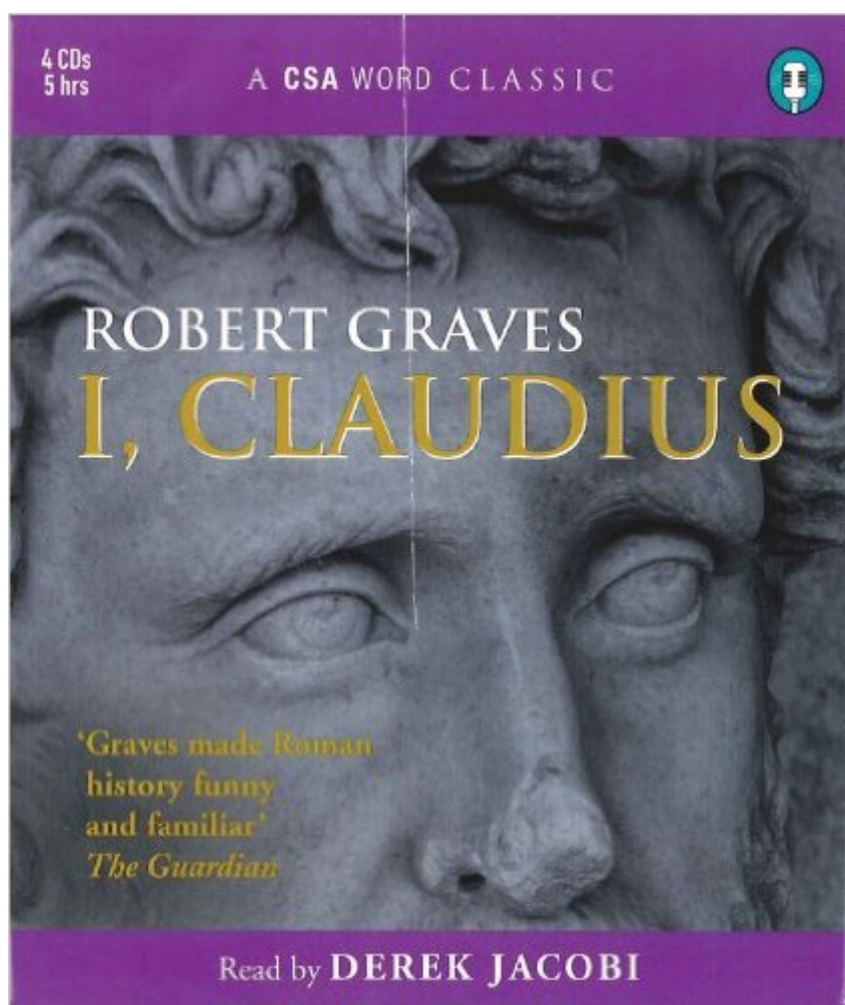


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# I, Claudius (A CSA Word Classic)



## Synopsis

Written as an autobiography, *I, Claudius* tells the tale of the nobleman Claudius, who is abhorred for his physical infirmities and viewed by his family as little more than a stuttering fool. The mask of idiocy ultimately serves him well: viewed as too insignificant to bother with, Claudius quietly survives the cruelties, intrigues, and bloody purges of the imperial Roman dynasties. From the sidelines, he observes the reigns of its emperors, from the wise Augustus and his wicked wife Livia to the sadistic Tiberius and the excessive Caligula. This historically accurate and vastly entertaining novel paints a vivid picture of the ancient world in all its madness and debauchery, highlighting the complexities and politics inherent in Empire-building. First published in 1934, it endures as one of literature's most celebrated and compelling historical novels.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This novel by Robert Graves represents the supreme instance in the twentieth century to write a literarily serious historical novel. There has, of course, been no shortage of historical novels during the past century, but for the most part "historical" fiction has become a species of genre fiction, like Sci-Fi, detective fiction, spy fiction, and Westerns. *I, CLAUDIUS*, on the other hand, is a historical novel composed by someone otherwise regarded as a serious writer. This relationship between serious writers and the genre of historical fiction has not always been the case. Until the mid-19th century, a host of novels attempted to recreate a historical era, not least Dickens in *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*, William Thackeray in *HENRY ESMOND*, Flaubert in *SALAMBO*, Tolstoy in *WAR AND*

PEACE, and Pynchon's GRAVITY'S RAINBOW. But for the most part, writers in the latter half of the nineteenth century and all of the twentieth century have forsaken historical fiction to write in the present tense, or at the latest of their childhood, as with Marcel Proust or Anthony Powell or Harper Lee. Because of his success in the writing of *I, Claudius* and its sequel *CLAUDIUS THE GOD*, many today think of Robert Graves as primarily a novelist, but in fact most of his writing falls into the nonfiction realm, much of that with a historical bent. Graves was a passionate student of antiquity, both the Greeks and the Romans, and his goal in writing *I, Claudius* was to chronicle the period in Roman history immediately after the collapse of the republic and near the beginning of the rule of the Caesars. On the one hand, he wanted to adhere as closely to the documentary evidence for the events in the period as is compatible with a work of fiction, and on the other produced a first rate historical novel.

After you finish "*I, Claudius*" you'll probably be sighing in relief that you weren't born into Roman nobility at the end of the first century BC. Because that would mean you'd have had wealth and political influence during the time of Augustus's scheming wife Livia and the tyrannical reigns of Emperors Tiberius and Caligula, which could have easily meant total loss of wealth and quite possibly death (and the deaths of all members of your family) if you so much as looked at any of them cross-eyed. Claudius is the nervous stammering weakling in the background, ridiculed by nearly all the royal family but relatively safe on account of those same shortcomings. He witnesses and lives through the many terrors and murders that the helpless upper crust of Rome suffers at the hands of the Caesars and their families and friends. The few noble-hearted members of the family are systematically wiped out as well, to prevent them from returning power to the Senate and making Rome a republic again. Graves based this work (and the sequel *Claudius the God*) on Claudius's actual autobiography. Clearly many of the details must be fictional (i.e. what was on the menu on such and such night, words said during conversations, etc.), but all major events and many of the minor plot elements are ostensibly substantiated by historical text and hence are probably true to fact. That's scary. How can politics within a single city get as ridiculously inane and out of touch with regard for human life as portrayed in this work? Then again we need to remember that the Roman people condoned the spectacle of people killing each other for sport, so their thought patterns were obviously different from ours today. The Roman empire was a civilization, certainly.

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