

the love of man and woman that includes no physical expression.

William A. Percy

NERO (37–68)

Roman emperor. Exiled as a result of the disfavor of the Emperor Caligula, the boy Nero and his ambitious mother Agrippina were rehabilitated and allowed to return to Rome after the emperor's death in 41. Several years later Agrippina married the emperor Claudius and, on his demise in 54, was able to secure the throne for her son. Guided by the philosopher Seneca, the empire then entered an auspicious period of sound government. Growing bored of the tedium of rule, however, Nero became addicted to luxury and to his artistic pursuits—he imagined himself a distinguished poet and performer. He constructed for himself a great palace known as the *Domus Transitoria*. This proved insufficient, and Nero apparently ordered a large part of Rome set on fire in 64, to serve as a site for the construction of his Golden House. As foreign relations became more difficult, his connections with the Senate soured, and the plots against him required increasingly repressive measures. A revolt by the army and Senate caused him to commit suicide, uttering the words, "What an artist is perishing in me." His death ended the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Nero's appetite for luxury and self-indulgence emerged in his sexual escapades. After enjoying sexual relations with his mother (or so Suetonius claims) he grew tired of her when she disapproved of his liaisons with the freedwoman Acte and the glamorous sophisticate Sabina Poppaea. He then devised a special collapsing boat on which he sent her with great ceremony for a short cruise. But Agrippina escaped and swam to shore, where she was dispatched. Nero had a youth, Sporus, whom he castrated and treated as his wife. Sporus was escorted through the streets, receiving the homage due an empress.

Reversing roles, Nero made his husky freedman Doryphorus marry him (though dispensing with the castration).

Nero's many misdeeds have earned him an infamy outstanding even for the profligate age in which he lived. Recent historians, however, have sought to redress the balance. His early years were marked by a serious effort at governmental reform. Unlike his cruelty, his sexual irregularities no longer seem monstrous. And Nero presided over what has been called the Roman architectural revolution, the beginning of the great phase that made the empire's accomplishments in this field unsurpassed. The image perpetuated by Henryk Sienkiewicz' novel *Quo Vadis* (1896) and by Hollywood films is not confirmed by sober historical analysis.

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NETHERLANDS, THE (HOLLAND)

A European kingdom of fifteen million Dutch-speaking inhabitants, the Netherlands has in recent times acquired a reputation as the most tolerant country in the industrialized Western world on the subject of homosexuality.

History. The (northern) Netherlands emerged as a national entity (the Republic of the United Provinces) during the Eighty Years War (1568–1648), a revolt against the Spanish Habsburg empire, which separated them from the southern Netherlands (Belgium). A great commercial and maritime power, until 1795 they were a loose federation of seven virtually independent provinces. The House of Orange, by no means a monarchy, held only limited rights. Until 1748 the princes of Orange, the so-called *stadtholders* (vice-