I, Claudius Study Guide

I, Claudius by Robert Graves

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Introduction

The initial reason Robert Graves set out to write *I, Claudius* (1934) was for money. Living on the Spanish island of Mallorca with the poet Laura Riding, Graves fell into some financial difficulties, which he hoped to resolve through the writing of the historical epic. The book, the first of two fictionalized accounts of Claudius, the Roman emperor from 41 to 54 a.d. , was a great success. Within a couple months it had gone into four printings both in the United States and in Great Britain. In 1937, one of Hollywood's biggest directors, Josef von Sternberg, made a failed attempt at filming Graves's epic, a failure that only enhanced the book's growing prestige.

Told from the point of view of the stuttering, physically deformed Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus (most commonly referred to as "Claudius,"), *I, Claudius* covers the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius and Caligula, and ends at the point of Claudius himself reluctantly assuming the position of emperor shortly following Caligula's assassination.

Laden heavily with political intrigue, sexual depravity, incest, conspiracies, family strife, war and pagan rituals, *I, Claudius* was seen by contemporary readers as an allegory of the current times and was awarded both the James Tait Black and the Hawthornden Prizes in 1935.

While the book takes poetic and historical license in several key areas, it has been widely hailed as a masterful portrayal of the Roman Empire and the families that ruled it. In Graves's version of events, Claudius was seen by most around him as a bumbling, deformed, and mentally handicapped, but generally harmless, individual who, because of those traits, was able to survive the capriciousness of Tiberius and the madness of Caligula. While those around him plotted endlessly for political power and revenge, Claudius kept to himself, quietly recording his history of Rome and of the Etruscans, but all the while keeping a keen eye on the Empire's goings- on□observations of which formed the basis of Graves's novel.

Author Biography

Robert von Ranke Graves was a noted English poet, classical scholar, translator and novelist. Born July 24, 1895, in Wimbeldon, England, Graves was one of five children born to Alfred Perceval Graves, a poet and Gaelic scholar, and Amalie von Ranke Graves. (Graves's father also had five children from a previous marriage.)

After attending Charterhouse, a private English preparatory school, Graves in 1913 received a scholarship to St. John's College at Oxford. But with the outbreak of World War I, he enlisted and was seriously injured in 1916. This was clearly a crucial event in his life. During the Somme offensive, he had been abandoned as dead and only much later rescued from a pile of corpses. He was eventually nursed back to health and sent back to the front, but the event would scar Graves for years. While recovering from the wounds, he published his first collection of poetry, *Over the Brazier*, and over the next two years, while still enlisted, he would publish two more collections of poetry.

Although Graves would eventually become most famous for his historical novels and his studies on mythology, he considered himself first and foremost to be a poet, producing over 50 volumes of verse in his career. But his first commercial success as a writer came with the publication in 1929 of *Goodbye to All That*, his controversial autobiography in which he recounts his difficulties in school as well as the horrors of war. The book would quickly lead to a falling out with one of Graves's good friends, the English poet, Siegfried Sassoon.

In 1918, Graves married the painter and feminist activist Nancy Nicholson with whom he would have four children. Shortly following the war he took up a teaching position at St. John's College. He soon became known as one of the country's finest "war poets."

A turning point in both Graves's personal and poetic life occurred in 1926 when he met the poet Laura Riding. Together, they founded a press and collaborated on several publishing projects. After a series of infidelities with Riding, Graves permanently separated from his wife in 1927. In 1929 Graves and Riding moved to the Spanish island of Mallorca, but with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, they were forced to move to America. Riding would soon fall in love with Schuyler B. Jackson, whom she would marry in 1941. Graves would meet and fall in love with Beryl Hodge, the wife of a good friend. In 1946 Hodge and Graves moved back to Mallorca, and they married in 1950.

The books that gave Graves his international reputation and greatest commercial successes were *I, Claudius* in 1934, and its 1943 sequel, *Claudius the God*. In 1948 he turned to mythology with his classic, but highly controversial, study *The White Goddess*. His attention turned would soon to Christianity, with the publication in 1946 of King Jesus, and by the 1950s, the publication of several more significant works had cemented his international reputation as a novelist, poet, translator and scholar.

In 1962, W. H. Auden called Graves England's living poet, and in 1968 he was the recipient of the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. From 1961 to 1966, Graves was Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford, and by the time of his death in 1985, at the age of ninety, he had published more than 140 books.

Plot Summary

Chapters 1—6

The Robert Graves novel *I, Claudius* begins with a depiction of the title character as a child. Claudius suffers from many ailments that cause him to stutter and give him a permanent limp. Although reviled by most of his relatives, he is prophesized by a sibyl to one day rule Rome, and as a young child a tiny wolf cub, which eagles had been fighting over, falls into his arms, a sign that he will become the protector of Rome.

Considered by most to be an idiot, Claudius is given the love of history through his tutor Athenodorus, and he eventually grows to write several historical studies, of which *I, Claudius* is one.

Claudius's grandmother Livia is the most important figure in these early chapters. "Augustus ruled the world, but Livia ruled Augustus," Claudius writes, and he describes how his grandmother turns Augustus into an instrument for her ambition to take control of Rome through her son Tiberius.

For starters, Livia uses her position to create discord between Marcellus, Augustus's son-in-law and leading candidate to succeed Augustus, and Agrippa, Augustus's oldest friend and most successful general. The end result of Livia's complex ruse is that Marcellus eventually dies of mysterious ailments (this is the first of many hints that implicitly tie Livia to the rash of food poisonings that infect Rome for generations) and Agrippa is left free to marry Augustus's daughter Julia. Nine years later, in 12 b.c. , after Agrippa dies while alone in the country, Julia is free to marry Tiberius, a man Claudius describes as "morose, reserved, and cruel."

Claudius's father Drusus, on the other hand, is a virtuous man. A successful general widely known for his Republican values, he suffers a riding accident on the Rhine. Tiberius rushes to his side, but it is too late. Drusus is dying of gangrene, and his final words, whispered to Tiberius and in reference to Livia, are, "Rome has a severe mother."

With Drusus dead, Livia's plan to rule Rome through Tiberius moves forward. But now Gaius and Lucius, the sons of Julia and direct descendants to Augustus, are in her way. Gaius has become the favorite to follow Augustus as emperor. Livia, in another cunning set of moves, succeeds in getting Tiberius relocated outside of Rome, leaving his wife Julia behind. All along Livia had been feeding Julia an elixir she claims will make her irresistible to Tiberius, but it is actually an aphrodisiac that only increases Julia's sexual appetite. With Tiberius away, Julia goes wild, and her nightly orgies become legendary. When Augustus learns of Julia's activities, he banishes her for life. Meanwhile Gaius, who is sent away to Asia Minor, is given the wrong treatment for a battle wound and is forced for health reasons to retire, and Lucius, in transit to Spain, dies mysteriously. Thus, with no one else remaining to take over as emperor, Augustus has to accept

Tiberius back to Rome and adopt him and Postumus jointly as his sons and primary candidates to succeed him.

Chapters 7—14

After his first love is poisoned, and after Livia's plans to have Claudius married to a girl named Aemilia are thwarted when Aemilia's parents are accused of a conspiracy against August, Claudius is forced to marry the six-foot-two inch Urgulanilla. A week after his marriage, Claudius comes across Pollio and Livy, two of Rome's most famous historians. In the course of discussions, Pollio tells Claudius how Claudius's father and grandfather were poisoned. Henceforth Claudius would be on the look-out for further clues to support Pollio's contention.

Meanwhile, Livia and Augustus's views of Postumus begin to change for the worse, and Livia conspires with Livilla, Castor's wife, against Postumus by inviting him to her room and seducing him. As soon as he embraces her, she cries out and Livia immediately breaks through the door and has Postumus arrested. Postumus is banished for life and disinherited, but not before he can tell Claudius the entire story of Livia's conspiracy against him. With Postumus gone, the lone heir to Augustus is now Tiberius.

Soon after returning to Rome to help the aging Augustus, Germanicus learns from Castor of Livia's plot to banish Postumus, and in turn he tells Augustus. On the pretence of taking another trip to one of the colonies, Augustus visits Postumus on his island to help him escape. Livia catches wind of Augustus's plan, and assuming he would bring Postumus back to Rome and restore him to favor, she has to act quickly. She knows that with Postumus restored, her own life will be in danger. Coincidentally, Augustus falls sick, and though he eats only from the common table and of the figs he himself has picked, out of fear of being poisoned by Livia, he dies.

Prior to his death, Augustus expresses to Claudius his deep apologies for how has been treated throughout his life, and says that he has taken care of a certain "document" and that Claudius will one day be compensated. Claudius assumes Augustus is referring to his will, and surmises that the emperor has come to learn of Livia's conspiracies. But Augustus did not safeguard his changes well enough, and the previous version of the will, which names Tiberius as successor, is read to the Senate. Livia finally gets her wish, and when Postumus is reported killed by a captain of the guard, her final problem, it seems, is solved.

Chapters 15—34

Soon rumors that Postumus is still alive begin circulating through Rome. The rumor proves true, but Tiberius is able to catch him and have him tortured and killed.

Roman troops in the Rhine mutiny upon Augustus's death, angry over the few shares they are given. Germanicus, remaining faithful to Tiberius, borrows money from Claudius and pays the men under the pretence that the money has come directly from

Tiberius. In Rome, Sejanus, Tiberius's Commander of the Guards, begins poisoning the emperor's mind against Germanicus with several lies. Sejanus had also forms a group of professional informers whose job it is to infiltrate the populous for the purpose of weeding out Tiberius's potential opponents. When Germanicus is sent with his family, including his son Caligula, to the East, Sejanus revives Tiberius's fears by reporting a statement that Germanicus allegedly says in front of one of Sejanus's secret agents. Livia and Tiberius then send a man named Gnaeus Piso to work with Germanicus. Piso also reports back statements construed to make Germanicus appear unfaithful to the emperor. Soon Germanicus finds that his orders to his regiments or cities are not being followed; they are all being overridden by contradictory ones from Piso.

Germanicus soon falls ill and starts smelling "death" in his house. A superstitious man, he sleeps with a talisman, or good luck charm, under his pillow. A slave soon reports finding the body of a dead baby beneath the house, and soon similar discoveries are made throughout the house. After several strange and near-hallucinatory experiences, Germanicus becomes certain that Piso is trying to murder him through black magic. Germanicus dies, and for years the murder remains a mystery. Aggripina returns with her children to Rome, where the public grieves for the popular Germanicus for days.

Sejanus continues to consolidate his power and even tries to become related to the imperial family by marrying his four-year-old daughter to Claudius's son Drusillus. But and a few days later Drusillus is found dead with a pear stuck in his throat. Soon Sejanus, Livia and Livilla, Castor's wife, conspire against Castor, who has just been named Protector of the People by Tiberius, a sign that Tiberius is aware of Sejanus's ambitions and intends to check them. The conspiracy works, and Castor quickly falls out of favor with Tiberius. Soon thereafter he falls ill with symptoms of consumption and dies.

Treason trials soon proliferate throughout Rome, and Sejanus once again plot to gain entrance into the imperial family by arranging Claudius's divorce and marrying his adopted sister Aelia to Claudius.

Tiberius, getting old and weak, retires to Capri, thus leaving control of Rome in the hands of Sejanus. He remains there eleven more years until his death, practicing acts too obscene for Claudius recount.

Livia calls on Claudius and confesses all of her murders, including those of Claudius's father and son, as well as Agrippa, Lucius, Marcellus and Gaius. She also tells him of the prophecies that Germanicus's son, Caligula, will be emperor, and that Claudius will avenge Caligula's death. Livia also makes Claudius promise to deify her when he becomes emperor. In 29 a.d., Livia finally dies.

Under Sejanus's rule, Rome suffers from endless capricious arrests and executions. Claudius's mother happens to find drafts of letters between Livilla and Sejanus, implying a conspiracy to kill Tiberius. She sends Tiberius the letters, and Tiberius has Sejanus arrested for treason. After Sejanus's gruesome execution, a whole crop of equally grim executions follow.

In his final years, Tiberius indicates Caligula as his successor. After Tiberius's death, the Senate confirms Caligula's accession, and in the first days of his rule, Caligula generously pays off Tiberius's debts, observes the terms of Tiberius's and Livia's will, doubles the pay to the army, and sends millions of gold pieces from the treasury into general circulation. General amnesty is declared, and when Caligula falls ill with what is called a "brain fever," the popular consternation is so great that thousands of people stand in vigil day and night outside of the palace.

When Caligula "recovers," however, one of his first acts is to call Claudius into his room where he reveals to his uncle his "metamorphosis" into a divine being and also reveals, with pride, how as a young boy he had murdered his father Germanicus by frightening him to death and stealing his talisman.

Quickly thereafter, Caligula indiscriminately begins killing friends and family members, marries other men's wives at a whim, and puts men to death for such crimes as selling hot water. When the treasury is nearly depleted, Caligula empties the prisons by executing the prisoners and feeding their bodies to wild beasts in the amphitheaters. Claudius's own mother, rather than living under the reign of this madness, kills herself.

Caligula's "divinity" continues; he argues daily with Neptune and with the river gods. No one feels safe around Caligula, and when Claudius is summoned to the palace one night, he assumes his end is at hand. But instead he is awarded with a play in which Caligula plays the "rosy-fingered Goddess," after which Claudius is given the beautiful young Messalina in marriage.

Caligula grows madder by the day, until finally Cassius, one of his soldiers, kills him during a festival. In the melee that follows, soldiers tear through the palace, intent on plunder, and notice two feet sticking out from behind a curtain. Claudius has tried to hide out of fear for his life, but one of the soldiers recognizes him, and the group proclaims him emperor. After a brief protest, he gives in and is soon being carried around the court, fulfilling the sibyl's prophecy and the omen of the wolf cub.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Claudius is born into the Imperial family as a crippled child who is thought to be an idiot by his family because of his severe stutter. As he grows up, various political intrigues and assassinations sweep through his grandfather's generation, then his father's generation, and finally his own generation. Throughout it all, he is not targeted because he is considered an incompetent idiot—thus he ironically survives to become virtually the only male heir in the entire Imperial family. He watches dispassionately as Augustus dies and Tiberius, his uncle, claims the title of Caesar, and then as Tiberius dies and Caligula, his nephew, claims the title of Caesar. Claudius finds Tiberius' rule dangerous and Caligula's rule both dangerous and disgusting. When Caligula is assassinated, Claudius fears briefly for his life but is soon flabbergasted to be selected as the fourth emperor of Rome.

Chapter 1 details events beginning in 10 BC and extending until 41 AD. Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus, that is, Claudius, was born in 10 BC and writes the current text—his own autobiography—during 41 AD at the age of 51. In 33 AD, eight years prior to writing the autobiography, he had been elevated to Caesar of Rome. He states that the book is written for future historians and, as such, is written in Greek, which Claudius feels "will always remain the chief literary language of the world" (p. 9).

Claudius recalls at a young age having visited the Oracle Sibyl and receiving a cryptic prophetic message delivered in verse. In this prophecy, he was foretold to become Caesar. He also recounts another Oracular message delivered by Sibyl that recounted several generations of Caesars; all of these cryptic prophecies have come to pass exactly as stated.

Claudius was born with several physical problems, including failing legs unable to support his own weight for any period of time; deafness in one ear; a tendency to drool saliva and snot when excited; uncontrollable tremors of body, face, and hands; and an extremely bad stammer. Because of these physical infirmities, he was generally considered mentally incompetent—he was referred to typically, in fact, as 'Claudius the Idiot'—and was excluded from all public functions.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The fictional book purports to be the non-fictional autobiography of Claudius, Caesar of Rome. The chapter presents the text, sets the tone and texture, and introduces Claudius, the protagonist, meta-fictional author, and principle character. The text is related from the first person, limited, point of view and reads much like a delightfully dry diary mingled with format historical accounts. The initial chapter sets forth one of the novel's three primary themes in forceful terms—the religion of Rome is not only

significant, it is based on valid practices which can decidedly foretell the future. Claudius introduces two oracular verses that, though probably seeming obscure when delivered, have come to pass with remarkable fidelity. In one oracle, Claudius is foretold to become Caesar. Given that at the time there were any number of potential candidates without Claudius' severe handicaps, this oracle must initially have seemed ludicrous. However, it came to pass. The second oracle discussed foretells the generational secession of six Caesars. It uses cryptic terms but, in the final analysis, is completely accurate.

Finally, the chapter begins the immensely detailed characterization of Claudius that continues throughout the remainder of the work. The fundamental premise is that Claudius' physical ailments are interpreted by his seniors—particularly his grandmother and his mother—as indicative of that of a severely damaged intellect. Claudius, however, is possessed of an immense intelligence and often, in the future, will exaggerate his physical defects to achieve personal goals.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 details events beginning in 41 BC and extending until 31 BC. Claudius' biological father was Nero Claudius Drusus, known as Drusus; his biological mother was Antonia. His mother's parents were Mark Antony and Octavia, the sister of Augustus Caesar. His father's parents were Tiberius Claudius Nero and Livia, who had divorced—Livia subsequently married Augustus Caesar. Claudius had one older brother, Germanicus, and one older sister, Livilla. Claudius' paternal uncle is Tiberius, the future Caesar.

Claudius briefly recounts the political and military history of the formation of the Roman triumvirate of power between Augustus Caesar, Mark Anthony, and Pompey. The establishment of this government marked the temporary end of extensive civil war within the empire; the government's structure was also inherently unstable, however. During this period, Livia met and married Augustus and began to subtly guide his thoughts and shape his policies. After a brief respite, the empire was again embroiled in civil war, which concluded with the death of Mark Antony, and the undisputed victory of Augustus Caesar who became a dictator and was ultimately deified as a God. Throughout this period and the remainder of his life, Augustus was nearly completely dominated by Livia, his third wife and Claudius' grandmother.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The characterization of Claudius continues, and is expanded to take in his ancestry. His numerous relations to the imperial family of Rome are notable; had Claudius not been physically handicapped he would likely have been thought of as a serious contender as Augustus' heir. The sweep of the novel becomes apparent by the number of minor characters introduced in this and subsequent chapters. Fortunately for the reader, the author selects a popular common name for each principle character and uses it consistently throughout the text. Additionally, chapters are dated according to the current popular calendar and thus the narrative becomes accessible and consistent. The latter part of the chapter details the rise to power of Augustus and Livia, two characters who have a profound influence on Roman and world affairs, not to mention Claudius' life. Note that chapters 2 through 13, inclusive, primarily deal with the period where Augustus was Caesar of Rome.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter details events beginning in 23 BC and extending until 12 BC. Marcellus is Augustus' nephew. He becomes Augustus' son-in-law through his marriage to Julia, and Augustus adopts him as his legal son. Agrippa is Augustus' long-term friend, advisor, defender, and military general who enjoys enormous popular support. Naturally, as Augustus' secession and heir are considered, Marcellus and Agrippa are noted and the two men become the focus of two power centers that fosters political intrigue. To avoid smearing Augustus' reputation through association, the honorable Agrippa enters a voluntary exile, signaling his abandonment of designs to become Augustus' heir. Shortly thereafter, Marcellus dies under peculiar circumstances—Claudius affirms that Livia had poisoned him. Political unrest occurs in the city and Agrippa is recalled to lend his popular appeal to Augustus. Agrippa marries Julia and begins to receive public honors but then he, too, dies mysteriously.

Livia's son Tiberius, a renowned military general, remains as the most-likely heir of Augustus. He is a severe man not given to humor or gossip, but he also enjoys public support. He, in turn, is married to Julia. Claudius concludes the chapter by discussing his father's military career, noting it to be brilliant. His father, like his father's brother Tiberius, also enjoyed popular support. At one point, the political influence of Drusus and Tiberius, when combined, surpassed that of Augustus and Livia. Tiberius was noted for his iron hand and firm rule over troops. Contrarily, Drusus was noted for his leniency of command. Drusus was beloved, honest, and freedom loving. Tiberius was feared.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 continues the development of the web of political intrigue that surrounded Augustus' chosen heir and successor. From the first, Livia desired her son Tiberius to rule after Augustus and stopped at nothing to achieve her aims. Claudius states that Livia poisoned Marcellus and Agrippa to remove them from the picture. This had the unexpected result of elevating Tiberius and Drusus to positions of enormous popular support, which threatened Augustus' hold on the empire. The chapter also introduces the concept of legal adoption, which became rampantly popular among the imperial family. Coupled with frequent divorces and re-marriages, adoptions formed one of the most significant public demonstrations of intent. When Marcellus married Julia, and was adopted by Augustus, the political implications were obvious.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter details events occurring between 9 BC and 2 AD. Drusus wrote a letter to Tiberius suggesting that they join together to force Augustus to step down from the throne and return Rome to the Republic. In the letter, Drusus candidly notes that Livia—their mother—was a significant problem and barrier to liberty. The letter was unfortunately delivered to Tiberius while in the presence of Livia and Augustus. Livia requested the letter from one of her sons to her other son be read out loud; Tiberius, unaware of the nature of the letter, complied. Drusus is immediately recalled from the frontier; he is unable to comply immediately due to wartime injuries. Livia sends her personal physician to the frontier to care for Drusus, and within a few days, he dies. Tiberius strongly suspects Livia of poisoning Drusus. Because he relies upon his mother for political success, Tiberius immediately publicly praises her and binds his political future to hers with various understandings and agreements.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The text continues to develop the rationale between the gradual shift in power away from Augustus' genetic family and toward Livia's genetic family. Although Livia suffers some setbacks in her designs—such as Drusus' letter to Tiberius—she manages them well. Over the course of several years, she eliminates numerous potential claimants to the throne of Augustus. Her untiring poisonings reduce the cluttered field until only Tiberius remains as a serious contender for the moment. Subsequent chapters, however, deal with a younger generation who begins to come to the age of political awareness.

Of major importance to Claudius' personal future is the interception-by-happenstance of his father's letter to his uncle. Although Tiberius, at that time, shared Drusus' feelings regarding the desirability of a return to the Roman Republic, the structure of the letter appeared to indicate that Drusus was attempting to enlist Tiberius in some sort of plot to action against Augustus. Tiberius, having little choice, denounced the letter, leaving Drusus to appear as a lone radical. Livia's schemes and poisons extended as far as her own son, and within weeks, Livia's personal physician has killed Drusus. Claudius thus becomes fatherless at age one and his family returns from the frontier. In order to claim Drusus' popular appeal, Livia does not expose the supposed mutinous plot; instead, Drusus remains a popular military hero and Claudius' family is not denigrated.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter details events occurring primarily in 6 BC. Claudius is a sickly child beset by many physical shortcomings. In his childhood, Claudius suffers from several contagious diseases. Had his family not returned to Rome from the wilderness when he was an infant, he most likely would have died. His mother, Antonia, is distant and unloving—she considers him a half-wit idiot and does not care to invest any maternal effort on his behalf. His older sister, Livilla, is cruel and conniving. His older brother, Germanicus, however, is his friend and benefactor. As Claudius grows into a child, Augustus takes a particular dislike to him, being uncomfortable around his drooling and constantly running nose. Augustus, however, does allow a tutor named Athenodorus to replace Antonia's selected tutor who is abusive and mean. Athenodorus is kind and attends to Claudius. Athenodorus remains supportive, understanding, and in many respects a surrogate father figure. Aggrippa's youngest son, Postumus (so named because his delivery occurred shortly after the death of his father), also befriends Claudius and is a devoted friend of Germanicus.

One day, Claudius and his siblings and some other children are outside playing. A disturbance captures everyone's attention—two eagles are fighting in the air, struggling to gain possession of prey. Both eagles lose their grip and their supposed prey—a struggling wolf cub—drops from the sky and happens to land safely in Claudius' arms. A subsequent prophecy interprets the event to mean that Claudius will be Rome's protector. Livilla scoffs and Antonia dismisses the prophecy as ridiculous. The chapter ends with a long and apparently random digression that addresses the inferiority and wickedness of Cato, a senior Roman statesman.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 turns attention on Claudius as a young child. He was born at seven months' gestation but survived. He limped, was too weak in the legs to walk any distance or even to run at all, was partially deaf in one ear, drooled from the mouth, and usually had snot running from his nose. He stuttered horribly and, when nervous—which was most of the time—suffered from facial contortions and hand-and-limb spasms. All of these physical ailments are entirely removed from his intellect, however, which is highly developed. Most people take him to be an imbecile and his early name appears to have been 'Claudius the idiot', to distinguish him from other men named Claudius. Athenodorus is an attentive tutor but is a relatively minor character in the novel. Postumus and Germanicus are both good friends, and remain so, but both will eventually come to unpleasant ends due to Livia's scheming. In essence, Claudius survives because Livia considers him incompetent. The chapter contains another incident supporting the novel's theme of infallibility of religion—an unlikely event occurs which leads to a prophecy so far-fetched that even Claudius feels it ridiculous; yet in

point of fact, the prophecy is fulfilled entirely. The long digression on Cato provides characterization for Claudius; since the narrative is related in the first person point of view, such meta-fictional devices are ingeniously utilized to allow Claudius, as a character, to make personal statements (and engage in personal methods of literary development), which are telling.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

This chapter focuses on events occurring around 6 BC, and is primarily concerned with Tiberius, Claudius' paternal uncle and the man who would follow Augustus as Caesar. As part of Tiberius' political grooming, Augustus causes him to divorce his beloved and young wife Vipsania and marry the older Julia; Tiberius thus legally becomes a member of the imperial family. However, Tiberius misses his first wife and quickly comes to detest Julia even though she finds him pleasing. Julia, by Agrippina, had given birth to Gaius, Lucius, and Postumus, as well as two daughters including Julilla (Postumus, it will be remembered, becomes Claudius' particular friend). Gaius and Lucius are adopted by Augustus, but Tiberius soon refuses to have normal relations with Julia and she embarks on an impressive array of scandalous and perverse sexual affairs. To remove himself from the scandal and complications, Tiberius enters a voluntary exile from Rome even as Augustus concludes that Tiberius is his only possible heir. Tiberius' absence and Julia's scandals cause his political reputation to suffer somewhat.

With the assistance of Livia, news of Julia's scandalous sexual escapades finally reaches Augustus, and he is shocked and dismayed. Even though she is his beloved daughter, he orders her banned and instructs Livia to select a location and keep it forever secret from him. Livia ensures that Julia is banished to a horrible location with no possible entertainment or recourse to news of world events. Gaius subsequently requests Tiberius' return through a political intrigue orchestrated by Livia, but Tiberius stoically refuses, briefly leaving Gaius as Augustus' apparent heir. Shortly thereafter, Lucius dies under mysterious circumstances, followed quickly by Gaius—once again Augustus finds himself without any genetic descendents due to Livia's poisoning campaigns—and once again he concludes that Tiberius is his only possible heir. Thus, Tiberius is recalled to Rome by decree and his reputation is officially rehabilitated.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Just as she had done with a previous generation of contenders, Livia subtly and successfully maneuvers events and liberally administers poison to wipe out an entire emerging generation of contenders to Augustus' throne. Since marriage to Julia strengthens Tiberius' claim as heir of Augustus, Livia spares her life. Instead, she orchestrates a defamation campaign that eventually leads to Julia's banishment (Julia's sexual escapades made Livia's job substantially easier than it otherwise would have been). Livia does not spare Julia's sons—Augustus' grandsons—and they are removed. Only Postumus remains of Agrippa's posterity and, soon enough, Livia will untie that knot too.

Throughout this entire series of events, Tiberius remains in voluntary exile. Claudius suggests that Tiberius' political fortunes were vastly enhanced by this absence, though

Tiberius is characterized as too thickheaded and honor-bound to realize it. Tiberius' absence ensures he is spared all connotations of guilt subsequent to the deaths of Gaius and Lucius, even though he is the obvious principle benefactor. His absence also raises his value in the eyes of Augustus, as Livia informs August that Tiberius entered voluntary exile to escape the shame of Julia's excesses, refusing to betray her behavior to Augustus as a point of honor.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

This chapter focuses on events occurring from 1 AD to 4 AD. Claudius' generation comes of age and engages in a series of marriages, often between related families. Claudius discusses the various marriages, nearly all conducted for political purposes. He then enters on a prolonged analysis of the state of marriage in Rome, noting that the custom of marriage was then becoming increasingly less-frequently practiced. Augustus blamed this on the men, and often railed against their so-called selfish bachelorhood. Claudius, however, concludes that the decline was due to women's resistance. Married women became the legal chattel of their husbands and were expected to remain entirely monogamous and sacrifice their lives and figures upon the alter of motherhood, whereas single women retained their own liberty and monies and could escape childbirth and prolong their youthful figures and engage in any number of sexual adventures of any nature they found satisfying.

During this period, Claudius meets the young Medullina Camilla and, improbably, the two young adults fall in love. Camilla's father has occasion to speak with Augustus and mentions that his daughter finds Claudius a suitable bachelor. Camilla's father realizes that any connection with the imperial family is beneficial, and Augustus approves feeling that Claudius has little likelihood of finding any other wife and has very little political use as a bachelor. Livia, however, has other ideas, and arranges a marriage of slight political advantage between Claudius and ZHmilia, the daughter of Julilla (daughter of Julia and Agrippa, and sister to Postumus) and ZHmilius. Nevertheless, the engagement of Claudius and Camilla is carried through until the wedding day when disaster strikes—on her way to the wedding ceremony, young Camilla is attacked by a stranger who stabs her with a poisoned dagger, claiming her life. Claudius is devastated and quickly becomes engaged to ZHmilia. He, however, is saved from marriage to ZHmilia when ZHmilius is exposed as a political plotter and the engagement is thus canceled.

Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter considers the nature of marriage in Rome; most of the chapter is given over to a particular harangue of Augustus as he addresses the many prominent bachelors of Rome, condemning them for failure of performing their duty of marrying and creating posterity to ensure the survival of the nation. Although Augustus blames the men, Claudius comments retrospectively that it was probably the women who should have been scolded. He notes that married women in Rome enjoyed little privilege and no status whereas single women had their full liberties and, at the very least, enjoyed the political status of being desirable objects. Most women, therefore, chose not to marry.

The chapter concludes with a brief series of how Claudius' matrimonial prospects ended disastrously. Livia's agent murders his first betrothed, a young woman he loved. His second betrothed, a young woman he hardly knows, is selected and then rejected by Livia when she sees the young woman's family political fortunes wax and wane, respectively. Claudius quickly comes to realize that, considered an idiot or not, he is certainly considered by Livia to be a somewhat-useful pawn in her grand strategic game of empire building. His desirability as a spouse comes entirely from his relation to the imperial family—a relation not lost on the fathers of potential marriage candidates.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The events of this chapter are undated but may be inferred to have occurred around 8 AD. Livia has a personal friend and confidant named Urgulania. Urgulania has no political connections aside from Livia and is therefore completely compliant and trustworthy. Livia bestows various vague honors on Urgulania and thereby acquires certain minor political advantages. Urgulania has a daughter, Urgulanilla, who is single. As a sign of particular favor to Urgulania, Livia causes Claudius and Urgulanilla to be engaged. Claudius is hopeful, but when he sees Urgulanilla, he is distraught—she is a behemoth with the sex appeal of a gorilla and the intellect of a stone. Nevertheless, the engagement culminates in marriage; after the ceremony, Claudius and Urgulanilla are summoned into a private chamber before Livia and Urgulania where their cruel sponsors mock them at length.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Claudius' marriage is arranged by Livia as a favor to her particular friend, Urgulania. Urgulania, through Livia's influence, has been appointed as confessor to the Vestal Virgins who are decided non-virginal. The nature of the appointment allows Urgulania, and hence Livia, to learn many secrets regarding sexual impropriety. Livia uses her knowledge to blackmail or influence important political figures in Rome. The diminutive Claudius and the hulking Urgulanilla make a pitifully ridiculous pair. Livia's cruelty is demonstrated by her open mocking of Claudius after his marriage.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The events of this chapter are undated but may be inferred to have occurred around 8 AD. Pollio and Livy are both renowned historians. Pollio has the edge on accuracy and scholastic achievement, whereas Livy is by far the more popular author. Claudius meets them by accident in a public library, and after Livy introduces the young man to Pollio, a rather humorous exchange about books takes place. Pollio then criticizes Livy for being too free with the facts to be a good historian; Pollio recounts that Julius Caesar delivered bawdy monologues before combat, not preachy addresses as reported by Livy. Livy leaves in anger while Pollio praises Claudius. He suggests that Claudius would make an excellent military general, then makes a brief but veiled inference that Claudius' father and grandfather were both poisoned by Livia. Claudius regards the statement as untenable.

Chapter 9 Analysis

From an early age, Claudius embarks on a strict regimen of education and learning. He becomes very insightful and develops a keen intellect. As a young man of perhaps sixteen or eighteen, he meets two of the most intelligent men in Rome and is able to engage them in conversation as an equal. Pollio's furtive suggestion that Livia is a routine murderer, even of husbands and sons, seems to Claudius to be fantastic; however, it does instill in him an insightful curiosity about the circumstances surrounding his father and grandfather's unlikely deaths.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The events of this chapter occur during 6 AD. Tiberius adopts Germanicus, Claudius' older brother. This leaves Claudius, as the only legal male family member living, the legal trustee of the Claudian family—he becomes his mother's legal guardian, which Antonia finds particularly distasteful. Claudius fathers a male child, Drusillus, with Urgulanilla. The remainder of the chapter presents transcriptions of letters sent between Livia and Augustus from roughly the period described in the chapter. In her letters to Augustus, Livia argues that Claudius is an unbecoming blot on the family honor and should be kept from the public eye as much as possible. In response, Augustus relates having overheard Claudius speaking with Athenodorus and states that Claudius is a capable orator; perhaps they have misjudged his intelligence. Livia responds that even a parrot can be made to talk and suggests that Athenodorus is a capable animal trainer—certainly Claudius is an idiot incapable of rational thought.

Chapter 10 Analysis

At about sixteen, Claudius becomes a father; he relates that he never holds his son dear and that he performs his duty on Urgulanilla but finds her more or less repulsive. Claudius becomes the family trustee because Tiberius adopts Germanicus, his older brother. This means that Antonia, his mother, must solicit his permission before spending money or making decisions—needless to say, she finds this situation ridiculous. The included transcriptions basically indicate that Livia had early on dismissed Claudius as an idiot and thereafter refused to entertain evidence that would indicate otherwise. In retrospect, Claudius realizes that had Livia considered him intelligent she very probably would have had him murdered as a potential obstacle to her various political schemes. Thus, his disabilities contributed to his survival.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The events of this chapter primarily occur during 5 AD. Widespread famine and resultant political unrest sweep through Rome. To divert attention from problems, Augustus proclaims a series of public games to honor the popular late general Drusus, Claudius' father. Claudius bears most of the cost, and Germanicus bears the remainder. Once the reckoning is complete, Claudius is shocked at the vast expenditure. During the events, Claudius attends his first sword fight. One of the fighters, Cassius Chzhrea, wins against long odds; his nickname of "Roach" contributes to making him a crowd favorite—Claudius singles him out for mention because he recurs in the narrative. Eventually, the intensity of watching men kill and dismember each other causes him to faint and go into a convulsive fit. Livia later points to his public fainting as being conclusive evidence that he is unfit for any duty.

Claudius investigates Pollio's insinuations about his father's death; because of the public games, many of his father's close acquaintances are in Rome and he takes the opportunity of questioning them closely. The information he gathers confirms that his father died under suspicious circumstances, only hours after Livia's personal physician arrived to take charge of his treatment. Claudius thus becomes convinced that Livia is, in fact, a subtle murderess. Claudius' friend Postumus agrees that the evidence is incontrovertible.

Meanwhile, Postumus has continued to gain in public support. His refusal to kowtow to Augustus infuriates Livia but endears him to the public. Livia comes to view his popularity as a problem, feeling he could potentially usurp the throne from Tiberius upon the death of Augustus. Livia therefore orchestrates a complicated series of events that result in the spurious charge of attempted rape of a noblewoman. Postumus is deemed guilty by a kangaroo court and sentenced to eternal banishment.

Chapter 11 Analysis

It is politically interesting to note that Augustus decrees the games to honor Drusus to divert attention from his political issues and yet Drusus' sons are expected to—and do—bear the expenses of the games. Because Germanicus is involved in politics, it is deemed reasonable to drop the majority of the financial burden upon Claudius. He pays out monies, feeling he is thus honoring his father, but at the same time, the vast expenditure gags him. The games are a success and Livia caps her political gains by framing up Postumus and thus eliminating the last potential claimant to Augustus' throne. The tale of Postumus is over-represented in the text because of his particular friendship to Claudius. Postumus' ultimate fate is as complex as it is unpleasant, and is described at length in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The events of this chapter primarily occur during 9 AD. The next few years are difficult for Claudius. His three benefactors, Athenodorus, Postumus, and Germanicus, all leave Rome. Postumus is banished to exile, Athenodorus returns to his distant home to quell political unrest (which he does but then dies of old age) and Germanicus is sent to the frontier where he leads Rome's military forces. Germanicus' victories and charisma win him enormous public support, and Tiberius is also sent to the frontier to lead troops.

Claudius performs a valuable public service at the request of Germanicus. He scours through the public and private libraries of Rome, compiling information on the tactics, culture, and strategies used by the Germans in previous campaigns. He edits and organizes this information and sends it on to Germanicus, who uses it quite successfully to anticipate German actions. Claudius then turns his hand to write a history of his father; Livia intervenes and demands that he stop. He subsequently begins to write a history of his grandfather; Livia again intervenes and stops the project. She then tells him to write a history of the religious reforms of Augustus, and Claudius pursues the assignment.

Meanwhile, on the frontier, a general named Varo suffers a calamitous reversal of fortunes; the Germans obliterate his various regiments and only their drunken revelry prevents them from crossing the frontier and marching on Rome. A single unit, led by Cassius Chzhrea holds a key bridge and prevents an incursion. As this occurs on the frontier, political intrigue continues at home—Livia exposes Julilla as a sexual pervert and lustful adventurer and Augustus causes Julilla to be banished; her newborn infant son is exposed on a hillside and dies.

Chapter 12 Analysis

In brief, Claudius continues to grow up. His various childhood friends—never plentiful—wane away until he is more or less alone. His elder brother Germanicus is always a supporter, but he is far away and engaged in warfare. Claudius begins an abortive history of his father and another of his grandfather but Livia objects; even though she considers him an idiot, she doesn't want him gathering information that may become suggestive of intrigue. Instead, she suggests the dull and safe subject of religious reforms. Claudius has gained a wider awareness of empire, and his focus is more often diverted to the frontiers and the advances and defeats of Roman military might. The general Varo's failure is singular and complete and Rome is exposed, though the Germans fail to press their advantage. Finally, Livia banishes and kills a few more of the very few remaining genetic relatives of Augustus Caesar. Her strategy for securing the throne for Tiberius is essentially one of removing every other possible alternative; obviously, she does not feel that Tiberius could acquire the throne on his own merits.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

This chapter focuses on events occurring from 11 AD to 14 AD. A public reading is arranged for Claudius. Although it begins well enough, an incident makes him collapse into a fit of nervous laughter from which he cannot recover. The reading will be the sole public reading Claudius ever undertakes for his own material.

Augustus grows old, his health begins to fail, and his death is imminent. Livia's constant plotting and scheming ensures that Tiberius is the heir-apparent. Meanwhile, Claudius informs Germanicus of Postumus' innocence. Some inquiries lead Germanicus to realize that Livia, in fact, had arranged for the innocent Postumus' banishment. Germanicus seeks a private audience with Augustus and pleads the case of Postumus. Rather late, Augustus begins to suspect Livia of treachery. He uses a complicated excuse to go to the island where Postumus has been banished, and substitutes a look-alike hostage. Postumus is then freed to the mainland where he remains incognito, pending an official rehabilitation. Augustus then suspects Livia of much dishonorable activity and feels sure that she is attempting to kill him with poison. Livia realizes that Augustus has lost faith in her and, as expected, Augustus falls immediately sick and quickly dies—Claudius suspects Livia poisoned Augustus. Tiberius is immediately recalled from the frontier and Claudius, as the only male family member in Rome, is sent to the Senate to establish the funeral arrangements for Augustus.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The novel's plot development suffers somewhat for credibility in Chapter 8. From 38 BC to 14 AD, a period of over fifty years, Livia schemes and poisons and yet the young and virile Augustus never suspects her and in fact retains her as his primary confidant and advisor. Clearly many incidents must have occurred which would have implicated Livia, including the orchestration of Julia's exposure, yet Augustus turns away from them. Then when the aged Augustus is presented with the injustice done to Postumus, his grandson, he investigates against Livia's wishes, discovers a single case of intrigue, and immediately begins to suspect Livia of numerous crimes and outrages. Their estrangement becomes so complete that within a few days Livia poisons him and completes her schemes of obtaining the imperial throne for her own family line. Although the development is historically accurate and consistent with the narrative development, it is not a particularly strong segment of the novel.

The recounting of Claudius' first public reading is simultaneously humorous and pitiful. The extent of Livia's brutal housecleaning is apparent when, at the death of Augustus, there is a single possible heir, and even he must be summoned from afar. Perhaps even more telling is that she must send her supposedly idiot grandson to the Senate to represent the family in an official capacity because he is the only surviving male family

member in Rome! Chapter 13 concludes the section of the narrative that deals with the reign of Augustus.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The chapter is not specifically dated but obviously takes place immediately after the death of Augustus in 14 AD. After his death, Augustus, long deified in the provinces, is officially deified in Rome. His will is involved in political intrigue, but finally an older version is deemed authoritative and read out; Augustus possessed surprisingly little wealth. Tiberius is considered the *de facto* emperor but engages in a prolonged political show of reticence, appearing to haltingly accept every honor, privilege, and power granted him by the senate. In the end, he comes to have accepted all of the powers of Augustus.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Deification is an official process of religious iconography that is made law by the Roman senate. Augustus is therefore made, literally, a God of the Roman religion, complete with temples, worship services, priests, and so forth. Many expect Augustus' personal wealth to be vast, and anticipate a huge public payout from his personal treasury. In fact, Augustus has spent most of his personal fortune on matters of state and has left behind only a rather small estate for distribution. Tiberius, meanwhile, puts up a theatrical show of accepting the office of emperor, only haltingly and with great reticence. In reality, he is performing a carefully orchestrated political assumption of powers to avoid the appearance of greedily usurping Augustus' many roles. Note that chapters 2 through 13, inclusive, primarily deal with the period where Augustus was Caesar of Rome.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The chapter is not specifically dated, but obviously takes place immediately after the previous chapter, probably in 14 AD. When news of Augustus' death reaches the Roman regiments stationed along the Rhine River, widespread rioting erupts. The soldiers are owed back pay and many have served far beyond their term of enlistment. The situation becomes especially critical as German raiders threaten to invade the empire. Germanicus' regiments also revolt. Germanicus tries to resolve the situation among his own troops but must eventually result to a ploy; he pretends to have received a statement from Tiberius granting the soldiers' demands. When Tiberius refuses to agree to Germanicus' settled terms, Germanicus asks Claudius to liquidate portions of their respective estates to raise cash to pay the promised back wages. Germanicus then re-establishes his local forces.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The soldiers' demands are fairly typical—the want higher pay, to actually be paid what is owed them, and to be discharged at the end of their legally required period of service. Germanicus meets their leaders and accepts the demands on behalf of his adoptive father, Tiberius. Germanicus is as popular as Tiberius is unpopular, and his acquiescence ends local revolution. Tiberius, however, refuses to enforce many of the issues Germanicus settled, which places Germanicus in the uncomfortable position of liquidating large portions of his personal estate to raise capital to pay the soldiers. The incident demonstrates not only Germanicus' loyalty to Tiberius, but also Tiberius' lack of concern for the common soldier. Even as the rioting winds down in Germanicus' sector, it continues along the larger front. Note that chapters 14 through 28, inclusive, primarily deal with the period where Tiberius was Caesar of Rome.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The chapter is not specifically dated but obviously takes place immediately after the previous chapter, probably in 14 AD. Germanicus uses his now-loyal regiments and a large amount of political maneuvering to quell the rioting of nearby regiments and, eventually, to bring the entire front under order. Germanicus' wife, Agrippina, and children typically accompany him on campaign, largely to vacate the politically poisonous atmosphere of Rome. Germanicus now decides the frontier is too chaotic and dangerous for them, and he sends them away. His regiment has adopted his young son Caligula as their mascot, however, and they implore him to recall the boy. After they swear their personal loyalty to Germanicus, he recalls their mascot Caligula. Throughout the entire episode, Germanicus acts with Tiberius' best interest at heart. Tiberius nevertheless suspects Germanicus of political intrigue and feels threatened by his great popular appeal. Also during this time, Claudius requests of Tiberius to be appointed to some political office useful to Rome, but Tiberius declines.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Germanicus uses his intellect and influence to quell the rioting along the entire German border, thus once again securing the safety of Rome. Even so, he feels the area now too dangerous for his family and has them sent away, save the young boy Caligula who is dear to the troops and their mascot. Needless to say, Caligula plays a significant role in latter portions of the narrative. Even though Germanicus is loyal and honest about his dealings, Tiberius suspects him of unseen treachery.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The chapter is not specifically dated but obviously takes place after the previous chapter, probably 14 AD through16 AD. Claudius notes that Tiberius rules with moderation and usually consults the senate before taking political action. Some few senators, political opponents, dare to openly defy his power. Tiberius eventually tires of their antics and delivers a well-phrased and public rebuke; thereafter, his political opponents remain quiet. As his rule becomes routine, Tiberius grants powers and offices to his friends and he greatly strengthens the Rome guard and his personal bodyguards. Claudius then goes into a rather rambling discussion of the two types of ciphers used by Livia and Augustus, noting that in later life he was able to crack the more complicated cipher relatively easily.

During this period, Germanicus is recalled from Germany so that Castor could assume command of the frontier and gain military honors. It will be recalled that Castor was Tiberius' biological son from his first marriage to Vipsania. Castor married Livilla, who was his cousin and Claudius' sister, and was also regarded as having a foul temper. Even though he was Tiberius' biological son, Castor's claim as heir to Tiberius followed that of Germanicus due to Tiberius' adoption of Germanicus during the reign of Augustus.

Caligula spends time at Claudius' house and one day, in a temper-tantrum, deliberately sets fire to the attic, and the entire structure burns. Claudius commences a slow but deliberate reconstruction, and in the meantime, removes to Capua. Claudius is by this time entirely estranged from Urgulanilla and they pursue completely separate lives. In Capua, Claudius lives openly first with Actl, and then Calpurnia, two young female prostitutes. Claudius forcibly states that he never practiced homosexuality, unlike nearly every other male in his extended family. The chapter ends with the recounting of a peculiar dream that, later on, proves prophetic.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Nero Claudius Drusus, that is, Castor, has appeared previously in the novel but only in a very minor role. Earlier, Claudius had noted that Castor was an uncommonly used nickname that the narrative nevertheless uses because all three of Castor's other names are used within the text to refer to other individuals. This chapter begins a period of the narrative wherein Castor's possible political future is considered (Castor is killed in Chapter 22). Because of the complications of Roman adoption law, Germanicus is the legal heir of Tiberius (a fact that Augustus surely considered when he caused Tiberius to adopt Germanicus). This situation sets up a natural conflict between the two men and various political factions attempt to connect themselves to one or the other potential future Caesar. At this point in the narrative, Claudius also begins to comment liberally on

the nasty demeanor and poor manners of Caligula, his nephew. Claudius also states that he never practices homosexuality, but does indeed have a passionate desire for women—despite his many physical infirmities. Fortunately and very agreeably for Claudius, his estate and monies allow him to serially retain a house prostitute.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The chapter is not specifically dated but obviously takes place immediately prior to the death of Postumus in 14 AD. Claudius is one day overjoyed to receive a cryptic message from Postumus, who he had thought dead. The nature and private contents of the message allow Claudius to know beyond doubt that its originator is Postumus. Claudius sends money to Postumus and attempts for several weeks to contact Germanicus, learning only later that all his letters were intercepted. Meanwhile, Postumus covertly travels about Italy, gaining in popularity until rumors of his return reach Tiberius. As Postumus is not assisted by the ignorant Germanicus, still on the German frontier, he eventually determines to publicly enter Rome and rely upon the mercy of Tiberius. Still officially banished, entering Rome would technically be a capital offense. Postumus approaches Rome but then simply vanishes. Later, Tiberius addresses the senate and informs them that an imposter, claiming to be Postumus, has entered the area and is causing turmoil and difficulty. The imposter, surprisingly like Postumus, had been arrested and disposed of. Postumus thus dies, and Claudius is devastated.

Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter relates the ultimate death of Postumus; notably, the account is entirely fictional and not based on any historic account of an attempted return. The account does once again implicate Livia and Tiberius in gross miscarriages of justice for personal gain—Claudius recounts how they tortured poor Postumus to death with full knowledge of his actual identity. The account, though interesting, is not particularly significant to the narrative as a whole.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

This chapter focuses on events occurring between 16 AD and 17 AD. Germanicus leads Roman forces against a rebelling German general named Hermann. A rather lengthy discussion of tactics is presented; in brief, the campaigns result in a series of decisive victories for Germanicus and Rome. When Hermann returns home, his own family kills him. As the Roman army returns via sea, a storm arises and scatters the fleet—Germanicus fears a terrible loss but after several days, most of the ships straggle to safety. Germanicus regroups and makes a triumphal return to Rome.

Meanwhile, Claudius has been sent to Carthage, ostensibly to dedicate a new temple. In reality, he has been shipped off by Livia to keep him out of the public eye during Germanicus' celebrations. The chapter concludes by noting that Tiberius continues to descend into moral and political corruption. His reputation also continues to suffer from his constant sexual debauches. Tiberius also splits from Livia, and in the future these two politically powerful relatives—son and mother—will become entirely estranged and, ultimately, largely at odds with each other.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Germanicus continues to excel militarily and thereby gains enormous popular support. This concerns Tiberius who fears Germanicus may attempt a military coup; nothing could be further from Germanicus' simple devotion to Rome. Needless to say, the combination of a suspicious Caesar and a napve hero foreshadows a dim future for the hero. Claudius' temporary jaunt to Carthage is amusing but relatively insignificant to the larger plot development. Meanwhile, the split between Tiberius and Livia will continue to develop throughout the next several chapters of the text.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

This chapter focuses on events occurring between 18 AD and 20 AD. Claudius spends one year in Carthage, a time that he finds quite enjoyable. While there, he gathers an extensive corpus of information that he plans to use for an eventual composite history of Carthage. On one occasion, Claudius takes the field of battle as an observer and watches Roman forces defeat Tacfarinas, a local bandit chief. He eventually returns to Rome, but shortly before his arrival, Germanicus has been dispatched to the East to act as political overseer of an extensive region.

Tiberius and Livia have coldly calculated Germanicus' assignment; his growing popularity has caused them concern and they have become determined to ruin him. Thus, even as Germanicus is sent on his assignment, another man, Gnzhs Piso, is enlisted to secretly ruin Germanicus' political future. Piso, along with his wife Plancina, is assigned as a political overseer to one of the localities within Germanicus' realm. Piso is instructed to harass and undermine Germanicus at every opportunity, and is given the full but secret support of Tiberius and Livia. Piso proceeds to his appointment and begins to make every sort of trouble he can imagine. As Piso harasses Germanicus, Tiberius supports Piso and replies nastily to Germanicus. Because of the prolonged political troubles, Germanicus' health and well-being suffers.

Then Germanicus' house becomes haunted—various curses are written on the walls in seemingly sealed rooms and dead babies and mutilated animal corpses are dug up from beneath flooring tiles. Germanicus' death is foretold and, as expected, he sickens and dies on the very day the curse has named. Piso immediately flees his post and returns to Rome where he expects to be lauded as a hero.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Chapter 20 provides several major plot developments. While Claudius is in Carthage, Livia and Tiberius hatch a plot against Germanicus that will ultimately prove entirely successful. Of course, Claudius would have been powerless to stop the plot, but using his contacts and intellect, he might well have been able to discover the plot and thus warn Germanicus. As the split between Tiberius and Livia continues to grow, however, their political agent, Piso, successfully ruins Germanicus on a personal level. Rather than taking decisive political action of his own, Germanicus writes to Rome to request Piso be recalled—Tiberius, of course, refuses. The seeming haunting of his home and the cursed predictions of his death complicates Germanicus' political disintegration. In addition, he believes (and rightly so) that he is somehow being poisoned. Germanicus' actual death as predicted strengthens the novel's theme of the validity of Roman religion. The chapter also comments briefly on Tiberius' continual sexual debauches.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

The principle events in this chapter occur in 20 AD. Germanicus' death leaves Castor as the sole heir apparent. He, however, is deeply saddened by the death of his friend and he swears to Agrippina that he will defend her children. In Rome, Agrippina is spurned and completely marginalized. Meanwhile, an inquiry is held and Piso is put on trial for witchcraft and intrigue against Germanicus. In an unlikely turn of events, Plancina takes Piso's letters of defense from Tiberius and murders him; she exchanges the letters for her own guaranteed freedom.

Chapter 21 Analysis

As to be expected, once his mission is accomplished, Piso suddenly finds himself without any sponsors. Tiberius and Livia conspire with Plancina and she murders Piso and eliminates all materials that might incriminate Tiberius. Castor appears to be a changed man due to the death of Germanicus. His pledge of support to Agrippina will have profound personal consequences in the subsequent chapter. Claudius does not write about his personal grief over the loss of his brother and benefactor—he simply states that it is beyond measure.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

The principle events in this chapter occur between 23 AD and 25 AD. Tiberius has few personal friends, but those few enjoy broad powers and ever-more impressive positions within the empire. The single friend of greatest persuasion is Sejanus, and Tiberius places him virtually second-in-command in the empire, substituting Livia's waning influence with Sejanus' waxing influence. Claudius catalogues Germanicus and Agrippina's surviving children—Nero (not the future emperor), Drusus, Drusilla, Caligula, Agrippinilla, and Lesbia. Agrippina is constantly followed and subtly harassed by State police. Meanwhile, Livia develops a bizarre but firm attachment to Caligula, and spends a huge amount of time with her great-grandson.

Meanwhile, the public sentiment focuses on the perceived power struggle between Castor and Sejanus; both men are now seen as potential heirs to Tiberius, and Tiberius does not decisively clarify the situation. The contention eventually is resolved when Castor is poisoned and dies—Tiberius is publicly, and privately, unconcerned and unemotional. Sejanus thereafter manipulates Tiberius and gains ever-more political power. Tiberius constantly raises taxes of various sorts, employs legal pretexts to scam and openly steal money, and continues to become more erratic and debauched. The chapter concludes with Claudius noting the death of his own estranged son—probably a murder but also plausibly an accident.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter is essentially a bridge between the death of Germanicus and the ascendance of his son Caligula. It likewise notes that Livia's overt influence is replaced by Sejanus' influence even as a developing power struggle between Castor and Sejanus gains the public attention. Sejanus poisons Castor and thus becomes the sole apparent heir to Tiberius. Claudius notes that Sejanus, of low birth and limited education, is very unpopular among Roman citizens and wields his power solely as Tiberius' protygy. Claudius also briefly notes some of the characteristics of Agrippina's children and then notes, entirely without emotion, the death of his own son Drusillus by choking. By the conclusion of this chapter, every potential heir from Augustus' generation, from Tiberius' generation, and from Claudius' generation, has been murdered, poisoned, or killed under often-suspicious circumstances. The paucity of genetic offspring leaves those with political acumen the only possible heirs, and the self-serving Sejanus is the preeminent candidate. Needless to say, the decades-long history of infanticide in the Julio-Claudian dynasty is cause for alarm to Agrippina; her three sons are obviously in harm's way.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

The events of this chapter are undated, but can be inferred to occur around 25 AD. On one event, Claudius is informed that Caligula, age 12, has commenced incestuous sexual activities with his three sisters. On another event, Sejanus informs Claudius that he will shortly be divorced from Urgulanilla on the charge of adultery. Claudius presumably will then be married to Sejanus' daughter; this will secure for Sejanus a tenuous but valid connection to the imperial family. Claudius takes the suggestion in stride, realizing that his opinion is entirely superfluous to the ultimate decision.

The remainder of the chapter deals with a certain night in which Claudius spends at his brother-in-law Plautius' home. Claudius arrives and learns that Plautius has recently divorced his wife of many years and remarried for political and economic gain. Plautius' divorced wife was particularly beloved by Urgulanilla. Claudius retires to his bedchamber and is stunned to discover that he will be spending the night with Urgulanilla—he immediately assumes he is the target of an assassination attempt and refuses to fall asleep. Claudius eventually dozes off, but then is awakened by a horrible shrieking and commotion. He quickly realizes that Urgulanilla has left the bedchamber, traveled to Plautius' bedchamber, and flung Plautius' new wife through the window to her death. Urgulanilla returns and Claudius pretends to be oblivious to everything.

Chapter 23 Analysis

The chapter presents three basic developments. First, Caligula at a very early age descends into troubling behavior. Second, Sejanus plots to utilize Claudius as a soon-to-be-eligible bachelor. Finally, the bulk of the chapter is a notoriously humorous passage relating Urgulanilla's long-suspected capacity for murder. As the household sleeps, Urgulanilla uses her enormous strength and prodigious size to gain access to Plautius' bedchamber, seize hold of his new bride, and fling her bodily through the bedroom window. She returns and is greeted by Claudius who convincingly pleads complete ignorance. In fact, his claim saves his life as Urgulanilla was quite prepared to kill Claudius if he proved to be any sort of a witness. Although the topic of murder is after all serious enough, it is here presented as enjoyable light farce and makes for the most humorous and one of the most memorable passages in the entire novel.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

The principle events of this chapter occur between 25 AD and 26 AD. Tiberius and Livia continue to grow apart until their split is total and publicly acknowledged. Tiberius spurns Livia in the senate and Livia responds by holding a public reading for all of the senator's wives and mistresses. At the reading, she flips through several massive tomes of bound letters from Augustus. Picking carefully screened letters seemingly at random, Livia reads Augustus' damning condemnation and fault-finding of Tiberius and his questionable character. After Tiberius learns of Livia's performance, he leaves Rome in disgrace and stays out of the public eye for many months. Livia then invites Claudius to dinner, an unprecedented invitation. Claudius worries that he may quickly become dead but nonetheless accepts the invitation because he has no viable alternative.

Meanwhile, Agrippina falls sick, the victim of apparent poisoning. Sejanus continues to consolidate his influence and gain power. Tiberius continues to descend into debauch and erratic behavior. Claudius notes that although Tiberius' small political circles are ruled with absolute terror and capriciousness, the Roman Empire as a whole has benefited through Tiberius' reign.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The chapter deals primarily with the acrimonious split between Tiberius and Livia. Although Tiberius wields all of the overt power, Livia demonstrates her covert power and nearly undiminished capacity for political intrigue and influence. The primary beneficiary of their public split is Sejanus. Claudius' dinner invitation is the risible subject of the next chapter. Claudius' comment on the state of Rome is telling—although Tiberius rules his smallish circle with an iron hand of terror, the greater empire of Rome continues to flourish largely because of the efficient apparatus of state established by Augustus and Livia, in spite of Tiberius than because of him. Claudius suggests that while hundreds or thousands suffer Tiberius' outrages, tens or hundreds of thousands benefit from Rome's benevolent rule.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The chapter's events are undated but are inferred to occur in 26 AD. The chapter relates Claudius' dinner with Livia and is full of dryly sarcastic comments. When Claudius arrives, he discovers that Caligula is also attending the dinner. Livia makes several disparaging remarks about Caligula, but she obviously holds him in dear regard. She makes some veiled references to a certain green object—the nature of the object is discussed in a later chapter of the novel when Caligula presents it to prove that it was he who had killed Germanicus, his father. Livia then dismisses Caligula and holds an incredibly frank and open discussion with Claudius. She states, based upon prophecy that is surely correct, that she will soon be dead, Caligula will be the next emperor, and that Claudius will avenge Caligula's death and then also be emperor.

Livia then pleads her case in an uncharacteristically needy way. She explains that in her life she has been caused to perform any number of wickedest deeds, all of which will surely earn her a horrible and personal place in Hell. She notes that Gods surely are never consigned to eternal Hellish torments. She also notes that Tiberius, contrary to his promises, has never caused her to be deified. She therefore has extracted promises from Caligula to cause her, upon her death, to be deified. Now she extracts from Claudius a promise to do all in his power to see that she is deified. Claudius agrees but only upon terms. Thus, for the next several hours, Claudius asks any question that interests him and Livia answers him without obfuscation. Eventually, Claudius' dinner with Livia draws to a close.

Chapter 25 Analysis

In many ways, this chapter is the basis of the novel. Livia is entirely convinced of the infallibility of the Roman religion and its ability to prophesy the future. Thus, she believes that she will soon die, that Caligula will be emperor, and that Claudius, too, will be emperor. In point of fact, all of these prophecies do indeed come true, which supports the novel's theme of the infallibility and veracity of the Roman religion. Livia's motivation in having Claudius to dinner is of course entirely self-serving. The difference being that now, sure of her own rapidly approaching death, Livia is looking forward to the afterlife. She fears that her many evil deeds will cause her to suffer an eternity of torment in Hell. Noting that Gods do not so suffer, she desires to be deified and, after some brief unavoidable visit, escape from Hell. To this end, she enlists Caligula and Claudius. In exchange, she tells Claudius everything she knows about anything he asks. In this way Claudius also gains the inside story on virtually every topic presented in the book previous to this chapter. This explains how Claudius, perpetually ignored and habitually marginalized, possesses such intimate knowledge of secret events. For example, Livia tells him unabashedly about poisoning her children, grandchildren, and others. Notably, she denies having killed Germanicus, leaving at least one plot strand

untidy. She also delivers to Claudius a small book of Sybilline prophecies, among them the prophecies presented in the initial chapters of the novel. Thus, chapters 1 through 25 can be seen as a sort of unit; a prologue to the remaining chapters of the novel wherein Claudius comes into his own, as it were, as a political figure.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

The events of this chapter occur between 28 AD and 29 AD. Tiberius, faced with increasing scandal, retires to Capri where he pursues the life of a sadist and pervert in the open air. He leaves Sejanus in control of affairs at home. Tiberius and Livia have completely split and their mutual enmity grows. Sejanus arranges for Claudius to marry his daughter ZHlia. After the public marriage ceremonies, ZHlia summons Claudius and makes it perfectly clear that their marriage is entirely for political purposes—they will pursue nothing of a shared life (although they do have one child, a daughter, together). The information is a great relief to Claudius. Livia then falls ill, summons Claudius, and forces him to repeat his oath to her. She then literally dies in his arms.

Chapter 26 Analysis

The chapter details political developments in Rome; Livia sickens and dies as prophesied. Tiberius enters a state of semi-retirement at his villa in Capri; there he is consulted only by Sejanus, who otherwise rules as emperor *pro temp*. Tiberius confines himself mostly to a series of sadistic tortures and sexual escapades in the open air far beyond the prying eyes of proper Romans. Claudius' marital situation changes; the relationship will prove fairly ephemeral. The death of Livia closes a significant era detailed by the text; her death will prove immediately problematic for Agrippina who had relied upon Livia for protection.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

The principle events of this chapter occur between 31 AD and 32 AD. Agrippina, as expected, is banished; her oldest son Nero is banished to a separate location. On her voyage to sequestering, Agrippina is delivered to Tiberius for observation—he beats the aging woman so savagely that he puts out one of her eyes. Agrippina's next-oldest son Drusus is then cast into a dungeon for the remainder of his life. Gallus, a senator frequently opposed to Tiberius and also the son of Asinus Pollio, is also imprisoned and the aged man quickly dies.

Meanwhile, at Rome, Claudius' mother Antonia learns of a plot being developed between her daughter Livilla and Sejanus. She pastes intercepted letters into copies of Claudius' recently finished history and forwards them to Tiberius. Antonia then closes Livilla into a room and presides over the house as Livilla starves to death. Tiberius, enraged by the plot, causes Sejanus to be executed. Various wholesale executions follow as Tiberius purges the government of Livia and Sejanus' agents and friends. As Sejanus is now wholly discredited, Claudius divorces his daughter, ZHlia. Antonia desires an infant to care for and thus Claudius keeps his child by ZHlia.

Chapter 27 Analysis

The death of Livia causes a cascade of political events that must have been easily foretold. Tiberius uses the occasion to pursue the wholesale slaughter of Livia's friends and political connections. Among these unfortunates are Agrippina and her children, who are imprisoned. Sejanus continues to intrigue for more power and is finally exposed as a traitor to Tiberius, who has him executed. Claudius thus once again finds himself a bachelor.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

The principle events of this chapter occur between 36 AD and 37 AD, though reference is made to a five-year period. The last five years of Tiberius' reign are full of unspeakable cruelty and constant sexual debauch. Agrippina and Drusus are slowly starved to death in their banishment, and Nero is starved to death in prison. Caligula rises to immense public support and Tiberius names him as his heir. The public mistakenly believes that Caligula will embody the traits of Germanicus, his father. Thrasyllus, the seer, pronounces numerous prophecies and then dies—his prophecies will be borne out to be completely accurate.

Tiberius then sickens and appears to be about to die. Caligula has meanwhile enlisted a brutal and amoral soldier named Macro to act as strongman. Caligula and Macro become excited at the prospect of Tiberius' imminent death, but are angered when Tiberius appears to have recovered his health. Rather than wait longer, Caligula watches while Macro murders Tiberius, smothering the old man with his own pillow. Caligula then ascends to the throne amidst wild popular acclaim.

Chapter 28 Analysis

This chapter concludes the events transpiring during the reign of Tiberius. Much of the chapter deals with the atrocities perpetrated during Tiberius' last few years of life; notably, the deaths of all potential Julio-Claudian heirs save only Caligula and Claudius. The chapter also establishes the public's mistaken belief that Caligula will rule like his father Germanicus might have ruled. In fact, Tiberius has chosen Caligula as a type of self-gratification; Tiberius is well aware that Caligula will quickly be perceived as an even-worse ruler than Tiberius has been. The chapter also establishes Macro as Caligula's servant—a rough equivalent to Tiberius' Sejanus. Note that chapters 14 through 28, inclusive, primarily deal with the period wherein Tiberius was Caesar of Rome.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

The events of this chapter occur in 38 AD. Caligula quickly ascends to the throne of the Emperor without any opposition. At first, he shows remarkable largess, repaying loans, paying debts, issuing rewards, building infrastructure, and raising military pay. He assumes the treasury with about twenty-seven million gold pieces, and in the first three months of his rule, he spends about seven million pieces of gold. Caligula then decrees that Claudius must, as a member of the Imperial family, reside at the palace—Claudius bids his beloved prostitute Calpurnia goodbye. At the palace, Caligula routinely engages in incestuous sexual relations with his three sisters—Drusilla is his favored mistress. Caligula entertains various sexual perverts and openly engages in the most licentious behavior imaginable.

Caligula then sickens and hovers on death's door. After several days of high fever, he suddenly regains his strength and sends for Drusilla, Claudius, and others. In a private confrontation, Caligula demands to know of Claudius what has changed. The canny Claudius accurately guesses and, falling on his face, proclaims that Caligula is a God and worships him as such. Caligula is pleased by Claudius' sycophantic gesticulations and pronouncements and spares his life. Over the next months, Caligula performs or causes to be performed various murders—including that of his own son. He also constantly engages in the most perverted and bizarre sexual acts thinkable.

Chapter 29 Analysis

The reign of Caligula begins in 38 AD and ends in 41 AD. During that time, he engages in the most flagrant perversions and licentious behavior imaginable, including fathering children by his own sisters and performing various forms of torture and murder on a variety of victims. Claudius fears daily for his own life, and survives only by the most debasing behavior meant to mollify Caligula. Claudius' primary danger is his proximity to the madman—as a resident of the Imperial palace, Claudius is summoned almost daily to feasts and debauches where he is subjected to an endless stream of insults and threats. His superior intellect allows him to recognize and thwart the more serious attacks and his self-assured and effacing personality allows him to ignore the rest. Note that chapters 29 through 34, inclusive, primarily deal with the period of time where Caligula was Caesar of Rome.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

The chapter is undated but may be inferred to occur between 38 AD and 41 AD. Antonia, Caligula's grandmother, commits suicide in protest of Caligula's bloodthirsty executions of relations. Claudius oversees his mother's funeral without emotion. Meanwhile, Caligula tires of Macro's growing influence and causes him to be executed and replaced by Cassius Chzhrea, the aged veteran, as his captain of the guard. The appointment is meant insultingly, as Cassius is forced to execute a veritable avalanche of grossly unfair and demeaning punishments.

Caligula becomes increasingly outrageous, despicable, and erratic. A large section of the chapter details some of Caligula's disgusting behaviors. In one notable passage, he assembles a vast fleet of ships and arranges them so as to be able to ride his horse across the bay of Baizh. His apparent insanity leads to a rapid loss in popularity, and massive executions convince most that he is an evil tyrant. His flagrant expenditures on opulent settings for perverse debauchery quickly drain the royal treasury of all wealth.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Although the chapter makes interesting reading as it relates many of Caligula's disgusting activities it is not materially important to the book's major plot development. Caligula is established as a cruel despot and his popularity evaporates. His excesses rapidly drain the treasury, which provides the impetus for most of the remaining acts Caligula causes during his life. Caligula's appointment of the honorable and intelligent Cassius Chzhrea is not particularly well thought out, as will become obvious in the final chapter of the novel.

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

The principle events of this chapter are undated but may be inferred to occur between 38 AD and 41 AD. Caligula, newly poor, embarks on a bewildering array of large and small scams to extract wealth from the Empire. He continues to torture and murder innocents and enemies alike, and behaves in an altogether insane manner. On one notable occasion, he raises cash by inviting senators to his personal home that he has converted into a brothel; he charges enormous sums and prostitutes his own sisters. Meanwhile, Claudius' fortunes depend entirely upon the crazy Caligula's mood, and he narrowly escapes death on several occasions.

Chapter 31 Analysis

This chapter continues the theme of chapter 30; Caligula's excesses continue and several outrageous stories are related. Caligula's reign by this point is that of endlessly extorting monies from any available source with the goal of allowing his unrestrained debauches to continue. Claudius continues as an observer and remains as disengaged as possible.

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

The principle events of this chapter are undated but may be inferred to occur between 38 AD and 41 AD. Caligula, having expended all of Rome's solvent monies, travels to France, accompanied by an enormous train burdened by his family's generational heirlooms. These he auctions in France to crowds of affluent and influential persons, and thus he raises considerable sums of money by peddling junk.

He then travels to Germany where he engages in several abortive and light skirmishes with scattered enemy forces. He writes back to Rome, claiming complete and triumphant victory over the troublesome Germans. He then travels to the Atlantic coast where he takes several British prisoners. Again, he writes back to Rome, claiming complete and triumphant victory over England. Finally, he arranges his impressive armies on the ocean coast and orders them to fire volleys into the ocean and charge, slashing, into the water. He writes back to Rome, claiming complete and triumphant victory over the insouciant God Neptune. Throughout all this, his mental state continues to deteriorate and his behavior becomes increasingly erratic. He begins to dress and act as various Gods, claiming that he is greater than them all or alternately claiming that he is the very embodiment of them all, simultaneously.

One night, Claudius is summoned to Caligula's presence without prior notice; he assumes he will be shortly tortured or executed. He is, needless to say, enormously pleased to instead be married to the beautiful, sexually attractive, and young Messalina.

Chapter 32 Analysis

This chapter continues the themes of Chapters 30 and 31; Caligula's excesses continue and become more public and intricate. His concern for more wealth leads him abroad, where he engages in a series of completely meaningless military maneuvers which he subsequently claims as gigantic martial victories. For Claudius, at least, the period is somewhat delightsome as he is married to the young girl Messalina whom he finds incredibly attractive.

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

The primary events of this chapter occur during 41 AD. The attractive and young Messalina quickly becomes pregnant. On one occasion, a plot is discovered that implicates Claudius—he escapes execution by playing the idiot, which entertains Caligula. Meanwhile, the disgusted Cassius Chzhrea forms a real plot among the Imperial guard; they intend to kill the despised Caligula. The plot is complicated because Caligula retains a massive bodyguard of German troops. The German bodyguard takes Caligula's insane and capricious behavior as a sure sign of his divinity and thus bears him unreasoning loyalty. Eventually, however, Caligula declares an enormous festival. During the confusion of the festivities, Cassius and other guards set upon Caligula in a passageway and kill him.

Chapter 33 Analysis

Caligula's excesses continue to the very end. His bizarre behavior is viewed, by his German bodyguard, as a sure sign of his divinity. His Roman bodyguards, however, have become entirely sickened by his brutal behavior and determine to kill him. By executing a rather haphazard plot, Cassius and other guards repeatedly stab and dismember Caligula. He dies in a hallway, his hand and jaw hacked off, and stabbed in the neck, groin, and elsewhere. Caligula, notably, never took the occasion to deify Livia.

Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

The principle events of this chapter are undated but may be inferred to occur between 38 AD and 41 AD. The murder of Caligula is recounted in greater detail; Cassius and the other guards involved in the assassination plot hack the erstwhile emperor apart in a passageway. The German bodyguards react in an enraged frenzy and set out to slaughter thousands of Romans as they sit in a massive amphitheater—an enterprising actor, however, leaps to the main stage of the festivities and calms the Germans by making the absurd, but believed, claim that Caligula's wounds were ephemeral; the emperor, he states, has recovered and yet lives. Meanwhile, widespread rioting has broken out and confusion is rampant.

The German bodyguards stand ready to enact a great slaughter, hesitating only momentarily to see if their beloved Caligula will in fact appear unharmed. The Roman guards, realizing that calamity has been delayed but probably not averted, run through the Imperial palace looting and celebrating. One of them, by chance, happens upon a confused and fleeing Claudius—he carries Claudius to his companions and announces that he has found a way of mollifying the Germans. The guards then present Claudius to the Germans and the Roman populace in general as the next Caesar—the Emperor of the realm. Their ploy works as the German bodyguard accepts the recalcitrant Claudius as their emperor. Although he does not desire it—in fact, he attempts to avoid it—the crippled Claudius thus finds himself the unlikely emperor of Rome. At least, he muses, he will have access to a wide variety of historical documents—, and now people will want to read his books.

Chapter 34 Analysis

Note that chapters 29 through 34, inclusive, primarily deal with the period of time where Caligula was Caesar of Rome; during this brief final chapter, Caligula is assassinated and Claudius ascends to the throne of the Empire. It is amusing to realize that after decades of struggle, deceit, murder, and infanticide, the emperor winds up being Claudius, the only person who didn't seek power. Raised to emperor largely by happenstance, and accepting of the office mostly to avoid being killed, Claudius begins what history records as a long, if boring, reign as emperor.

Characters

Agrippa

The most important man in Rome after Augustus, Agrippa is Augustus's oldest friend. Livia favors Augustus's stepson, Marcellus, over Agrippa for the purposes of making Agrippa jealous. When a strange sickness overcomes Augustus, he is forced to name an heir. He chooses Marcellus at Livia's behest, forcing Agrippa to request a relocation out of Rome.

Agrippina

The daughter of Julia and widow of Germanicus, Agrippina becomes the de facto leader of Rome's anti-Tiberius faction following Germanicus's death.

Athenodorus

Athenodorus is Claudius's second tutor. Described by Claudius as "a stately old man with dark gentle eyes," Claudius credits the tutor with instilling in him self-confidence and a love of history.

Augustus Caesar

Augustus, or "Octavian" as he was known before he became Emperor in 27 b.c., claims to be Caesar's heir. Claudius portrays him as essentially a just, though generally weak leader, who defers to his wife Livia and is blind to her numerous conspiracies. "Augustus ruled the world, but Livia ruled Augustus," Claudius tells his readers early on. Every attempt he made at placing one of his direct descendants in line for succession, his second wife Livia succeeded in either killing them off or having them exiled. For most of his marriage to Livia, Augustus was unaware of his wife's conspiracies. It was not until Germanicus returns from his military excursions and informs Augustus of Livia's evil-doings does he catch on. But by then it is too late; Livia poisons the figs directly on the tree, and Augustus becomes one of her many victims.

Briseis

Briseis, one of Claudius's slaves, offers faithful friendship and support to her master, and is most remembered in the narration by a dream she relates to Claudius that foretells the way in which he will assume the position of Emperor.

Caligula

After Tiberius dies in 37 a.d., Caligula, takes over. His first acts as Emperor are to make amends for the unjust reign of Tiberius, and in the first months of his own reign, the Roman public comes to love him. However, after a "brain fever" nearly kills him, Caligula comes to believe he has metamorphosed into a god. Thereafter his reign as Emperor is marked by madness and capricious acts of sadism, sexual depravity, and cruelty. Friends and family members are killed for no reasons, the private fortunes of citizens are plundered, and the women of Rome are considered the emperor's personal property. Caligula is eventually killed at the hands of Cassius, one of his soldiers, and succeeded by Claudius.

Calpurnia

As Claudius's longtime mistress, the prostitute Calpurnia provides Claudius with advice and friendship and is the only woman who ever truly loves him. Her true feelings for Claudius are revealed by her visible hurt when Claudius announces his marriage to the beautiful Messalina.

Cassius

First known for surviving the massacre in the German forests, Cassius becomes more famously recognized as the solder who assassinates Caligula.

Castor

Castor is Tiberius and Vispania's son and the husband of Livilla. He is as cruel as his father. When he was named Protector of the People by Tiberius, a clear sign that he would be heir to the emperor, a conspiracy against him unfolds. He dies of consumptive-like symptoms, thus leaving Sejanus with even greater power.

Claudius

Officially known as Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus, and referred to variously as "Claudius the Idiot," "Claudius the Stammerer," and "Clau-Clau-Claudius," he is the narrator of the story and emperor of Rome during his narration. The son of Drusus and grandson of Livia, Claudius is considered by most Romans to be little more than a harmless, if bumbling, idiot, allowed to remain in the company of the imperial family only because of his birthright. But Claudius, over time, proves to be a keen observer of the political and familial intrigue that Rome had become famous for. While taking no sides in any of the familial struggles, he is able to survive the poisoning of Livia, the tyranny of Tiberius, and the madness of Caligula. His deformities make him a figure of scorn, but they also help to keep him under the radars of the legion of

conspirators stalking Rome's streets. Upon Caligula's assassination in 41 a.d., Claudius is forced against his will to accept the position of emperor, a title he maintains for 13 years.

Drusilla

Drusilla, one of Caligula's sisters, is known for having sexual relations with him from a very early age. She is referred to as a "she-beast" by Claudius's mother.

Drusus

Drusus is Claudius's father. He is highly respected by his son and wildly popular with Romans for his belief in the liberties of the Republic. As a general in the army on the Rhine he is wounded slightly. In a letter to his brother Tiberius, he exhorts Augustus not to continue his rule, for the sake of Republican values. The letter is accidentally read aloud to Augustus and Livia. Augustus replies immediately, asking Drusus to return to Rome, but by the time Augustus's letter arrives, Drusus has fallen from a horse and is severely injured. It is revealed later that Livia poisoned him. At his deathbed he whispers to Tiberius, in reference to Livia, "Rome has a severe mother." His death feeds into Livia's plan to rule Rome through her son, Tiberius.

Gaius

Gaius is Julia's oldest son by Marcus Agrippa and a favorite of Augustus. Shortly after being made Governor of Asia Minor, he falls sick and dies, another of Livia's poison victims.

Gemellus

Gemellus is the young son of Livilla and Castor. Caligula kills him for no apparent reason.

Germanicus

Germanicus is the older brother of Claudius and a hugely popular general in the Roman army. Devoutly faithful to Tiberius, Germanicus borrows money to pay mutinous troops and forges a document indicating that the gift came directly from the emperor. As Tiberius's military successes grow, he becomes more and more unpopular among the populace. Tiberius sends him and his family to Antioch, where a series of foreboding and mysterious events unfold, culminating in his death. It is eventually revealed that his son Caligula had killed him, but the belief at the time is that Piso and his wife Plancina, had done the deed.

Julia

Julia is Augustus's daughter by his previous marriage. She is married to Marcellus until he dies, then to Agrippa until he dies, and then to Tiberius. Tiberius never loves her, and after he leaves Rome, she engages in nightly orgies throughout the city and is eventually banished for life by Augustus. It is eventually revealed the Livia has been feeding her an aphrodisiac under false pretences. Julia dies of starvation during Tiberius's reign.

Livia

Livia, the second wife to Augustus and mother of Tiberius and Drusus, is undoubtedly the most powerful individual in the Roman Empire. Her name, Claudius tells us, relates to the Latin word meaning "malignity," an apt description of her relationship to Rome. "Augustus ruled the world, but Livia ruled Augustus," Claudius writes. Livia has fooled her husband into divorcing her so she can marry Augustus, whom she has convinced, falsely, that his wife, Scribonia, is having an adulterous affair. Livia's marriage to Augustus is never consummated; Augustus is a mere instrument in her boundless ambitions. She even provides Augustus with beautiful women with whom he can satisfy his sexual needs. Just before dying, she admits to Claudius that she poisoned several political opponents, including Claudius's father and son. Livia's monomaniacal desire is to bring her son Tiberius into the line of succession to the emperor, and she uses every ounce of cunning to see that desire through.

Livilla

Livilla is Claudius's sister, Castor's widow, and Sejanus's mistress. She helps conspire against Postumous by seducing him and having him arrested for attempted rape.

Lucius

Julia's second son by Marcus Agrippa and adopted son and heir to Augustus, Lucius is an obstacle in Livia's plan to control Rome. On a trip to Spain, Lucius mysteriously dies, leaving Tiberius as Augustus's obvious heir.

Macro

Commander of the Praetorian Guard under Tiberius following Sejanus's execution, Macro serves briefly under Caligula until he is executed by Caligula.

Marcellus

Octavia's son and Julia's husband, and adopted son of Augustus, Marcellus is considered a leading candidate to be Augustus's heir. After being named Augustus's heir, thus taking Agrippa out of the picture, he is elected to a city magistracy. However, he quickly dies from the same sickness as Augustus, thus leaving Agrippa as the only possible successor. Like so many others, Marcellus falls victim of Livia's touches of poison.

Medullina

A beautiful girl of thirteen who befriends Claudius and whom Claudius loves and sets out to marry, Medullina is poisoned on her way to the wedding and dies before the marriage can take place.

Messalina

Claudius's third wife, Messalina, is given to him by Caligula. She is the first woman Claudius loves since his youth. Although *I, Claudius* ends before Messalina's true colors are revealed, she comes to be known as one of the most famous harlots in history.

Aelia Paetina

Claudius's second wife and Sejanus's adopted sister, Aelia is used by Sejanus to help him become a member, by marriage, of the imperial family.

Piso

Appointed the Roman governor of Syria and Tiberius's agent, Piso conspires against Germanicus by spying on him and sending false reports back to the Roman Senate. When Germanicus becomes ill, he suspects Piso of black magic. Following Germanicus's mysterious death, Piso is accused of the murder and forced to stand trial. Because he holds documents that indict the emperor and his wife, before a the trial can be completed, Livia arranges for his wife Plancina to kill him and make the death appear to be a suicide.

Plancina

Out of fear of losing everything she owns, Plancina, Piso's wife, with Livia's help, kills her husband Piso and makes the death appear to be a suicide. She herself is then tried, and acquitted, of Germanicus's murder.

Postumus

One of Claudius's best friends and grandson to Augustus, and therefore a possible successor to Augustus, Postumus is daring and adventuresome. At the age of fourteen, he protects Claudius from a beating by Cato, Claudius's tutor. He loves Livilla, which proves to be his downfall. Livilla seduces Postumus and then cries rape, causing Postumus to be banished from Rome. He was eventually freed secretly by Augustus, who had finally come to learn of Livia's treachery, but it was too late for him to become Emperor. Livia's further treachery kept him out of Augustus's will, and when his whereabouts were eventually discovered, he was tortured and killed by Tiberius.

Sejanus

Born of humble origins, Sejanus becomes Commander of the Praetorian Guard under Tiberius and effectively ruled Rome with an iron fist when Tiberius retired to Capri. His thirst for power became too much, however; his excesses, which cause the indiscriminate arrests and deaths of many officials and everyday citizens, lead to his own hideous execution at the hands of Tiberius.

Sibyl at Cumae

Claudius relates his visit to the Sibyl at Cumae, who foresees his ascension to emperor and further tells him that 1900 years hence, despite his "stammer, cluck and trip," he "shall speak clear," a reference to the history he writes.

Tiberius

When Augustus dies in 14 b.c., Tiberius, his adopted son and the natural son of Augustus's wife Livia, becomes emperor. His lasts for twenty-two years, most of them in self-imposed exile on the island of Capri. Claudius portrays Tiberius as being a cruel and degenerate ruler who comes to power primarily as the result of his mother Livia's murderous plots. Claudius also tells us of Tiberius's depravity, hinting at acts of bestiality and other depraved sexual practices. Tiberius is on his deathbed, but not quite dead, when he is suffocated by Caligula's commander Macro.

Urgulanilla

A huge, six-foot two-inch woman whom Livia forces Claudius to marry, Urgulanilla has little to do with Claudius.

Objects/Places

Eagle

Claudius makes frequent reference to a military ensign known as an eagle. Each regiment carried an eagle, a staff topped by a globe surmounted by an eagle with wings flared. The eagle was typically made of bronze or silver and represented the regiment's esprit de corps and military infallibility. When eagles were captured in battle, Rome felt the disgrace. When eagles were recovered from vanquished enemies, it was cause for great celebration.

The Roman Republic

The original government of the vast Roman civilization was a republic. From 500 BC until 44 BC, Rome was ruled by a republican government composed primarily of a senate. The end of the Roman Republic came when the senate appointed Julius Caesar perpetual dictator and, later, when the senate upheld Augustus as Caesar in 27 BC. Although modern historians view the change from republic to empire as something decisive, it was not so obvious to Romans at the time. Claudius, for example, discusses how the senate transferred its power piecemeal to Augustus and, later, to Tiberius. By the time of Caligula, however, the concept of the Republic had been completely abandoned in the public imagination.

The Roman Empire

The second government of the vast Roman civilization was a dictatorship and the nation was referred to thereafter as an empire. Julius Caesar was appointed perpetual dictator in 44 BC and his selected heir, Augustus, was confirmed as dictator by the senate in 27 BC, following his spectacular military victories over other contenders. The empire was further entrenched when the senate confirmed Tiberius as emperor. By the time of Caligula, the empire was the accepted proper form of Rome. The Roman Empire endures for many hundreds of years.

The Julio-Claudian Dynasty

The Julio-Claudian dynasty refers to a series of five Roman Emperors following Julius Caesar, including Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and—though not considered in the novel—Nero. These five ruled the empire from 27 BC to 68 AD. Julius Caesar himself was not an emperor *per se*, and he had no relation to the Claudian family. Ironically, Tiberius was not related by blood to the Julian family, but instead became emperor subsequent to his adoption by Augustus. Likewise, Claudius was not related genetically to the Julian family.

The Roman Senate

The Roman Senate was the principle governing body of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire from 500 BC through 470 AD. Presumably established by Romulus, the founder of Rome, the senate originally functioned as an advisory council composes of one hundred men. The number was later increased to 300 men and, under Julius Caesar, again increased to 600. Membership was determined by factors that gradually changed over time, but in general, senators were respected and wealthy citizens.

Rome (The City)

Rome, the modern capital of Italy, was once the capital city of the Roman Empire and hence, the center of world politics. Founded by Romulus in 750 BC, the city eventually became the center of the greatest ancient empire. The city was governed by the senate until 31 BC when it fell under the control of the Emperor. The city is the setting for much of the novel's action.

Rome (The Civilization)

The influence of Roman culture was spread throughout the Western and Mid-Eastern worlds by a prolonged series of decisive military victories spanning several hundred years. Roman dominance expanded over most of Europe and ringed the entire Mediterranean Sea. The civilization and culture of Rome find embodiment in the novel, and the tone and texture of the narrative is decidedly Roman.

Capri (The Island)

Capri is an Italian island off the Sorrentine Peninsula, near Naples, and has been regarded as a beautiful resort since the time of the Roman Republic. Tiberius Caesar built a series of impressive villas on the island and, in 27 AD, retired permanently to Capri. For the next decade, he resided on the island and ruled the empire *in absentia*. Claudius states that for Tiberius, Capri's attraction was not so much physical beauty, but rather isolation—on Capri, Tiberius was free to engage in numerous cruelties and sexual perversions upon his slaves while simultaneously enjoying sunlight, the open air, and the beach. In Rome, such unacceptably deviant practices required the privacy of underground chambers.

The Roman Religion

The Roman religion is not rigorously defined in the novel, but instead is stated to be based on Etruscan religious practices that were in general poorly understood. Salient facts stated in the novel involve polytheism and a form of subdued ancestor worship. In addition to the established Gods, newer Demigods and Gods could be established by

legal decree. Thus, Augustus was made a God by deification after his death. Tiberius had a temple erected to him during his life, though he resisted further deification while alive. Contrarily, Caligula openly declared his own status as a God and demanded to be worshipped as such. It is interesting to note that immediately after Caligula's assassination the streets of Rome were full of the broken religious statues of Caligula.

In the Roman religion, the various offices of priest and religious functionary were as nearly political as they were religious, and the appointment of Claudius to be a priest was accompanied by a hefty bill from the treasury. Under the early Roman Empire, the religion was burdened with the growing popularity of oracles, or divinely inspired prophecies. In the novel, Livia frequently seeks council from various oracles and finds that their prophecies routinely occur exactly as stated.

Carthage

Carthage was an ancient city in North Africa as well as the civilization and empire that developed from the city. From the earliest days of the Roman Republic, Carthage was viewed as the chief military and political opponent of Rome. A series of costly and brutal wars between Carthage and Rome were conducted, ending in the final victory of Rome and the complete subjugation of Carthage. Claudius travels to Carthage to dedicate a temple. While there, he gathers an immense amount of historical documents that he later uses as source material to write a history of Carthage.

Social Concerns

I, Claudius and the sequel Claudius the God form a continuous narrative of Emperor Claudius's life and times.

Graves studied hard before writing these books. As early as 1929, he had been interested in Ancient Rome's Emperor Claudius, and he already had a generalized knowledge of the period in which I, Claudius is set. Once he had decided to write the novel, Graves carefully researched Claudius's era, steeping himself not only in the historical events, such as wars and assassinations, but in the everyday life of Roman society. He wanted the background of the novel to seem real to his readers by presenting an accurate account of how the Romans lived.

The Roman society of I, Claudius is disintegrating. The once proudly free Roman people have surrendered their political liberties to first Emperor Augustus Caesar and then to his successors. Absolute power is wielded mercilessly by the emperors and their families. Livia, the wife of Augustus, murders and brutalizes family members, friends, and enemies in order to preserve her own political power and to secure power for her favorites. Her husband turns a blind eye to her activities, and she manages to destroy nearly every sympathetic character in the novel, leaving only madmen and fools to rule after Augustus' death. Claudius covers his own good nature and quick mind by pretending to be a fool. In a society in which political power rests with one man, the emperor, any good leader or honest person is a threat to the emperor; if the public admires the good deeds of a royal subject, the emperor may feel threatened, and the good subject must be exiled or executed. Those who might have been great leaders or philanthropists are forced to be sycophants who must engage in petty politics in order to survive. The learned Claudius, potentially a great historian, must abase himself by playing the fool in order to escape the murderous rampages of his grandmother Livia and Emperor Caligula, as well as other evil schemers.

The world of I, Claudius is a cruel one. Roman citizens become progressively more degenerate as the novel advances. Their best and brightest fellow citizens succumb to murder.

Without ethical leadership and without political responsibilities, a once great people indulge in debauchery, superstition, and laziness. I, Claudius is in part a presentation of what may happen when a free people surrender their liberties in exchange for political stability. Claudius tries to reverse history — to re-reate the Roman Republic — but no one, not even an emperor, can restore liberty to people who do not want it.

Techniques

Again in his letter to T. E. Lawrence, Graves declares about I, Claudius: "The writing is definitely not high-pitched but the sort of writing to be expected from the man we know Claudius was.

It is a very modest book, and full of anecdotes because people like anecdotes." Graves works at two levels in his novel. One is the popular level; nearly every critic takes pains to point out that Graves has said that 1, Claudius was meant to be a best-seller. Yet, Graves also is a conscientious writer who chose the subject of the novel because it interested him. Thus, I, Claudius is not just a sensational account of Roman depravity but an attempt to be honest with readers and produce a work suited to "the man we know Claudius was." On the second level — "literary" as opposed to "popular" — Graves is a very self-conscious artist who carefully creates characters, moods, and even a narrative pace suited to the characters, such as a slow one for Tiberius but a lively one for Caligula.

Thematic Overview

Claudius's personal history is one of survival. His father is murdered by Livia. Around him, friends and family are killed by those maneuvering for power. The strong die. The honorable die. So, too, the cruel and wicked die.

Claudius survives by behaving as though he is a threat to no one. Indeed, when the palace guards declare him emperor, Claudius refuses to become emperor, but the guards force him. In a land in which the populace has no political power, a group of thugs — the guards — determine who will rule. In order to survive and save his wife and child, Claudius yields to the guards and becomes emperor.

The themes of I, Claudius are grim.

Positive themes such as love and friendship are debased by the lust for power and the lusts of the flesh. Selfishness, cruelty, and treachery are the novel's dominant themes. At first, Emperor Augustus seems to rule honorably, but the poison of absolute power has infected his wife. She creates an atmosphere of treachery; those who would dare to tell Augustus of her murdering and deceit risk their lives because Augustus refuses to believe the truth about her. Characters must scheme and lie in order to evade Livia's treacherous plots. Those who remain honorable risk their lives in a world in which honesty makes one an easy target for Livia, Tiberius, Caligula, and other schemers. The dark themes add up to a world gone mad.

Every moment may bring sudden death. A misspoken word, a poorly chosen friend, or simply being born into the wrong family may bring torture and murder. In an insane world madmen may be kings, and crazed Caligula is the logical result of a political system gone berserk.

Themes

Fatalism

The Romans believed that the Fates had already determined their futures, which could not be altered. Claudius describes a visit to the Sybil of Cumae, who foretells of his becoming emperor. He also describes how the Roman Senate would order consultations with the books of prophecies whenever strange portents or disasters occur. Tiberius consults Thrasyllus and acts in response to the soothsayer's prophecies. Livia, near her own death, calls Claudius to tell him of the omens that point to him both becoming emperor and eventually avenging Caligula's death. As described by Claudius, these omens and prophecies were far more than mere superstitions; they effectively guided the Romans in their decision-making and actions. Both Livia and Caligula, for instance, had ample opportunities to kill Claudius, and given all that Claudius knew about their goings-on, it would have made sense to do so. But the fact that Claudius is prophesied to become Emperor and one day avenge Caligula's death helped explain his ability to stay alive.

The Recording of History

Claudius is, first and foremost, a historian. His explicit aim with these chronicles is to offer "readers of a hundred generations hence" this "confidential history" of his life. In what seems at first a digression, Claudius, shortly after his first marriage, meets the historians Pollio and Livy in the library. While there, they have a discourse on the uses and abuses of history. "Yes, Poetry is Poetry, and Oratory is Oratory, and History is History, and you can't mix them," Pollio chides his fellow historian. Ironically, Claudius, the narrator of *I, Claudius*, claims to be following Pollio's dictum, but Graves, in his creation of Claudius and his imaginative turns of events, certainly mixes "poetry," or imaginative liberties, with "history." While Graves rightly argues that the characters and events of *I, Claudius* are all historically based, he nevertheless took great liberties in enhancing the characters' traits and filling in the historical detail. Perhaps Graves's most liberal use of "poetry" occurs in his depiction of Caligula. While there is general agreement as to the vicious and capricious nature of Caligula's reign, there is no consensus as to Caligula's psychological state. History certainly suggests that Caligula may have been certifiably mad, but Graves offers an extreme view of that madness that few others have previously, or since, depicted.

Nepotism

Much of the political power in the novel is relegated according to the nepotistic desires of the characters, or the characters' desire to secure the emperor's seat for their own blood relatives, resulting in conniving and murderous competition. With the demise of the Republic, political power in Rome has become concentrated in the hands of the

emperor. It is through the emperor's will that a successor is chosen, and it is clear in Augustus's case, at least, that he wants at all costs to choose one of his direct descendants. Unbeknownst to him, however, Livia is constantly scheming to place her own son, Tiberius, in the line of succession. Throughout most of the narrative, it is unclear exactly how Livia is doing this, but near her deathbed, she admits to several poisonings and plots that effectively kept Augustus's children and grandchildren from being able to take over as Emperor. In fact, one could argue that the primary tension that fuels the early action of *I, Claudius* is the continual battle between the wills of Livia and Augustus in this regard. Livia is able to manipulate Augustus through her strategic use of poisoning and plotting, and she wins supremacy for her bloodline.

Paganism

Rome, during these years, is still a pantheistic pagan society, with multiple gods. Christianity, as such, has not yet been established. The Senate, for instance, allows Augustus to be deified in Asia Minor; Livia asks that Claudius promise to deify her upon her death; Caligula believes himself to be a god and, in fact, goes to war, like a god, against Neptune. Sibyls and oracles are consulted, and the emperors retain astrologers to advise them on political matters.

Political Tyranny

Under the Republic, a considerable amount of power was conferred upon the elected officials of the Senate. When August was made emperor, the senate conferred all power to him. As a result, Rome suffers under years of endless plots and conspiracies as Augustus's potential successors and their followers vie with one another for advantage. The winners of these stratagems tend to be those who are most merciless in their acts, such as Livia, Sejanus and Macro, and otherwise innocent politicians, officials and citizens are denied their basic rights and summarily exiled or executed. Although Augustus was generally viewed as a just leader, the reigns of Tiberius and Caligula are noted for their brutal and tyrannical characteristics.

Sexual Activity

Although Claudius is, on most accounts, remarkable for the objectivity of his narration, he does not hesitate in passing judgment in regards to issues of certain types of sexuality. In one noted digression, he states emphatically that he has never engaged in homosexual practices, a sexual lifestyle he considered degenerate. This digression is all the more odd considering that at no time in the narration does he explicitly describe observing any homosexual practices. Also, on several occasions he remarks that the depravity of Tiberius was too revolting to describe, without actually stating what that depravity is, though he does allude to the emperor's practice of bestiality, and he describes one of the Roman wives killing herself as a result of being forced to endure unspeakable acts by Tiberius. Julia is described for her excessive wontedness, and

Caligula comes off as being the most depraved of them all, with his inclination to sleep with his sisters and couple with whomever he desired. The sexuality that Claudius describes is effectively used to enhance the atmosphere of "depravity" in Rome; since Claudius makes little, if any, mention of his own sexual activity, this effectively lends a greater air of objectivity to his narrative. (Though it is interesting to note that Claudius is more judgmental of Roman sexual practices than he is of his family's proclivity for grisly murders.) As is the case in virtually all aspects of his life, Claudius is a passive observer of Rome's sexuality; he only acts when acted upon.

War and Xenophobia

Part of the popularity of *I, Claudius* when it was first published may have had to do with the historical and political context in which Graves was writing. The year before the book's publication, Hitler had just come to power in Germany, and although it was still early, there was growing sentiment that Germany would one day soon be on the march to war. *I, Claudius* depicts one of the most aggressive imperial forces in world history. The Roman Empire was able to expand throughout the world as a result of its continual military incursions and victories. Augustus was one of the most successful emperors in this regard, helping Rome to solidify its holdings in the Balkans and Germany. Roman citizens were generally excited at the news of new military victories, for it usually meant that they would soon profit from new supplies of food and an infusion of new wealth into the Roman economy. War also provided military leaders, such as Germanicus, with a way to advance themselves in the eyes of the Roman Senate and emperor. And as in the case with most imperial forces, Rome played of its citizens' fear of the foreign "barbarians." Such a fear of foreigners is known as xenophobia. Without vigilance, these barbarians could one day be knocking down Rome's gates. In Rome's particular case, just as it already was for Graves to a large degree, the Germans were considered particularly barbaric, and Augustus and Tiberius expend serious resources on their German military incursions. Claudius describes massacres of Roman regiments at the hands of the German barbarians, and he describes the fear of the citizens when news of Rome's losses spreads.

Liberty or Stability

Claudius proposes throughout the entire novel that he would prefer the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire; he also states that all of the men which he refers to as 'good Claudians' would prefer Republic to Empire. Even Augustus Caesar occasionally mused that the Republic hypothetically was preferable to his own Empire; throughout his reign, he maintained the outward appearances of Empire, consulting the Roman Senate on various matters and behaving, for the most part, as if the Senate's advice was considered. After Augustus' death, Tiberius publicly derived his power from the Roman Senate and their willingness to confer on him the various offices and functions that had heretofore been consolidated only in Augustus. Claudius mentions that several senators were openly antagonistic to Tiberius and declared their preference to return to the Republic—these senators were quickly eliminated after Tiberius' acceptance of all

powers. Yet even as Tiberius accepted these powers, he did so with a public show of great reluctance.

This heated debate, which spanned generations, between the appropriate forms of government for Rome—Republic versus Empire—was more than simple politics for it embodied the novel's major theme of liberty or stability. The desire for true liberty—freedom from an emperor—espoused by Claudius throughout most of the novel is starkly contrasted with statements made by Livia; the Republic, she recalls, was plagued by constant civil warfare as one powerful politician attempted to seize ever more power from less capable neighbors. Thus, in one memorable discussion between Livia and Claudius when Claudius declares himself at heart a Republican, Livia dismisses him as a hopeless romantic and definitively states that for nearly all citizens, the Empire is vastly superior to the Republic. Claudius eventually comes to realize that the Roman Civilization apparently must choose between liberty and Republic or stability and Empire.

The Women Rule the Men

The novel presents a subtle and complicated gender relationship between women and men. The status of women is described briefly during Chapter 7 when Claudius and Augustus consider the topic of marriage. As stated, single women were able to maintain their own finances, own property, and enjoy some measure of personal freedom in the patriarchal male-dominated Roman society. On the other hand, married women were little more than chattel to their husbands; they surrendered all wealth and real estate to their husbands, they were totally subjugated to their husbands' wishes, and in matters of sex they were sequestered and used or ignored as desired. For this reason many, many Roman women elected to remain unmarried and in control of their own lives.

However, single women were completely excluded from any significant form of involvement in the political process, with the exception of limited roles in religious practice. Thus, for politically minded women such as Livia, the road to influence and power was subtle and complicated. Even so, numerous women in the novel hold positions of considerable political power and for over half of the time considered by the narrative, women wield more raw political power than men do. From 38 BC until 17 AD, Livia was the most powerful person in Rome. From 17 AD through 26 AD, her overt political power gradually waned, but she was still a force to be reckoned with until her death in 29 AD. Under her influence, Augustus remained Emperor, Tiberius became Emperor, and Caligula ascended to the throne; thus, Livia is the actual power behind the throne of three Caesars. Additional women wield considerable influence, including Agrippina, Antonia, Livilla, and the prostitute Calpurnia who seems not only wiser but also more rational than Claudius does during the difficult reign of Caligula. Finally, perhaps the most powerful figure of all throughout the novel is the Sybil, or Oracle of the Roman Religion, who pronounces various rhyming prophecies, which all come to pass. She can be viewed not only as a powerful political figure, but also literally as a creator of history.

The Validity of Roman Religion

The novel does not rigorously define the Roman religion but instead presents it as loosely based on prior Etruscan religious practices that were in general poorly understood. The novel does establish the religion to be polytheistic and inclusive of a form of subdued ancestor worship. In addition to the established Gods, newer Demigods and Gods could be established by legal decree. Thus, Augustus was made a God by deification after his death. Tiberius had a temple erected to him during his life, though he resisted further deification while alive. Contrarily, Caligula openly declared his own status as a God and demanded to be worshipped as such. In the Roman religion, the various offices of priest and religious functionary were as nearly political as they were religious, and the appointment of Claudius to be a priest was accompanied by a hefty bill from the treasury, which he paid only under some duress. Under the early Roman Empire, the religion was burdened with the growing popularity of oracles, or divinely inspired prophecies. In the novel, Livia frequently seeks council from various oracles and finds that their prophecies routinely occur exactly as stated. In addition, Livia is not alone in seeking the counsel of oracles—Tiberius constantly consults with them and Caligula finds their prophecies compelling (at least before he becomes a God himself).

It can thus be appreciated that every major character in the novel views oracular pronouncements as significant, interesting, and definitive. Claudius offered examples of numerous prophecies which, when uttered, seemed either incomprehensible or fantastical in their vision of the future. Yet, without exception, every prophecy is fulfilled in every particular. Not only are they completely fulfilled, they are also fulfilled in a manner that does not strain credulity or require more than a straightforward interpretation. Providing these prophecies is a religious function and most of them are uttered by priestesses whose job is to manifest divinity temporarily. Clearly, within the framework of the novel, the Roman Religion is a dominant social force; one based on 'true' and valid principles, one that worships actual Gods, and is capable of accurately and routinely foretelling the future. For Claudius, the Roman Religion is clearly valid.

Style

Foreshadowing

I, Claudius is narrated by Claudius during the final years of his life. Throughout his narration, Claudius hints at events that are yet to come, oftentimes with the help of sibyls, oracles or other methods of divination. His visit to the Sybil of Cumae, for instance, foretells of his becoming emperor, and a dream that his slave Briseis has describes how his succession would take place.

Historical Novel

As a novel relating a particular period in the history of the Roman Empire, *I, Claudius* relies on certain, verifiable historical facts. The characters he describes all existed in the chronology and relationships that he lays out. Graves seldom fudges dates or the details of significant events, such as the deaths of major Roman figures. However, much of *I, Claudius* is based purely on the author's power of speculation and imagination, and as such should be considered for what it is: a fictional account of the reign of three Roman emperors. However, the purpose of historical fiction is not to portray the "facts" of a particular historical time or event as would a scholarly study; rather, its purpose is to portray the general "truth" of the times in the hopes of providing insights in the readers' contemporary times. A good historical novel reveals universal truths about other people and cultures, and transports us to another historical time through good storytelling, but not through ponderous academic research.

Narrative Objectivity

While Claudius, by the nature of his own existence as a member of the imperial family, can not but help to be involved in many of the plots and subplots unfolding around him, he nevertheless consciously strives to provide his reader with an objective view of events. His early speculation of Livia's involvement in various deaths is eventually proven true, establishing his credibility as a narrator, and rarely do his other speculative thoughts fail on the grounds of his own biases and subjectivity. Claudius is an historian. As such, he should not lift one historical character above another in the eyes of his eventual readers, but rather reveal the truth as he sees it. This narrative technique is one of the most remarkable characteristics of *I, Claudius*, and Claudius himself, as depicted through his narration, is one of Graves's most ingenious inventions and certainly one of literature's most memorable. Claudius introduced to his readers as "'Claudius the Idiot,' or 'That Claudius,' or 'Claudius the Stammerer'" comes across as a remarkably self-deprecating individual. A stuttering, limping, bumbling fool, he is seemingly out of favor with Rome's power structure. But the course of his narration proves him to be an insightful and brilliant figure with a sharp intellect and flawless

memory, and as a result, he is able to survive the caprices of Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula before being named emperor himself.

Point of View

The fictional autobiography is related from the subjective first-person point of view as is common for the form. The meta-fictional author Claudius reflects upon his history and life with the knowledge of a master but he is able to present material from a broad swath of history with a surprisingly fresh voice. Thus, his recounting of the tribulations of the reign of Caligula is simultaneously informative and humorous and notably lacks any personally condescending attitude toward being victimized by the probably insane tyrant.

Claudius's life spans a significant portion of Roman history and he is clearly a master of the subject. Nevertheless, the topic is presented without the haughty opinion of a master and is remarkably free of jargon. Indeed, the strength of the fictional autobiography is found in the easy accessibility with which it offers to a technical and often dry subject. The reader is not expected to understand the intricacies of Roman politics, governance, or history and, when such details are important, they are provided and explained in easy terms. The text is also enjoyably free of any political or personal bias of the actual author, and the text's perspective is as refreshing as it is proficient.

Setting

The novel's setting is a lightly fictionalized Roman Civilization. Often praised as historically accurate, the novel deviates from established historical interpretations only in a few minor points and usually only to provide tone or detail when such details are not known to historians. The novel's time period focuses on the initial decades of the life of Claudius, the protagonist, and spans from 10 AD through 41 AD. In popular terms, the novel's focus includes the latter period of Augustus' reign and the entirety of the reigns of Tiberius and Caligula.

Most of the novel's significant events transpire in the city of Rome, proper. In nearly every respect, this city's fictional portrayal is based on sound historical understandings of social, cultural, religious, and political conditions. Additional settings include the vast but vaguely described Roman-German border, where Germanicus conducts many of his successful military campaigns, Carthage, where Claudius spends about one year, and Capri, the retirement island of Tiberius for several years.

The novel relies far more heavily on tone than on setting, however, and aside from the obvious historical significance of the locations noted, the setting is presented in fairly generic terms. For example, Claudius spends much more time describing the political situation than he does describing the physical presence of the magnificent capital of the Roman Empire.

Language and Meaning

Language is a particularly subtle aspect of the novel. Claudius, and nearly all of his fellow characters, would have routinely utilized Latin; obviously nearly all of the dialogue and political speeches recounted in the novel would have been delivered in the native tongue of Rome. However, Claudius states in the introductory matter that he is writing the fictional autobiography in Greek because he believes that language "will always remain the chief literary language of the world" (p. 9). Obviously, this type of consideration of language is entirely fictional, as well as enjoyable, because the novel was written in modern English. In fact, the front matter of the novel contains the 'Author's Note', which considers this issue in brief detail, "It has been difficult at times to find suitable renderings for military, legal and other technical terms" (p. i). The fictional aspect of writing in Greek also allows Graves to explore the etymology of Latin words which would otherwise be apparent in Latin as the names are the words; thus Graves through Claudius is able to consider a refined meaning of, for example, the word Caesar (presumably as rendered into Greek) without belaboring the point.

Meaning in the narrative is derived nearly entirely from a chronological presentation of events and explanation of how those events interrelate. The meta-fictional Claudius is not particularly emotional and does not generally view others as being motivated by anything except a desire to control others and extend personal influence and prestige. For Claudius, even money is simply a means to an end, as is relationship. When his various wives are divorced, Claudius views the action as relatively insignificant on a personal level; when his own son is murdered, he simply notes the event as having happened. Having known and despised his grandmother nearly his entire life, he notes the feeling of a vague sort of sorrow upon her passing. Being an adopted son, for legal purposes, is just as good as being a biological son, etc. The meanings of these events must therefore be derived from their relative chronology of occurrence and they are significant within the novel only insofar as they impact later events.

Structure

The 432-page novel is divided into thirty-four unnamed but enumerated chapters. Chapters are numbered appropriately with Roman numerals. Most chapters have side-bar notations which indicate the dates of significant events described within the chapter. Because of this, nearly every major event in the narrative can be placed in a strictly chronological ordering; this convention materially aids the reader. Nearly all of the characters and nearly all of the events described in the novel are based upon historical facts as they were understood by the author. The novel's fictive elements allow these facts to be presented as interesting and vibrant events rather than as a simple litany of chronological political developments. Furthermore, nearly all of the material in the novel is presented in more-or-less chronological fashion. That is, with some exceptions, the events of one chapter occur after the events described in a previous chapter and before the events described in a subsequent chapter. Occasionally, events will be presented out-of-order by a year or two for topical continuity; when this occurs, the text so states.

Additionally, some events retrospectively are reevaluated as Claudius learns more information about them. These chronological digressions are obvious.

The novel is presented as an autobiography of the meta-fictional author and protagonist, Claudius. This poses some interesting conceptual challenges to discussing the novel in critical ways—e.g., when speaking of the author, one must distinguish between the meta-fictional author, Claudius, and the actual author, Graves. This fictional structure also allows the novel to be intimate and easily accessible and proves to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the book. The novel's structure also features occasional lengthy digressions from the principle plot. For example, Claudius will occasionally wander off topic and deliver a fairly lengthy consideration of some historical event. These humorous wanderings provide for solid characterization of Claudius and indicate that he is, as he is often charged, fairly absent-minded.

It is of note that the text was authored and originally published in England, and as such uses English spelling and punctuation styles in favor of American conventions. Some American-market editions have altered quotation punctuation to better fit the American style; yet even in these editions, the original spelling is generally not altered.

Historical Context

I, Claudius was written from the Spanish island of Mallorca in 1934. Within two years, the Spanish Civil War would force Graves and his partner, the poet Laura Riding, to flee for America. Meanwhile, the Italian fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, Spain's right-wing General Francisco Franco, and the German National Socialists, under the leadership of Adolph Hitler, were gaining power in their respective countries and threatening greater Europe.

To understand how the convergence of these historical and political events affected the reception of *I, Claudius*, it is necessary to understand the historical background of the book's story. Although a work of fiction that relies on the author's imagination to fill in some historical voids, the book itself is generally accepted by critics as a historically accurate reflection of the Roman Empire.

In 23 B.C., the Roman Senate granted Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Octavianus, the grandnephew of Julius Caesar and more commonly known simply as Augustus, the titles and powers of *Imperium proconsulare maius* and *tribunicia potestas* for life, effectively ending the Roman Republic and turning over to him the complete control of the Roman state.

Although Augustus's reign is generally viewed as a just one, with the growing stability of the empire listed as one of his greatest achievements, the seeds of what would evolve into decades of capricious, corrupt and vengeful rulers were planted with the demise of the Republic. In 14 a.d, Augustus died and Tiberius Claudius Nero, commonly referred to as Tiberius, came to power. For twenty-three years, until his death in 37 a.d, Roman citizens and political leaders were on the receiving end of Tiberius's reign that was marked by seemingly capricious assassinations, poisonings, and banishments. In 26 a.d, Tiberius retired to the island of Capri, where he is said to have lived a life of complete depravity and debauchery, effectively leaving Rome in the hands of the praetorian prefect Sejanus, a man whose sole vision was to become emperor at all costs. But the brutality and corruption of Sejanus was even too much for Tiberius to ignore, and in 31 a.d he was arrested and executed.

With Tiberius's death, rumored to have come from the hands of his praetorian prefect Macro, his nephew Caligula took over, and thus began a reign marked by what many believe was the apex of Roman madness. Shortly after becoming emperor, Caligula suffered what doctors at the time referred to as a "brain fever." He survived, but his mental acuity suffered irreparable damage. For the remainder of his reign he believed himself to be immortal, was known widely to be having incestuous relationships with his sisters (often with his wife in attendance). His acts of cruelty to opponents, common citizens and criminals were unprecedented in Roman history. After only five years in his reign, an officer of the praetorians, or imperial guard, with the help of several colleagues, assassinated him. In the melee that followed, Claudius was found, literally hiding behind some curtains. The praetorians guards dragged the fifty-year-old,

stuttering and physically deformed uncle of Caligula to their camp, where they named him emperor.

I, Claudius covers the period of the Roman Empire that saw the end of the Republic and an increased concentration of power in the hands of the emperor, thus leading to an endless number of conspiracies and political intrigues among the Roman elite. Each successive emperor seemed to outdo the previous in capriciousness and terror, with the innocent bystanders and citizens suffering the most. It also covers a period in which Rome was intent on consolidating, and increasing, its hold on outlying territories, particularly Germany. Claudius's descriptions of the Germans in particular paint an unflattering picture of barbarity.

Graves wrote *I, Claudius* shortly after the tremendous and hedonistic excesses of the 1920s had imploded with the Great Depression and left the Western industrialized world in economic collapse. By 1934, there was also a growing anxiety with respect to Germany's intentions and Italy's growing fascist threat. Europe seemed to be precariously balanced between hyper-anxiety that fueled the 1920s and the hyper-aggression that would erupt with World War II. Europeans watched helplessly as the influence of fascists and Nazis grew. The severe prejudice against the German race as a result of World War I was also fueled by Hitler's rise to power. The rest of the Western world felt helpless as Europe seemed fated to repeat the debacle of World War I. As a result Western society seemed to be suffering from a severe moral angst that led to several unanswered questions: How can an individual survive in such a seemingly unresponsive and amoral world? What can the average person do to positively contribute to such chaos? Is it possible for a society move forward without repeating its destructive past? These questions were questions of life and death for millions of Europeans in 1934, and by addressing these issues through the eyes of a seemingly powerless, and even inept, individual, and by using an ancient time and world as the backdrop, Graves was able to throw light on the dark questions that the readers of 1934 in Great Britain and the United States may have been asking themselves.

Graves was not alone in using the Roman Empire as a backdrop for epic stories at this time. In 1934, the novelist Jack Lindsay published *Rome for Sale* and *Caesar is Dead*, and within a couple years several more would appear, including Phyllis Bentley's *Freedom Farewell* in 1936, Leslie Mitchell's *Spartacus* in 1937, and Naomi Mitchison's *The Blood of the Martyrs* in 1939. Rome, with its fascist-like praetorian guards and regalia, proved to be a good backdrop to explore issues of the political tyranny and excesses that were spreading across Europe. Even more important, *I, Claudius* covers the period of Roman history that followed the demise of the more democratic principles of the Republic. Democracy across Europe was on the defensive in 1934; Tiberius and, possibly, Caligula-like rulers were threatening Western civilization.

Critical Overview

I, Claudius was the most widely read and commercially successful book Robert Graves had written to that point. Although his autobiography *Good-Bye to All That* and his growing reputation as a war poet had placed him on the literary map, it was not until *I, Claudius* that he was able to make a reasonable living from his writing.

Within a few months of its publication, the book had been reprinted four times in Great Britain and the United States. Although Graves considered the book to be a potboiler that he wrote only for the money, it went on to win the James Tait Black and Hawthornden Prizes of 1935. Writing in *The Nation & Atheneum*, the novelist Mary McCarthy wrote that the book was "amazingly full of color and imagination." In 1935, Alexander Korda purchased the film rights to *I, Claudius* with the intention of making a movie starting Charles Laughton. The movie, eventually to be directed by one of Hollywood's finest directors, Josef von Sternberg, was never completed.

Posterity was very kind to Graves. In 1976, the British Broadcasting System produced a television series based on *I, Claudius* and its successor, *Claudius the God*, starring Derek Jacobi, Patrick Stewart and John Hurt. The series was one of the most successful mini-series ever produced, and following its broadcast in the United States, the book, which has been selling a couple thousand copies a year, was reprinted by Vintage for its Vintage Classics series and became an international bestseller. The book's crowning achievement came in 1998 when the Modern Library listed it as the fourteenth best novel of the twentieth century.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

White is publisher of the Seattle-based Scala House Press. In this essay, White argues that while Graves's novel is well-researched and well-written, it does not deserve the critical acclaim it has received.

In 1933, Robert Graves and the poet Laura Riding Jackson were living on the Spanish island of Mallorca and in desperate need of money. Graves' brilliantly received 1929 autobiographical book *Good-Bye to All That* was a commercial success, but its royalties only helped Graves to get out of debt and set himself up for a writing life with Riding on Mallorca. So when pleas to friends, including the British poet Siegfried Sassoon, failed to rescue them, Graves turned to a project he had been working on for some time.

Written primarily for the money and referred to variously by Graves as a "potboiler" and as a "bestseller," *I, Claudius* was a huge success, selling out of three printings within its first year of publications in both Great Britain and the United States. By the end of 1934, Graves was not only temporarily out of financial difficulties, but he had also become an international literary sensation.

Over the years, *I, Claudius* would continue to do reasonably well, selling on average some 2,000 copies a year. But in 1976, when the British Broadcasting Company produced a mini-series based on *I, Claudius* and its successor, *Claudius the God*, and a few years later when the series ran on American television, sales of Graves's fifty-year old novels skyrocketed, and the eighty-year old writer suddenly found himself on the bestseller lists again on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1998 the book would receive another unexpected boost when the Modern Library named it as number fourteen on its list of the best 100 novels of the twentieth century. So not only did this unlikely story of a stuttering and limping Roman Emperor dig Graves and his lover out of financial ruin, it also helped to secure him a place in literary posterity.

There is certainly no question that Graves would have deserved to have his name etched into the annals of literary posterity regardless of the fate *I, Claudius*. The author of more than 140 books, including over 50 volumes of poetry, several studies of mythology, and scores of critical studies, Graves was, by any standard of measure, deserving of a respectful place in English literary history.

But does he deserve to remembered critically for *I, Claudius*? Certainly the success of the television productions alone have guaranteed him many more years of popularity, but has it been a popularity that the book deserves in its own right? Does it alongside the likes of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, as the Modern Library list suggests? In other words, should one take Graves at his word when he called the novel a potboiler, or is there something lurking behind the words of the stuttering emperor that give this novel a greatness beyond its obvious commercial attributes?

As is usually the case with such queries, the answers to most of these questions are yes, and no. Yes, *I, Claudius* is far better than a mere "potboiler." Graves knew how to write, he knew how to tell a story, and he knew the point at which history should stop and fiction should begin. But no, the book does not deserve the critical immortality that it seems to be on the verge of acquiring. *I, Claudius* was written to make money, and it succeeded brilliantly because its author was a brilliant enough scholar and writer to make all the right literary moves. With *I, Claudius*, Graves fed on Great Britain's and America's bottomless appetite for sexual depravity, political intrigue, femme fatales, and even good, old fashioned German bashing. Add to the mix his ingenious use of age-old fairy-tale themes that one finds in such stories as "Cinderella" and "The Ugly Duckling" and in such venues as elementary school playgrounds where bullies are forever beating up on the lame and innocent, along with an atmosphere beginning to smell ripe with the familiar stench of war, and the result was well-timed, well-written and imaginatively inspired historical soap opera that hit the hearts and charts of the English-reading populace.

Graves was, by any account, a serious scholar and a man of high literary talent. With *I, Claudius*, Graves spent several years of assiduous research into Roman history and customs. While *I, Claudius* relies on Graves's boundless imagination for its storytelling, the major events depicted in the novel have a historical basis, and the dates within the story coincide with what we know of Rome's history. But a historical novel must do more than simply provide an accurate recording of history. A good historical novel, in addition to offering the reader a compelling story to follow, should also provide an insight into the times in which it was written. By any measurement, did *I, Claudius* provide its readers of 1934 insights into their own worlds?

An obvious place to look for an answer to this question is in the way the book portrays Rome's relationship with its outlying areas, particularly the Germans. Doing so would show how Graves presented his reader, if he did so at all, with insight into the "German question," a growing and pressing concern for him and his fellow Europeans in 1934.

In 1933, Adolph Hitler had come to power in Germany. While it would be a few more years before Germany would invade its neighbors, the psychological and political war had already begun. Europe could already hear the figurative echoes of the marching black boots of the National Socialists.

A large part of Graves' novel is devoted to the German campaigns of Claudius's brother Germanicus. The Germans that Germanicus' and Claudius's father Drusus had conquered, Claudius tells us, had quickly adapted to "Roman ways, learning the use of coinage, holding regular markets and even meeting in assemblies that did not end, as their former assemblies had always ended, in armed battles." In other words, Roman occupation had relieved the Germans of "their old barbarous ways," but when Varus, a political appointee of Augustus, entered the picture, he began abusing the Germans who, in turn, secretly planned a mass rebellion. Varus, believing the Germans to be a "stupid race" of men who respected you only when you hit them, ignored warnings of a rebellion from his own staff, and a horrible massacre ensued, in which only Cassius, the officer who would one day assassinate the Emperor Caligula, survived. News of Rome's

previously unimaginable defeat spread panic throughout Rome, and Romans believed that the German hoards were ready to knock on the city gates. News and rumors of German barbarity spread. As Claudius/Graves note:

Meanwhile, the Germans hunted down all the fugitives from Varus's army and sacrificed scores of them to their forest-gods, burning them alive in wicker cages . . . The Germans also enjoyed along succession of tremendous drinking-bouts on the captured wine, and quarreled bloodily over the glory and the plunder."

When Germanicus later returned to the front to avenge the massacre, he wrote to Claudius:

The Germans are the most insolent boastful nation in the world when things go well with them, but once they are defeated they are the most cowardly and abject. Never trust a German out of your sight, but never be afraid of him when you have him face to face.

Can an argument be made that Graves is merely using the facts of Roman history to lift a mirror to the situation of 1934 Europe? If that is the case, then what "insight" does Claudius's account afford the reader?

Any possible argument that Graves is building a case for Great Britain to defend itself against Germany here falls short when one considers the story of *I, Claudius* as a whole. Rome, under Augustus, and then less successfully under Caligula, was an imperial country with imperialistic aims. Its vision was to rule the world, from horizon to horizon; any useful analogy in this context would bring the reader to view Germany, not Great Britain, as the modern day Rome. If that is the case, then who would the Germans be? Certainly not the Brits, and certainly not the Americans□both races of people who considered themselves among the most civilized in the world and far from the barbaric natures that Claudius depicts.

The problems Rome was having with its colonies were problems all imperial forces have always had, and will always have, with their colonies: whenever the colonizer has tried to impose its own will on its subjects, the subjects have rebelled forcefully and usually violently.

No, the only purposes these passages effectively served, aside from the obvious ones of relating the history of Rome as it actually was, were to feed into the existing and growing fear of the German threat. After World War I, European leaders could not trust Germany's intentions, and their imposition of the humiliating Versailles Treaty only fanned the flames of German anger. That anger, in turn, fanned the flames of hatred against and fear of the German race. Whether conscious or not, Graves had pulled from ancient history the same themes of fear of the "outsider" and "other" that Europeans were still experiencing nearly 2000 years later. Graves is offering nothing insightful here; he is merely fanning the flames of anti-German sentiment, a sentiment that would help in the sales of his book.

So what of the possible argument that Graves is using ancient Rome to depict Germany or, better yet, the fascist states of Italy or Spain? On a superficial level, one could make

this argument, as there are several characteristics that both the fascists and the national socialists shared with Rome of Augustus, Tiberius and Caligula. For starters, as already mentioned, the Roman Empire, like Nazi Germany, had visions of world domination. The consolidation of political power in the hands of a single individual□Franco in Spain, Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany□also mirrored that of Rome, and like Rome, once power was consolidated by the respective parties, no method was considered too cruel to help the parties retain that power. Rome's praetorian guard also found distant relatives in the fascist and nazi states, as did Roman regalia and the classical attributes and themes on which the Roman Empire was built. But beyond that, one would be hard pressed to see any useful parallels. For instance, one of the most striking features of Germany and Italy were their regimentation; while the elites certainly had opportunities for the same illicit and licentious behavior as the Roman elite, and while they certainly did not hesitate to indulge in them, the ultimate ideology of the parties was always of paramount importance. Although the Holocaust was certainly as "depraved" as anything that Claudius described, Germany's execution in exterminating Jews and other "undesirables" was far more planned and systematic than any of the cruelties enacted by Rome.

What *I, Claudius* does offer contemporary readers, however, is the opportunity to rubber-neck at the figurative train wrecks that littered the Roman empire. Powerful men and women, immortalized by their lineage and their positions of power and prestige, were done in by their own lasciviousness, greed, sexual depravity, and conspiracies. *I, Claudius* was provided with all the makings of a high-brow soap opera decades before *General Hospital*, *As the World Turns*, or *West Wing* would rivet generations of Americans and Brits to their couches. And comparing *I, Claudius* to television series is by no means anachronistic or mixing metaphors, for it was the British Broadcasting Company and America's Public Broadcasting System, with the help of a brilliant performance by the British actor Derek Jacobi playing Claudius, that one could argue ultimately raised the book from its place as a solid, if forgettable, novel, to that of one the greatest novels ever written, at least in the eyes of Modern Library's panel of judges.

Of course, one could argue with equal vigor that regardless of the success of the television series, the book would not survive if it was not good. There are countless examples, after all, of stellar movies that are based on all-but-forgotten books. This is true, and this brings us back to the original argument that Robert Graves knew what he was doing. By creating an archetypal character in Claudius (a composite "ugly duckling," "Cinderella," and bullied school boy), surrounding him with some of the richest and most memorable characters in history, and describing their respective demises in agonizing detail, Graves found for himself a winning recipe for a money-maker. But to be considered great, Claudius's account of his life through 41 a.d. would have to have offered us insights into the 1934 world of its readers. If the insight that Graves is offering his readers is how train wrecks rivet us, then, yes, his novel is a great one, but otherwise *I, Claudius* the book offers little more than *I, Claudius* the television series and takes much longer to get through.

Source: Mark White, Critical Essay on *I, Claudius*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Kerschen is a freelance writer and adjunct college English instructor. In this essay, Kerschen shows how Graves used the structure of the historical novel, as well as imaginative speculation, to create a new portrait of the Emperor Claudius.

The historical novel is a type of novel that generally distinguishes itself by being set in a time period previous to the one in which the author lives. Most storylines can be set in the past, usually for the simple purpose of establishing a backdrop to a story that is peopled by fictional characters. Even when the social situation of the time period is essential to the plot, it is the characters that dominate the story. For some plots, the historical time period is an interesting enhancement but is otherwise irrelevant; for example, the plot and characters of *Cold Mountain* could have been set in any war time, just as *Romeo and Juliet* has been adapted to a variety of time periods and worked very well in the twentieth-century New York City adaptation we all know as *West Side Story*. Certainly, the author and editor take pains to assure the accuracy of the historical setting, being careful not to use inappropriate fashion or language, or mention any event that had not yet happened or any device that had not yet been invented. With some historical novels, such as the currently popular Patrick O'Brian naval series set in the Napoleonic era, it is the remarkable extent of the detail about life in those times that has fascinated readers and gained the most acclaim. Then there is the type of historical novel as written by Robert Graves in *I, Claudius*.

From among the genre's options, Graves chose to write a fictional story using real characters in a real setting; that is, his story was based on historical figures as well as a historical time period. The difference between a history book and a historical novel about real people is that the history book should be based solely on known facts, while the historical novel contains elements that may not be verifiable. In fact, some of the story may be a total invention of the author. Richard Cavendish, a reviewer for *History Today*, commented that "When the authors know their stuff, historical novels can make as enticing and informative a path to history as proper history books, which are not after all invariably free of fiction." In the case of *I, Claudius*, the story is based on careful and extensive research on the part of Graves, but then he filled in the areas that historians would ordinarily leave blank or mark as questionable, unknown. Graves connects the known history with plausible assumptions and unique interpretations about the unknown motivations and behind-the-scene intrigues of the figures involved.

Graves took theories and suggestions from historians and wrote a story that plays out the possibilities. Daniel Aaron in an article for *American Heritage*, suggests that when a novelist, such as Gore Vidal writing *Lincoln* as a novel and not as a biography, "mixes disagreed-upon facts and agreed-upon facts, he is creating an extra but not necessarily nonhistorical compound." In other words, when Graves addressed the "what if" of history through fiction, he might have actually guessed the truth. After all, those who were recording events at the time they were occurring might have done so with bias or malicious intent. Is a record of history always a fact just because it is written down, or might there be more to the story? Might some important link have been left out for

purposes of discretion or just lack of space? If so, might not a writer be able to reconnect the links through both research and imagination?

Graves was actually a poet who brought his literary sensitivities to his historical research as well as a gift for psychological analysis. With these attributes, he was able to discern relationships and an unfolding of events that an academic historian would not have reported. Graves was also aware of the social and political biases of Roman historians such as Suetonius and Tacitus that caused them to disregard any evidence of intelligence and savvy in Claudius. In an interview about *I, Claudius*, Graves explained that he felt that Roman historians:

. . . had obviously got Claudius wrong . . . I didn't think I was writing a novel. I was trying to find out the truth of Claudius. And there was some strange confluent feeling between Claudius and myself. . . . It's a question of reconstructing a personality.

Graves studied a number of documents that Claudius wrote in an effort to get to know the one-time emperor of Rome. Adding this knowledge to the realization that Claudius had cerebral palsy led Graves to conclude that "The whole scene is so solid, really, that you feel you knew him personally, if you're sympathetic with him. The poor man."

Thomas Fleming, himself a historical novelist, notes that "Sometimes it is a special insight into a historical character that triggers an imaginative explosion." Indeed, when Graves dared to venture into the mind of Claudius, he discovered that Claudius was perhaps not the deformed idiot that his family thought him to be, but a wily intellectual with enough survival instincts to play up his infirmities and thus put himself at a safe distance from the imperial intrigues. Then Graves was ingenious enough to construct the novel as if it were the autobiography of Claudius. What better proof of Claudius' abilities and insights? Who better to explain his deception and serve as a bird's-eye observer to important historical events than Claudius himself?

Fleming also advises that "fact can and should be woven into fiction so seamlessly [that] readers never stop to ask what is true in the literal sense and what is imaginative." Graves certainly accomplishes that feat, even though he uses language that is very British, which sometimes jars the reader out of the illusion that the novel is the autobiography of Claudius. When Tiberius calls for an omelet and a couple of beef-cutlets, one has to wonder if these items were ever really on the menu in ancient Rome. "It has been difficult at times to find suitable renderings for military, legal and other technical terms," Graves tells the reader in the "Author's Note." Nonetheless, his care in using correct terms in technical areas may or may not have carried over to other areas as well. In addition, the plan to hide the autobiography "in a lead casket and bury it deep in the ground," trusting the Sibyl's prophecy that it will be found in nineteen hundred years, is a contrivance of the author, as is the "confidential history" explanation. Therefore, the reader starts out knowing what game the author is playing with imagination and historical events. Nonetheless, as the novel progresses, everything seems so perfectly plausible that readers eventually forget the device of the novel. As Fleming adds, "All that should matter is the conviction that they are being taken inside

events in a new revelatory, personal way." There is nothing more personal than an autobiography, and revelations abound as Claudius confides in the audience.

Graves also saw the members of the Roman imperial family during the life of Claudius in a different light from historians. Using the character of Claudius as an observer and astute, skeptical reporter, Graves is able to turn rumors□that historians are obligated to ignore□into the juiciest parts of the novel. Consequently, there are some differences between his characters, drawn from history, and the generally accepted description of these people found in the annals of history. In other words, Graves may have assigned guilt or credit to different parties than the ordinary history book would because he felt that he had discerned the truth that was kept out of the public record.

Although some critics feel that historical fiction is most successful when it precisely and consistently reproduces the attitudes and lifestyles of its time period, it seems to be the nature of historical novels that they include a note of satire on contemporary times. Graves indicated an interest in using his novels to convey a modern message, and there are some telltale signs of this practice in *I, Claudius*, written in 1934. Graves was one of the first in Britain to warn of the potential trouble with the growth of fascism in Europe, particularly Germany. His description of Germans in *I, Claudius* are quite revealing of an attitude:

If Germans ever become civilized it will then be time to judge whether they are cowards or not. They seem, however, to be an exceptionally nervous and quarrelsome people, and I cannot make up my mind whether there is any immediate chance of their becoming really civilized.

Some readers feel that *I, Claudius* was written to parallel the fall of the British empire, although the fall of the Roman empire came long after the life of Claudius. Since the novel concentrates on relationships within the ruling family, other readers might suspect that *I, Claudius* is a parody of the Mafia since there are coincidentally so many striking similarities in the operation of this "family business." For example, the remorseless Livia said that she "never contrived a murder" for her own benefit but only to remove those people who might stand in the way of the succession of her own sons and grandsons. This mentality is classic Mafia: knock off the competition to increase your own power and territory, but do not feel guilty because it is only business.

The historical novel can be a valuable educational tool because it teaches history in a format that readers find palatable and enjoyable. Readers start out reading a story and end up with new knowledge about a certain time period. Also, just as when movie-goers see "based on a true story" in the credits and dash home to look up the facts or check to see if there is a book on the subject, the historical novel has the potential to revive popular interest in the time period of the story (e.g., the renewed interest in the actual events connected to the Titanic after the blockbuster movie named after the ill-fated ship). Even more, Aaron, writing about what we can learn from a historical novel, speculated that "in reshaping popular conceptions of the past [historical fiction] might even revolutionize the study of history." An ethical historical novelist will not purport that his/her version of history is closer to the truth than what has been previously

established, but will stimulate scholars into considering the "what ifs" and perhaps re-examining the records in a new light. Such is the accomplishment of Graves and *I, Claudius* in that his extensive research, combined with psychological analysis and compassionate sensitivity, results in previously unconsidered possibilities for the motivations, credit, and blame for some of Roman history's most famous people, and perhaps raises the reputation of "poor Claudius."

Source: Lois Kerschen, Critical Essay on *I, Claudius*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Quotes

"My readers must not therefore be surprised by my practised style: it is indeed Claudius himself who is writing this book, and no mere secretary of his, and not one of those official annalists either, to whom public men are in the habit of communicating their recollections, in the hope that elegant writing will eke out meagreness of subject-matter and flattery soften vices. In the present work, I swear by all the Gods, I am my own mere secretary, and my own official annalist: I am writing with my own hand, and what favour can I hope to win from myself by flattery?" Chapter 1, p. 4

"Ten years, fifty days, and three,

"Clau-Clau-Clau-shall given be

"A gift that all desire but he.

"To a fawning fellowship

"He shall stammer, cluck and trip

"Dribbling always with his lip.

"But when he's dumb and no more here,

"Nineteen hundred years or near,

"Clau-Clau-Claudius shall speak clear." Chapter 1, p. 7

"Claudius, you tedious old fellow, here you have come to within an inch or two of the end of the fourth roll of your autobiography and you haven't even reached your birthplace! Put it down at once or you'll never reach even the middle of your story. Write, 'My birth occurred at Lyons in France, on the first of August, a year before my father's death.' So. My parents had had six children before me but as my mother always accompanied my father on his campaigns a child had to be very hardy to survive. Only my brother Germanicus, five years older than myself, and my sister Livilla, a year older than myself, were living: both inherited my father's magnificent constitution. I did not. I nearly died on three occasions before my second year and, had not my father's death brought the family back to Rome, it is most unlikely that this story would have been written." Chapter 4, pp. 48-49

"I was a very sickly child—'a very battleground of diseases', the doctors said—and perhaps only lived because the diseases could not agree as to which should have the honour of carrying me off. To begin with, I was born prematurely, at only seven months, and then my foster-nurse's milk disagreed with me, so that my skin broke out in an ugly rash, and then I had malaria, and measles which left my slightly deaf in one ear, and erysipelas, and colitis, and finally infantile paralysis which shortened my left leg so that I was condemned to a permanent limp. Because of one or other of these various

illnesses I have all my life been so weak in the hams that to run or walk long distances has never been possible for me: a great deal of my travelling has had to be done in a sedan-chair. Then there is the appalling pain that catches me often, after eating, in the pit of my stomach. It has been so bad that on two or three occasions, if my friends had not intervened, I would have plunged a carving-knife (which I madly snatched up) into the place of torment. I have heard it said that this pain, which they call 'the cardiac passion', is worse than any other pain known to man except the strangury. Well, I must be thankful, I suppose, that I have never had the strangury." Chapter 5, pp. 49-50

"Well, in my life I have had many cruel bad jokes played on me, but I think that this was the cruelest and worst. Urgulanilla was—well, in brief, she lived up to her name, which is the Latin form of Herculanilla. A young females Hercules she indeed was. Though only fifteen years old, she was over six foot three inches in height and still growing, and broad and strong in proportion, with the largest feet and hands I have ever seen on any human being in my life with the single exception of the gigantic Parthian hostage who walked in a certain triumphal procession many years later. Her features were regular but heavy and she wore an almost perpetual scowl. She stooped. She talked as slowly as my uncle Tiberius (whom, by the way, she resembled closely—there was even talk of her being really his daughter). She had no learning, wit, accomplishments, or any endearing qualities. And it is strange, but the first thoughts that struck me when I saw her were: 'This woman is capable of murder by violence' and 'I shall be very careful from the first to hide my repugnance to her, and give her no just cause to harbour resentment against me. For if once she comes to hate me, my life is not safe.' I am a pretty good actor, and though the solemnity of the ceremony was broken by smirks, whispered jokes and repressed titters from the company, Urgulanilla had no cause to blame me for this indecorousness. After it was over the two of us were summoned into the presence of Livia and Urgulania. When the door was shut and we stood there facing them—myself nervous and fidgety, Urgulanilla massive and expressionless and clenching and unclenching her great fists—the solemnity of these two evil old grandmothers gave way, and they burst into uncontrolled laughter. I had never heard either of them laugh like that before and the effect was frightening. It was not decent healthy laughter but a hellish sobbing and screeching, like that of two old drunken prostitutes watching a torture or crucifixion. 'Oh, you two beauties!' sobbed Livia at last, wiping her eyes. 'What wouldn't I give to see you in bed together on your wedding night! It would be the funniest scene since Deucalion's Flood!'" Chapter 8, pp. 104-105

"Then Livy saw me. 'Hullo, my friend, how goes it? Do you know the famous Asinius Pollio?'

"I saluted them and Pollio said: 'What's that you're reading, boy? Trash, I'll be bound, by the shamefaced way you hide it. Young fellows nowadays read only trash.' He turned to Livy: 'I bet you ten gold pieces that it's some wretched "Art of Love", or Arcadian pastoral nonsense, or something of that sort.'

"'I'll take the bet,' said Livy. 'Young Claudius is not that sort of young man at all. Well, Claudius, which of us wins?'

"I said stammering, to Pollio: 'I'm glad to say, sir, that you lose.'

"Pollio frowned angrily at me: 'What's that you say? Glad that I *lose*, eh? Is that a proper way to speak to an old man like me, and a senator too?'

"I said: 'I said it in all respect, sir. I am glad that you lose. I should not like to hear this book called trash. It's your own history of the Civil Wars, and, if I may venture to praise it, a very fine book indeed.'" Chapter 9, p. 107

"Augustus was over seventy years of age. Until recently nobody had thought of him as an old man. But these new public and private calamities made a great change in him. His temper grew uncertain and he found it increasingly difficult to welcome change visitors with his usual affability or to keep his patience at public banquets. He was even inclined to be short-tempered with Livia." Chapter 13, p. 161

"Suspecting that Plancina was practicing witchcraft against him, for she had the reputation of being a witch, he made a propitiatory sacrifice of nine black puppies to Hecate; which was the proper course to take when so victimized. The next day a slave reported with a face of terror that as he had been washing the floor in the hall he had noticed a loose tile and, lifting it up, had found underneath what appeared to be the naked and decaying corpse of a baby, the belly painted red and horns tied to the forehead. An immediate search was made in every room and a dozen equally gruesome finds were made under the tiles or in niches scooped in the walls behind hangings. They included the corpse of a cat with rudimentary wings growing from its back, and the head of a Negro with a child's hand protruding from its mouth. With each of these dreadful relics was a lead tablet on which was Germanicus's name. The house was ritually cleansed and Germanicus began to be more cheerful, though his stomach continued troublesome." Chapter 20, p. 256

"The witness, who was the best drill-instructor in the Guards, bawled out Montanus's alleged obscenities at the top of his voice, not slurring over the most obscene words or phrases, and refusing to let himself be cried down by the shocked protests of the senators. 'I swore to tell the whole truth,' he bellowed, 'and for the honour of Tiberius Czhsar I shall not omit a single article of the accused's loathsome conversation overheard by me on the said date and in the said circumstances. Accused further declared that our gracious Emperor is fast becoming impotent from said alleged debauches and said over-indulgence in aphrodisiac medicines, and that in order to rally his waning sexual powers he holds private exhibitions every three days or so in a specially decorated underground room of the Palace. Accused declared that the performers at these exhibitions, Sprintrians as they are called, come prancing in, three at a time, stark naked..." Chapter 24, p. 305

"'Do you believe that the souls of criminals are eternally tormented?'

"'I have always been taught to believe that they are.'

"'But the Immortal Gods are free from any fear of punishment, however many crimes they commit?'

"'Well, Jove deposed his father and killed one of his grandsons and incestuously married his sister, and... yes, I agree... They none of them have good moral reputation. And certainly the Judges of the Mortal Dead have no jurisdiction over them.'

"'Exactly. You see now why it's all-important for me to become a Goddess. And this, if you must know, is the reason why I tolerate Caligula. He has sworn that if I keep his secret he will make a Goddess of me as soon as he's Emperor. And I want you to swear that you'll do all in your power to see that I become a Goddess as soon as possible, because—oh, don't you see?—until he makes me a Goddess I'll be in Hell, suffering the most frightful torments, the most exquisite ineluctable torments.'

"The sudden change in her voice, from cool Imperial arrogance to terrified pleading, astonished me more than anything I had yet heard." Chapter 25, pp. 313-314

"Tiberius was very sorry for himself at the time (I heard afterwards from Caligula), tormented by insomnia and superstitious fears; and actually counted on the Senate's sympathy. He told Caligula with tears in his eyes that the killing of his relatives had been forced upon him by their own ambition and by the policy that he had inherited from Augustus (he said Augustus, not Livia) of putting the tranquility of the realm before private sentiment. Caligula, who had never shown the slightest signs of grief or anger at Tiberius's treatment of his mother or brothers, condoled with the old man; and then quickly began telling him of a new sort of vice that he had heard about recently from some Syrians. Such talk was the only way to cheer Tiberius up when he had attacks of remorse. Lepida, who had betrayed Drusus, did not long survive him. She was accused of adultery with a slave and not being able to deny the charge (for she was found in bed with him) took her own life." Chapter 28, p. 344

"Caligula was twenty-five years old when he became Emperor. Seldom, if ever, in the history of the world has a prince been more enthusiastically acclaimed on his accession or had an easier task offered him of gratifying the modest wishes of his people, which were only for peace and security. With a bulging treasury, well-trained armies, an excellent administrative system that needed only a little care to get it into perfect order again—for in spite of Tiberius's neglect the Empire was still running along fairly well under the impetus given it by Livia—with all these advantages, added to the legacy of love and confidence he enjoyed as Germanicus's son, and the immense relief felt by Tiberius's removal, what a splendid chance he had of being remembered in history as 'Caligula the Good', or 'Caligula the Wise', or 'Caligula the Saviour'! But it is idle to write in this way. For if he had been the sort of man that the people took him for, he would never have survived his brothers or been chose by Tiberius as his successor. Claudius, remember what scorn old Athenodorus had for such *impossible contingencies*: he used to say, 'If the Wooden Horse of Troy had foaled, horses to-day would cost far less to feed.'" Chapter 29, p. 354

"Caligula went towards the covered passage. Cassius stepped forward and saluted, 'The watchword, Czhser?'

"Caligula said, 'Eh? O yes, the watchword, Cassius. I'll give you a nice one to-day—"Old Man's Petticoat".'

"The Tiger called from behind Caligula, 'Shall I?' It was the agreed signal.

"'*Do so!*' bellowed Cassius, drawing his sword, and striking at Caligula with all his might.

"He had intended to split his skull to the chin, but in his rage he missed his aim and struck him between the neck and the shoulders. The upper breastbone took the chief force of the blow. Caligula was staggered with pain and astonishment. He looked wildly around him, turned and ran. As he turned Cassius struck at him again, severing his jaw. The Tiger then felled him with a badly-aimed blow on the side of his head. He slowly rose to his knees. 'Strike again!' Cassius shouted.

"Caligula looked up to Heaven with a face of agony. 'O Jove,' he prayed.

"'Granted,' shouted the Tiger, and hacked off one of his hands.

"A captain called Aquila gave the finishing stroke, a deep thrust in the groin, but ten more swords were plunged into his breast and belly afterwards, just to make sure of him. A captain called Bubo dipped his hand in a wound in Caligula's side and then licked his fingers, shrieking, 'I swore to drink his blood!'" Chapter 34, pp. 428-429

Adaptations

The most comprehensive Web site on Robert Graves can be found at http://www.robertgraves.org/ (accessed November 24, 2004) with links to many data bases and material related to Graves's scholarship, including *Gravesiana: the Journal of the Robert Graves Society* and archived audio recordings of the writer.

Academy of American Poets houses a Robert Graves page at http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=197 (accessed November 24, 2004) with audio recordings and links to other sites.

Blackstone Audiobooks released an unabridged audio recording of *I, Claudius* in 1994 that is available both through bookstores and online as a digital download.

One of the most critically acclaimed television series of all time, Masterpiece Theater's *I, Claudius*, starring Derek Jacobi as Claudius, and also staring John Hurt and Patrick Stewart, is available both in DVD and VHS format. Included in the DVD format is the 1965 television production, *The Epic That Never Was*, a documentary of director Josef von Sternberg's failed 1937 filming of Graves's book.

Topics for Further Study

In Chapter IX of *I, Claudius*, the reader is introduced to two historians of the day, Pollio and Livy. They proceed to argue over their respective views of historical writing. Livy maintains one can spruce history up by providing its figures with "poetical feelings" and "oratorical ability." Pollio asserts that "Poetry is Poetry . . . and History is History, and you can't mix them." Explain in fuller detail the basic arguments that each historian is presenting here. Which side do you think Graves would side with? Which side do you agree with, and why?

Caligula is presented by Graves as a perverted, capricious, and certifiably mad emperor. However, not all historians agree with this account. Research Caligula's life and explain how your findings either support or reject Graves's portrayal.

Research the meaning of the term "femme fatale." Are there any "femme fatales" in *I, Claudius*? If so, who are they and what function do they play in Claudius's narration?

Sibyls play a major role in Roman society during Claudius's lifetime. Research the history of sibyls in Ancient Rome. What literary function do they serve in *I, Claudius*? Similarly, astrologers are also important in the story. How do astrologers and sibyls differ? How are they similar?

In Chapter 17 of *I, Claudius*, Claudius goes on record as saying that he and "never at any time of [his] life practices homosexuality" and goes on to explain his position. Although sexuality plays a major role in the book, this is one of the few occasions where homosexuality is mentioned. Whey does Claudius feel compelled to make this assertion? Research the life of Robert Graves and describe his views on homosexuality. How do they fit with these remarks by Claudius?

Compare and Contrast

1934: After years of unprecedented economic growth in the 1920s, the United States suffers from the stock market crash of 1929, leading to the Great Depression.

Today: After years of economic growth and prosperity in the 1990s, stemming from the unprecedented growth of the hi-tech industry, the United States enters into their greatest recession since the Great Depression.

1934: Europe faces the rise of anti-democratic movements in Germany, Italy and Spain. Fascism and National Socialism are threatening the stability of Europe and, by extension, of the world.

Today: Although Europe has experienced the spread of democracy since the fall of communism in the 1980s and 1990s, the region faces increased threats of terrorism from Islamic extremists and Russian secessionists.

1934: Labor unions are still struggling to make inroads into the private sector. As a result, workers do not have basic benefits such as guaranteed wages, overtime pay, or health insurance.

Today: Although labor unions made huge advances following World War II and helped union and non-union workers achieve basic rights, since the 1980s unions have lost political ground, and the wages and rights of many United States workers are being threatened.

1934: Germany is in the early stages of trying to extend its influence across Europe and around the world. Hitler makes no pretence in his desire to spread the ideology of National Socialism around the world.

Today: While generally speaking there are no military powers that are explicitly trying to take over the world, in the eyes of many the world over, particularly in the eyes of many observers in the Middle East, the United States, with its invasion of Iraq, is trying to extend its influence and ideology across the globe.

1934: Classical education, especially among the upper classes, is very much in vogue in colleges and universities, both in the United States and in Great Britain. Most students in private schools must learn Latin and Greek, and most students are well versed in the Greek and Roman classics and history.

Today: With some notable exceptions, most students are not required by colleges or universities to study foreign languages or the classics. Classical studies, including the study of Greek and Latin, has been relegated to small academic departments, and the vast majority of students graduate with very little knowledge of the classics or classical languages.

What Do I Read Next?

Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) received the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and was named by the Modern Library as one of the twentieth century's 100 Best Non-Fiction Books. It analyzes the effects of World War I on several major writers, including Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen.

Known as one of the bitterest autobiographies ever written, Graves's *Good-Bye to All That* (1929) is a scathing critique of World War I and the military and political leaders who led Great Britain during the war.

Wild Olives: Life in Majorca with Robert Graves (1995), by William Graves, and *A Woman Unknown: Voices from a Spanish Life* (2000), by Lucia Graves, offer glimpses into the writer's life from the perspectives of two of his children.

In 1937, shortly following her husband's success with *I, Claudius*, Laura Riding published *A Trojan Ending*, her attempt at classical historical fiction. Graves supplied Riding with the necessary historical material that formed the basis of the book.

In Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves, 1914—1946 (1982) and *Between Moon and Moon: Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1946—1972* (1984), both edited by Paul O'Prey, are the first collections of Grave's abundant correspondence to have been published.

Literary Precedents

Novels about Ancient Rome had become a staple of popular literature by the time I, Claudius was written. The success of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's potboiler The Last Days of Pompeii in 1834 inspired many imitations. Bulwer -Lytton's novel features an entirely fanciful religious cult and a sensationally decadent society. I, Claudius follows the pattern by featuring superstition and a corrupt society, but defies convention by emphasizing realistic portrayals of Ancient Rome.

Further Study

Gibbon, Edward, and David Womersley, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, abridged ed., Penguin, 2001.

First completed in 1788, Gibbon's classic study of the Roman empire continues to be considered one of the major works on the subject. Womersley's abridgement keeps the major themes and style of the original.

Graves, Richard Percival, *Robert Graves: The Years with Laura, 1926—1940*, Viking, 1990.

The second of a three-volume biography of Graves by his nephew, *The Years with Laura* covers the period in which *I, Claudius* was written.

Graves, Robert, *Claudius the God: And His Wife Messalina*, 1940, reprint, Vintage, 1989.

Picking up where *I, Claudius* left off, *Claudius the God: And His Wife Messalina* covers the 13-year reign of Claudius as emperor of Rome.

Seymour, Miranda, *Robert Graves: Life on the Edge*, Doubleday, 1995.

One of the most insightful biographies of Graves available, Seymour's work profited from the unprecedented cooperation she received from Graves's widow and son.

Seymour-Smith, Martin, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work*, rev. ed., Bloomsbury, 1995.

This 1995 edition, updated from its original 1983 edition on the occasion of the centennial of Grave's birth, is considered among the finest of Grave's biographies, even if it is also considered one of the most opinionated.

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Snipes, Katherine, "Historical Novels: On Claudius," in *Robert Graves*, Ungar Publishing Company, 1979, pp. 173—88.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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