because of tensions brought out in this book) highly moral advisors of rulers. As put by the author: "Seneca had made the bargain that many good men have made when agreeing to aid bad regimes. On the one hand, their presence strengthens and helps it endure.

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