

The Claudius Novels and Imperial Family Melodrama

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In her forty-page attack on the television series *I, Claudius*, Sandra R. Joshel claims that ‘a familial narrative of empire in which good men are endangered by scheming women pursuing their desires, political and sexual, arrived in the United States amid a crisis of American empire and society that put women and family in the spotlight’.¹ For Joshel, *I, Claudius* was perfect home viewing for Reaganite America after Vietnam and Watergate, since it was, in terms of genre, a ‘family drama with a particularly symbiotic relationship between family, empire, and the medium of representation’ (p. 133). Although she does not say much about Graves’s novels themselves, she appears to hold them in the ideological contempt that she has for the television series, which is not surprising, since the series was a faithful adaptation of the books, and the first novel was particularly closely followed. She suggests that Graves’s particular version of the Roman Empire was generated by a ‘moment of crisis for the British empire that included the loss of Ireland in 1922–23, the growth of the Indian Congress party in the 1920s and the 1930s and the total failure of the expected recovery of the imperial economy during the Depression’ (p. 124). She presents Graves as a man so obsessed with the disintegration of British life that he could not see the point of T. E. Lawrence’s objection to his waste of time on a sickening novel about a non-heroic character (p. 125).

Joshel thinks of the Claudius novels as imperial family melodramas in the guise of historical fiction. In a way she is correct, but her verdict on the Claudius novels is too harsh, and so in this essay I will analyse Graves’s use of his sources to construct a family melodrama of conspiracies in the palace. This genre was a reasonable one to choose because of 1) the incomplete nature of the sources, 2) the acceptance of the past as past and not as a

staging of problems of the present day, and 3) the desire to give prominence to a conspiracy theory.

Firstly, the Claudius novels are indeed imperial family melodramas, since there is little else that they could be, given the spotty nature of surviving source materials from the early first century. Graves did not have much written prose of any kind from the period from Augustus to Nero, and, as Ronald Syme points out in *The Augustan Aristocracy*, we do not even have an oration extant between *Pro Marcello* and Seneca's 'Sermon to Nero' *De Clementia*.² Not surprisingly, then, the Claudius novels mimic the lost materials written by members of the imperial family itself. They replace Claudius's autobiography, a work which perished, as did Augustus's *Res Gestae*, Tiberius's personal writings, and Agrippinilla's memoirs. In addition, the historical records that we do have, left by Suetonius, Tacitus, Dio Cassius, Seneca and others, leave gaps in the biographies of rulers which need to be closed by reasoned speculation.³

So the novelist is put in a situation similar to the historian's of having to make hypotheses to connect events, knowing that such hypotheses can never be proven. Graves wrote the Claudius novels as part of a larger project of using fiction actually to investigate and solve historical problems such as the nature of Claudius's death. For example, later, in 'New Light on an Old Murder' in *Food for Centaurs* (1960), he insists that Claudius was poisoned by Agrippinilla and explains how it was done.⁴ Of course, in his first- person narrative, Claudius could not completely account for his own death. Graves as 'editor' had to resort to the four different source versions of his death, which left the nature of the poisoning open.

Graves had to set his readers straight that he had done much more than create a pastiche of ancient historians – the furious Tacitus and the gossipy Suetonius. In his preface to *Claudius the God*, Graves says that some reviewers had claimed that he had 'merely consulted' Tacitus and Suetonius, 'run them together and expanded the result with my own "vigorous fancy"'.⁵ It is true both that the two novels make set pieces of events that were

already set pieces for Tacitus, and that the novels cover approximately the same period as the *Annals*, but big chunks of the *Annals* simply have not come down to us. Graves denied this accusation of pastiche, citing his use of two dozen other sources. Although the main outline of the story he told was derived from Tacitus, as supplemented chiefly by Suetonius, followed by Dio Cassius, Josephus and Seneca, Graves had to mix annal and biography in order to find a connecting thread that stressed cause and effect over the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* shape of incomplete records.

Indeed, although some of the appreciation has come long after the publication of the Claudius novels, Graves has been given praise by historians. For example, Arthur Ferrell, writing in his 1991 biography of Caligula, credits Graves with being more accurate about Caligula than was his biographer of 1934, J. P. V. D. Balsdon. Ferrell claims that Balsdon's book was 'essentially a whitewash'. For Ferrell, even Anthony Barrett in the much more recent standard biography of Claudius's predecessor, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (1989), ill-advisedly presents Caligula as an intelligent man who never became insane (p. 9).⁶ Back in 1960, B. Walker in her book on the *Annals* of Tacitus claimed that the story of the trial of Piso after the death of Germanicus as told by Graves is a 'brilliant transposition' of the story in Tacitus. She adds, '[I]t is no disparagement of that literary *tour de force* to say that the drama in this and many other episodes derives directly' from Tacitus's story of the decline of the Julio-Claudian Emperors in general.⁷

Graves even brought newly-edited documents to wider circulation through his novels. Beyond using the classical historians and biographers, Graves capitalised on three texts by Claudius published or republished in the 1920s, all of which put Claudius in a good light. The three documents are translated in full by Graves (as they later were by Victor M. Scramuzza): the letter to the Alexandrians on religion (Charlesworth Item 2, pp. 3–5; Scramuzza 64–66); the speech from 48 AD on the Senate and the Gauls (Charlesworth Item 5, pp. 8–11; Scramuzza 99–101),

and the document on the franchise from 46 AD (Charlesworth Item 4, pp. 7–8; Scramuzza 129–30).⁸ The first of these was first published by H. I. Bell in 1924 in *Christians in Egypt*.⁹ The second, the so-called Lyons Tablet, which was paralleled by material in *Annals* 11.24, appeared in H. Dessau's work of 1926.¹⁰ The third was also published by Dessau in 1926. Graves followed in the wake of Michael Rostovtzeff and Philippe Fabia, who in the 1920s had both published books that gave a more sympathetic presentation of Claudius than had been usual.¹¹

Secondly, however anxious Graves may personally have been about the British Empire, he did not use Rome as a stand-in for either the British Empire on the one hand or the Third Reich on the other. One of the reasons why the Claudius novels have been relatively neglected by literary critics derives from the fact that unlike many other historical novels from the 1930s they are not disguised or displaced attacks on fascism with the Roman Empire playing the role of Nazi Germany. One may sense in Claudius's praise of Britain and denigration of Germany an allusion to Britain's opposition to the political situation in Nazi Germany and its threat to Europe, but it is hardly more than a small observation on Graves's part.

In the 1930s, other political novels about Rome had a special appeal if they dealt with the end of the Republic or with Nero, since they could be fitted into the framework of the failure of democracy in Europe after World War I or the rule of a mad dictator. Here we can mention for example the novels of Phyllis Bentley on Julius Caesar (*Freedom, Farewell*, 1936), Edith Pargeter on Nero (*Hortensius, Friend of Nero*, 1937), Jack Lindsay on Catullus (*Brief Light*, 1939), and most notably Naomi Mitchison on Nero (*The Blood of the Martyrs*, 1939).¹² A more puzzling and moderate figure like Claudius did not suggest himself as the subject for this kind of novel. In Central Europe, including Germany, the same trend was also apparent. Other novels treating the Julian Caesars, particularly Caligula and Nero, written or translated into English in the decade around the Claudius novels include Dezso Kosztolányi's *The Bloody Poet: A*

Novel about Nero (1927) [*Nero, a véres költo*], Hanns Sachs's *Caligula* (1931) [*Bubi, Die Lebensgeschichte des Caligula*], and Lion Feuchtwanger's *The Pretender* (1937) [*Der falsche Nero*].¹³

For some readers, Graves's two novels seem less a call for a democratic stance against dictatorship than a quietist retreat to an interior, personal freedom in an evil, brutal, unredeemable world. However, this type of symbolic reading also seems stretched, since Claudius is hardly someone whose political position approximates that of Graves's contemporary readers. Because the Roman Empire already served as the object of emulation in the 1930s, Graves did not need to turn it into a disguised copy of Mussolini's Italy, for example. In treating Imperial Rome as Imperial Rome, Graves could show that attempts such as those of Mussolini to imitate the Roman Empire were vainglorious attempts at copying something corrupt. The Claudius novels as melodrama reveal the palace as a place where power is being exerted in a network of personal intrigue. Not all historians had such clear-sightedness. In the early 1930s many scholars treated the Roman Empire too sympathetically, and it was left to Sir Ronald Syme, hating the dictators of the 1930s, to take Augustus, his successors, and the fake Principate to task in *The Roman Revolution*, which appeared a few years after the Claudius novels.¹⁴ Without being didactic, Graves's novels made the dictatorship of Augustus's Roman Revolution apparent.

Graves was actually in the vanguard of historical re-evaluation of Claudius. The same year that he published *I, Claudius*, Arnaldo Momigliano's historical study, *Claudius the Emperor and His Achievement* (1934, revised in 1961), appeared in a translation/alteration from the 1932 Italian original. In the 1961 edition, Momigliano remembered how Ronald Syme had quipped that his 1934 book on Claudius showed the exaggerated sympathy of an ancient pedant for a modern one.¹⁵ Interest in Claudius continued with a second biography in 1940, *The Emperor Claudius* by Victor M. Scramuzza, a work which published in translation Claudius's speeches and letter to Alexandria (see above), but after it there were no more full-scale biographies in

English until Barbara Levick's, fifty years later.¹⁶ In 2001, in *Sick Caesars*, the eminent classicist Michael Grant returned to the problem of Claudius's personality, taken up as early as 1916 by Thomas de Coursey-Ruth.¹⁷

Thirdly, the surviving sources for Julian Rome suggest a palace melodrama because of the spread of what we can call 'disinformation'. Graves developed this line of action with considerable insight. Tacitus, Suetonius and Dio Cassius had to concentrate heavily on the palace because of certain political factors, and Graves manipulated these sources to stress Livia's conspiracy to kill or make powerless those members of the imperial family sympathetic to Republican government. Tacitus is well known for stating that it was a challenge for him to write the *Annals* since the records of the times of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero were falsified out of cowardice during the lives of the Emperors, and after their deaths, feelings of hatred distorted the way that they were remembered by the historians immediately following them.¹⁸

Since the memoirs of Agrippina the Younger are lost for good, as is Claudius's own autobiography, we have to make do to a large extent with the three major sources. Of these three, Dio explains the problem of writing a history of the Principate/Empire very well in his fifty-third book of the *Roman History*. Although Dio is more sympathetic to the establishment of the Principate than Tacitus, because he felt that it gave citizens more real protection than was achieved under the Republic, he presents the new problem of secrecy affecting both society and the historian. In the old days of the Republic, issues were recorded in the public records, although not without bias. However, they were open to discussion and people learned about the matters at hand.

But from this time on most things started to become secret and concealed, and though some things might happen to be published they are not trusted, as being capable of confirmation. For there is a suspicion that everything is said and done in accordance with the wishes of the powerful and their henchmen. Consequently,

many things that did not happen are spread about and many things that incontestably did happen are not known and virtually everything is broadcast differently from the way it happened. (Dio Cassius 53. 19.1–4, translated in Barrett, p. 196; cf. Dio Cassius 53. 22. 3–4 and 54. 15. 2–4)

Given these bleak conditions, one would expect unconfirmed conspiracies to abound, and Graves ably capitalises on the situation, in his handling of Messalina's activities in the palace in *Claudius the God*, for example.

Dio Cassius even felt the need to organise his discussion of Claudius's reign to fit the Emperor's personal life. Christopher Pelling claims that when Dio Cassius began writing on the Early Principate, he departed from the annalistic year-by-year type of history that he had used for the Republic and combined it with a biographical mode, most obvious at the beginning and end of each Emperor's reign. Thus his technique became a 'hybrid, a cross between a Suetonius and a Tacitus'.¹⁹ Dio Cassius divides Claudius's reign into a Messalina period and an Agrippina period. For Pelling, the Emperor's motives are upstaged, as many actions initiated by the wives and freedmen are described (p. 117). Pelling compliments Dio for seeking to go beyond individual personality and trying to find 'overarching explanatory strands'. Dio is interested in the whole imperial system as well as its Emperors (p. 123). Such strands can also be woven into the palace melodrama.²⁰

Since Tacitus began the *Annals* with the reign of Tiberius, it turns out that the most complete account of the reign of Augustus that we have comes from Dio (83), from whose history certain passages about the constitutional positions of Augustus have been much analysed, notably by Fergus Millar.²¹ Although Dio accepted the Empire as the only secure form of government for his day, according to Millar, 'this does not prevent him from writing in an ironical, not to say cynical tone of the political structure which Augustus erected'. He knew the political structure was just a façade for Augustus's one-man rule (p. 97). Graves uses this

knowledge to show an imperial family trying to conceal from the Senators and the people the degree to which government had become a front for personal rule.

Through his use of Suetonius, Graves found suggestions on how this policy was achieved. Suetonius was even less concerned with liberty than Cassius Dio. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill writes that ‘there are signs that he felt a warmth toward the Principate, which Tacitus never betrays’.²² Graves relies on Suetonius rather than Tacitus and Dio Cassius when he resorts to using the statement that Augustus ‘considered restoring the republic after Actium and in 23 BC, but he thought better of it in view of the risk both to himself and the state’ (see Suetonius 57–58, [i. e. *Augustus* 28. 1–2] and Wallace-Hadrill, p. 111). Graves takes at face value Suetonius’s very generous view of the Augustus’s regime, and Suetonius misses out the charade of the restoration of the Republic which was claimed by Augustus in his lost *Res Gestae* (but quoted in part by some ancient sources and used by Suetonius and Dio Cassius). For Wallace-Hadrill, ‘Suetonius’s Augustus can get credit for the idea of resigning, and [he] escapes criticism for the falsity of his pretence’ (p. 111).

In choosing to use Suetonius’s idea of a beneficent Augustus, Graves gives Claudius and Augustus a common bond which puts them at odds with Livia, who is not just openly hostile to the former Republic but also conspiring to make sure that there will be no new one. However, it would seem that all the characters in the novel exaggerate the possibility of such a return. The Senate was completely cowed, as we can see if we look only at their actions after Caligula’s murder. In order to give a context for Claudius’s own hopes for a return to the Republic, Graves had to create an Augustus who was less cynical and autocratic than he actually was.²³

To magnify the conspiracies around Claudius, Graves had to turn his protagonist into a passive figure who did not take part in conspiracies himself. In the case of the assassination of Caligula and the confusing events which brought Claudius to power, Graves made good narrative use of an inconsistency in the sources

concerning the degree to which Claudius was involved in the overthrow of Caligula, in order to stress Claudius's surprise at being made Emperor. Because, as is well known, the books devoted to Caligula's rule and the first years of Claudius, as well as the last years of Nero, are missing from the *Annals*, and because neither Dio Cassius nor Suetonius offers more than a brief account of Claudius's accession to power, historians have had to turn to the works of Josephus to understand how this came about. Here a major role is given to Herod Agrippa, a friend of Caligula.

In fact, in the opening pages of *Claudius the God*, which offer an account of the career of Herod Agrippa, Graves calls the attention of the reader to the change in the use of source material. The source problem, however, is even more complicated than Graves states, since, as Barrett points out in *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, Josephus in the *Jewish Antiquities* relied on two different sources, which cannot be completely reconciled.²⁴ According to one of them, the Praetorian Guard had a plan of action to maintain their privileged position after the murder, and they had decided the one good choice was Claudius. However, in the details of the events at the palace a second source is used, one which implies that the events were, in the words of Barrett, 'more spontaneous, even accidental' (p. 173). In the second version, Claudius was hiding in an alcove of a room in the palace, where he was found by a soldier named Gratus. The Praetorian Guard only then decided to make him Emperor. Both Suetonius and Dio, as Barrett notes, used this second source, which stresses the chance discovery of Claudius that made him Emperor – what Suetonius called an astonishing accident (pp. 173, 296).

Graves adapts the second source in Josephus to great effect and thus sidesteps the question of whether Claudius took part in the assassination plans, as Josephus's first, less detailed source indicates. Clearly, the second source was far more vivid for a novelist. Graves's use of it allows him to avoid to a large degree a problem raised by Barbara Levick in 1990 in her biography of Claudius.²⁵ Claudius in Levick's view was looked upon as a usurper, and Graves tries to turn attention away from this fact by

positing Claudius as a figure who would have liked to restore the Republic. Unfortunately, Claudius in the novels can only imagine the restoration of the Republic through a palace coup led by his son. In so thinking, he is simultaneously shrewd and naïve. He is shrewd because he recognises that politics have indeed become palace melodrama and naïve because there is no class of people who can be rallied to make the attempt more than a palace flare-up.

In the years before Claudius became Emperor, Livia not only opposed the Republic but also instituted a government behind the scenes, setting a model for Tiberius and Caligula. Graves's most ingenious stroke of plotting is to combine all the accusations against Livia as a poisoner, make them all true, and add even more crimes. Nicholas Purcell (105) sums up the ancient sources that make claims for Livia as poisoner (for Marcellus, see Cassius Dio 53. 33. 4; for Gaius and Lucius, Tacitus 1.3, Cassius Dio 55. 10a. 10; for Augustus, Tacitus 1. 5, Cassius Dio 56. 30. 1–2; Aurelius Victor *epit.* 1. 27; for Agrippa Posthumus, Cassius Dio 57. 3. 6; also, for Livia's pleasure at the death of Germanicus, see Dio Cassius 57. 18. 51).²⁶

Graves fleshes out all the accusations, adds Livia's own first husband Tiberius Claudius Nero to the list of victims, and indicates her plans for the murder of her son Nero Drusus and the latter's son Germanicus. This tactic enables him to exaggerate the idea of a conspiracy at work. According to Adrian Quinn, a conspiracy is 'a highly selective and convoluted model finding evidence anywhere, even in the very lack of evidence'.²⁷ Thus the lack of any conclusive evidence for Livia's poisonings cannot be used to discredit her. The mind connects fragments which make no sense in isolation, as everything is tied together in a conspiracy theory, and evidence itself becomes a nebulous concept (p. 123). By adding poisonings of which Livia was not accused in the extant writings, and by bringing- into Livia's plots characters such as Livilla, Caligula and Plancina (and unwitting helpers such as the Chief Vestal Virgin), Graves creates a startling narrative structure in Livia's conspiracy to make Tiberius the Emperor and

herself a goddess, a structure that adds extra zest to Tacitus's trajectory of progressive decadence. The conspiracy also provides a historical explanation for Claudius's having Livia named a goddess.

Although some historians have concluded that Livia might have been a poisoner and others have categorically denied it, the crucial fact remains that these accusations circulated and they reveal the mindset of the day, which was that real power was employed behind the scenes and not in government machinery. While one line of research takes the widespread accusations of Livia and Agrippinilla as poisoners to be a clear indication of Roman misogyny, and even of Graves's complicity in such misogyny, it overlooks the nature of conspiratorial poisoning itself, whether the accusation is against Livia or Messalina or Agrippinilla. For example, Nicholas Purcell and Cristina G. Calhoun both dismiss the idea of Livia as poisoner.²⁸ Purcell feels that it simply cannot be true because 'the *princeps femina*, the historical figure, had to be attacked appropriately, and the historiography of imperial poisoning developed from the tradition of *matronae uenificae* in response to that need' (p. 95). However, Purcell has no evidence, and with no evidence conspiracy is always a narrative possibility.

Discussing the question of the validity of accusations of poisoning during this period, Anthony A. Barrett, in the foreword to his revisionist biography *Agrippina, Mother of Nero*, writes that whether Agrippina the Younger was guilty of poisoning Claudius or not, the fact remains that this *topos* became part of her reputation. For Barrett it is generally 'wasted effort' for modern researchers to sift through and evaluate the ancient sources to reach a scholarly conclusion about the true cause of an alleged death by poisoning. Instead, we must remember that even now 'with the help of science, the opportunity for exhumation, police investigation and a systematic court procedure, it is notoriously difficult to determine the truth in poisoning cases' (p. xv). Questions about these deaths, in short, can never be solved.

Given this view that 'we can never know for sure', it would seem beside the point to claim that Graves is stretching credibility

when he presents so many poisonings in his Claudius novels. Instead, the novels take part in underlining if not exaggerating the suspicions that the Roman ruling class had about the moral character of powerful women, and they give us a feel for the period. This atmosphere is more important than whether Graves is ultimately right or wrong in his comments in 'Food for Centaurs' about the way that Claudius died.

The political implications of Livia's conspiracy are neither conservative nor liberal. Instead they suggest an absurd world. When Messalina starts to develop her secret plots around Claudius, our sadness that he is a duped cuckold pales in comparison to our admiration of her convoluted plots. Given how naïve he is, she gets an extra thrill with extra risks until she is downed by Claudius's freedmen. The existence of a plot by Livia that extends all the way from 38 BC until her death in 29 AD, that is, 67 years, leads the readers into a labyrinth of evil which is remarkable even for mystery and suspense novels.

In conclusion, the Claudius novels should not be read (as an extrapolation from Joshel's evaluation of the television series implies) as if Graves were demonstrating that that powerful women who do not accept their place in life destroy their men and their families, weaken the nation, and lead to imperial collapse. This attitude would imply that the Empire was worth preserving. However, Graves' clearly marks the Empire as the site of concealed, extra-legal government, and it is nothing to be admired. The bloody course of history goes on, and no one can control it, because power is exerted behind the scenes and beyond regulation. The expression of public political views is meaningless here, and a fatalistic view of the world filled with auguries and prophecies is easy to fall into. Surrounded by conspiracy, Claudius relies on the sibyl and on predictions to get his bearings, and to construct a counterplot to the conspiracy of Agrippinilla and Nero. However, Britannicus will not play his part. Like everyone else, Claudius has given up on public action. For him, plotting behind the scenes offers the only possible hope. Thus, although the Claudius novels do not fit into the main trend of 1930s historical

novels set in Rome that serve to spur resistance to dictatorship, they do reflect the liberal horror at extra-legal government by and through conspiracy.

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NOTES

¹ Joshel, Sandra R, 'I Claudius: Projection and Imperial Soap Opera', in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, edited by Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud and Donald T. McGuire, Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 119–61 (p. 127).

² Syme, Ronald, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 445.

³ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, translated by Catharine Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, translated by Michael Grant, seventh edition (London: Penguin, 1989); Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, edited by Herbert Baldwin Foster, translated by Earnest Cary, 9 vols (London: Heinemann, 1925; reprinted 1955); Seneca, *Apocalocytosis. Divi Claudii (The Pumpkinification of Claudius)*, translation, introduction, and notes by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1973).

⁴ Graves, Robert, 'New Light on an Old Murder', in *Food for Centaurs: Stories, Talks, Critical Studies, Poems* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 201–08.

⁵ Graves, Robert, *Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina* (London: Barker, 1934; reprinted New York: Random House, 1962), p. v.

⁶ Ferrill, Arthur, *Caligula: Emperor of Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 9; *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (London: Batsford, 1989).

⁷ Walker, B., *The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the Writing of History*, second edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), p. 117.

⁸ Charlesworth, M. P., ed., *Documents Illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1951); Scramuzza, Victor M., *The Emperor Claudius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940)

⁹ Bell, H. I., *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (London: British Museum, 1924).

¹⁰ Dessau, Hermann, *Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit*, 2 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1924–1930).

¹¹ Rostovtzeff, Michael I, *A History of the Ancient World*, translated by J. D. Duff, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926); Fabia, Philippe, *Le Table claudienne de Lyon* (Lyon: Audin, 1929).

¹² Claudius had been popular as a subject of historical novels around 1900. For example, see Alfred Jarry's *Messaline* (1901) [*The Garden of Priapus* (1932)], Prosper Castanier's *L'Orgie romaine* (1901), and Nonce Casanova's *Messaline, roman de la Rome impériale* (fifth edition, 1902). Even today the reign of Claudius is the subject of historical fiction in France, in Barbara Wood's *Séléné* (1990) and Jacqueline Dauxois's *Messaline* (2002).

¹³ If we take a brief look at another complex two-volume historical novel, published in 1935 and 1938, Heinrich Mann's *Die Jugend des Königs Henri Quatre* and *Die Vollendung des Königs Henri Quatre*, despite surface similarities we are in different territory. Both treat rulers from their childhood to their murders, and both men became rulers after the early deaths of members of the royal family. Both characters are basically sympathetic although they make serious mistakes. Predictions surface in both novels. Henry IV has Nostradamus; Claudius has the Sibyl. Powerful women affect both men. Claudius has Livia to contend with; Henry IV has Catherine de Médicis. However, political parallels linking Henri Guise to Hitler and the Duc de Mayenne to Goering (Linn 107) make Mann's novels more immediately political in their message than Graves's.

¹⁴ Syme, Ronald, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939; reprinted New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹⁵ Momigliano, Arnaldo, *Claudius the Emperor and His Achievement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934; revised edition, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961).

¹⁶ Levick, Barbara, *Claudius* (London: Gatsford, 1990).

¹⁷ Grant, Michael, *Sick Caesars* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2000); De Coursey-Ruth, Thomas, *The Problem of Claudius: Some Aspects of a Character Study* (Baltimore: Lord Baltimore Press, 1916).

¹⁸ See Barrett, Anthony, *Agrippina, the Mother of Nero* (London: Batsford, 1997), p. 197.

¹⁹ Pelling, Christopher, 'Biographical History? Cassius Dio on the Early Principate', in *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greeks and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, edited by M. J. Edwards and Simon Swain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 117–44 (p. 117).

²⁰ Unfortunately, Pelling writes, Dio was not good at psychological penetration, and he quips, 'It might seem to demand some perversity to make Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero as drab as Dio manages' (p. 135), a view he shares with earlier critics such as Reinhold and Swan in discussing Augustus's personality. Nor does Pelling find much subtlety in Dio's view of Claudius, writing: 'The strange mix of good and bad under his administration is explained very simply: the good bits come from him, the bad bits come from the wives and freedmen, and it is as simple as that' (p. 136).

²¹ Millar, Fergus, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 83.

²² Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p.111.

²³ Graves's Augustus is, however, less noble than the one created by John Williams in his National Book Award-winning historical novel *Augustus* (1972). At the close of this novel, Augustus at the end of his life is far more concerned that Rome will be destroyed by time and the outside barbarians than by the autocracy of the Principate itself. For him, 'Roman law tempers the disordered cruelty of Roman custom' (p. 299). At least Graves's Augustus is not so blind to the Constitutional problem of disguised one-man rule.

²⁴ Barrett, Anthony, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (London: Batsford, 1989).

²⁵ Levick, Barbara, *Claudius* (London: Gatsford, 1990).

²⁶ Purcell, Nicholas, 'Livia and the Womanhood of Rome', in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Parker* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 112–32. *Society*, no. 212 [n. s. 32] (1984), 78–105 (p. 105).

²⁷ Quinn, Adrian, 'Tout est lié: The Front National and Media Conspiracy Theories', in *The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and Human Sciences*, edited by Jane Parish and Martin Parker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 112–32.

²⁸ Purcell, 'Livia and the Womanhood of Rome'; Calhoon, Cristina G., 'Livia the Poisoner: Genesis of a Historical Myth' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1994).

I, Claudius, historical novel by Robert Graves set in 1st-century-ce Rome, published in 1934. The book is written as an autobiographical memoir by the Roman emperor Claudius, who is a son of a Roman general, a nephew of the emperor Tiberius, and a great-nephew of the emperor Augustus. Physically.Â Physically weak, afflicted with stammering, and inclined to drool, Claudius is an embarrassment to his family and is shunted to the background of imperial affairs. The benefits of his seeming ineffectuality are twofold: he becomes a scholar and historian, fascinated with the intrigues of his contemporaries, and he is spared the worst cruelties inflicted on the imperial family by its own members during the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula. Create comics and graphic novels that jump off the screen. DA Muro. Paint a picture.Â After the reforms of Emperor Gallus, the Empire's borders were rolled back to that of the reign of Augustus the Great. The Provinces were reorganized to that of the Old Empire. Bonaparte France (Yellow) and the Kingdom of England and Portugal (Green), and Athens (Blue) are also shown. Image size. 835x682px 1.07 MB. Show More. See More by Claudius42. Featured in collections. Maps by EricVonSchweetz. The Britannian Imperial Family (çšžâ@ª KÅshitsu) rules the Holy Britannian Empire. The members of the family hold the highest positions within its government and military. The Imperial Family are descended from Sir Ricardo von Britannia, the designated heir and lover of Queen Elizabeth III. When they die, an emperor or empress is buried in the Imperial Mausoleum.