

Fall, 2022 Semester – Syllabus

Instructor: Ted Wilks

Course: “I Claudius”

Course No.:

Day, time: Thursdays, 9:00 am – 10:15 am

Abstract: This epic BBC series spans the history of the Roman Empire and its emperors from Augustus through Claudius, a stuttering scholar who learns to play the fool and stay alive. The 13-part drama, based on the novels of Robert Graves, was last presented at OLLI in 2008.

Date	Episode	Synopsis
Program 1	1: A TOUCH OF MURDER	Claudius, emperor of Rome, nears the end of his life and begins to write his family’s history. The incredible memoir begins before his birth, during the rule of Augustus, who is married to the beautiful but treacherous Livia. Livia plots to have her son Tiberius inherit her husband’s throne. Only Julia, the emperor’s spoiled daughter, stands in her way.
Program 2	2: FAMILY AFFAIRS	Almost ten years pass before Livia can realize her dream of vengeance and arrange the poisoning of Julia’s husband. Now Tiberius can marry Julia, which will enhance his chance of becoming emperor, but the union fares poorly. When Drusus, Tiberius’ brother, dies in the care of Livia’s doctor, Tiberius is driven to despair and embarks on a violent rampage that ends in his banishment from Rome.
Program 3	3: WAITING IN THE WINGS	Livia, determined to see her exiled son Tiberius become emperor, uses blackmail and murder to eliminate rivals and end his banishment. Julia is banished after Livia reveals details of her orgies to Augustus, which turns him against his own daughter. Tiberius finally returns to Rome, but he must wait in the shadow of the aging Augustus for his time on the throne, and so must Livia.
Program 4	4: WHAT SHALL WE DO ABOUT CLAUDIUS?	Only one obstacle remains between Tiberius and the throne: Postumus, Julia’s son and heir to Augustus. Livia entraps Postumus in an adulterous tryst, and he is arrested for rape and banished from Rome. Postumus reveals her plots to Claudius, Livia’s stammering and lame grandson. Claudius, though regarded as a half-wit, is wiser than anyone suspects, because he hides behind the face of a fool in order to survive.
Program 5	5: POISON IS QUEEN	Emperor Augustus grows more senile. Tiberius bides his time. When revelations of Livia’s crimes reach the emperor Augustus, he realizes that he has been duped and writes a new will that favors Postumus in order to block Tiberius from gaining the throne. Livia, in her ultimate act of treachery, slowly poisons her husband. After his death she substitutes her own version of the emperor’s will and orders the murder of her remaining rivals. Tiberius rules Rome.
Program 6	6: SOME JUSTICE	Suspicious of a conspiracy involving Livia and Tiberius abound. A Senate trial must be rigged to clear the emperor’s henchmen, but when the cover-up begins to unravel, one of the defendants threatens to implicate Tiberius in murder. He lives just long enough to regret his threat.

Program 7	7: QUEEN OF HEAVEN	Tiberius, egged on by Caligula, Agrippina's cunning son, revels in a life of erotic hedonism and lives only for perverted pleasures. His former allies see his end ahead and build ties to Claudius, next in line for the throne. Livia, a mere shell of her former self, now regrets her son's savage reign. On her deathbed she reveals the full scope of the family's crimes to Claudius and makes him promise that she will be revered as a goddess for generations to come.
Program 8	8: REIGN OF TERROR	Tiberius, old and frail, slowly begins killing off all potential successors. He fears assassination and orders a purge, which leaves the Senate piled high with the bodies of his enemies. Claudius survives only through cleverness. Finally, Tiberius banishes his long-hated rival Agrippina along with her son Nero. Caligula is now in position to capture the throne.
Program 9	9: ZEUS, BY JOVE!	Tiberius, on the brink of death, names Caligula heir to the Roman throne. To win favor with the masses, Caligula spreads money left by Tiberius among the Roman people and pledges to pay off Livia's debts. A new age of prosperity seems to be beginning, but Caligula soon descends into insanity. He declares himself a god and embarks on an orgy of bloodletting; he murders all who might challenge his heavenly rule – even his own sister.
Program 10	10: HAIL WHO?	Caligula, now totally mad, turns the imperial palace into a brothel with orgies and gambling. The empire is in financial ruin, though Claudius retains his dreams that one day the true Roman republic will be restored. Caligula taunts his court with ever greater wickedness. Finally, he is assassinated right in front of the eyes of Claudius. The soldiers, eager to justify their coup, give the crown to Claudius. At last he is the emperor of Rome, as had been prophesied.
Program 11	11: FOOL'S LUCK	"Trust no one" is the advice Claudius receives from his old and valued friend Herod as he assumes the throne. The aging emperor is at the peak of his life. Messalina, his beautiful young wife, gives him a son and daughter, and Rome's finances improve. Messalina secretly lusts for the nobleman Appius Silanus and is determined to seduce him. Her cunning manipulations lead to an attempt on the life of Claudius, and an order for the execution of Silanus.
Program 12	12: A GOD IN COLCHESTER	While Claudius leads his army in Britain, his wife organizes a tournament of sex by challenging the Guild of Prostitutes to provide a champion to compete with her. Claudius returns victorious from his campaign, but his wife's infidelities have made a fool of him. His public humiliation is complete when she cuckolds him by "marrying" another man in a Bacchanalian feast. Claudius signs a warrant for his wife's execution after consulting with his advisors.
Program 13	13: OLD KING LOG	Claudius is persuaded to remarry for his children's sake. He marries Agrippinilla, the most corrupt woman in Rome and the secret lover of his key advisor. Claudius wants only to make use of her brilliant mind while she longs for a position of power. The epic story of his family's history he has been writing is now complete. Claudius, knowing the prophesy that Agrippinilla son Nero will be Rome's last monarch, is ready to die when his wife poisons him.
