



Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy (Classic Reprint)

F. L. Lucas

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Excerpt from Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy

In the realm of letters it has been Seneca's destiny, like Banquo's, to beget in his posterity a greatness denied himself. Virgil, that imperial poet, was the founder of a line of degenerate literary faineants, the Epic poetasters of Silver Latin: but from Seneca, decadent Silver Latinist himself, by a seeming freak of fortune can be traced the direct descent of the lordliest names in the dramatic literature of Western Europe. To estimate his influence and to trace the line of descent from him to the Elizabethans is the main purpose of this book. But for the sake of completeness I have prefaced a slight sketch of the rise of the Greek drama, which made him possible, and of the Roman which led up to him, before dealing with Seneca the man, that strange compound of strength and weakness, brilliance and imbecility, and Seneca the writer, so second-rate, decadent and vulgar, yet with an ingenuity like Ovid's, almost genius, and an influence on Renaissance literature which really is amazing.

But before going into details it may be well to try to give the keynote of the whole, the thread that may be recognised running through even the earlier, but far more the later, part of our period of 500 B.C. to 1640 a.d. I mean that endless conflict which under a hundred different names is waged through all cultures, in all times and lands.

On the one side stands Classicism, in its widest sense, the feeling for the value of tradition, of form; for perfect form is of its nature the outcome of a long traditional evolution. And Classical minds and Classical periods are really only those in which are particularly realised the value of restraint.

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