

ROBERT GRAVES

I, CLAUDIUS

FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF TIBERIUS CLAUDIUS

"One of the really remarkable books of our day, a novel of learning and imagination, fortunately conceived and brilliantly executed."—*The New York Times*



VINTAGE INTERNATIONAL

ROBERT GRAVES

I, Claudius
*from the autobiography of
Tiberius Claudius*

Emperor of the Romans

*born 10 BC
murdered and deified
AD 54*

with an Introduction by BARRY UNSWORTH



PENGUIN BOOKS

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Author's Note



I, CLAUDIUS

ROBERT GRAVES was born in 1895 in Wimbledon, son of Alfred Perceval Graves, the Irish writer, and Amalia Von Ranke. He went from school to the First World War, where he became a captain in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Apart from a year as Professor of English Literature at Cairo University in 1926 he earned his living by writing, mostly historical novels which include: *I, Claudius*; *Claudius the God*; *Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth*; *Count Belisarius*; *Wife to Mr Milton*; *Proceed*; *Sergeant Lamb*; *The Golden Fleece*; *They Hanged My Saintly Billy*; and *The Isles of Unwisdom*. He wrote his autobiography, *Goodbye to All That*, in 1929 and it rapidly established itself as a modern classic. *The Times Literary Supplement* acclaimed it as ‘one of the most candid self-portraits of a poet, warts and all, ever painted’, as well as being of exceptional value as a war document. His two most discussed non-fiction books are *The White Goddess*, which presents a new view of the poetic impulse, and *The Nazarine Gospel Restored* (with Joshua Podro), a re-examination of primitive Christianity. He translated Apuleius, Lucan, and Suetonius for the Penguin Classics series, and compiled the first modern dictionary of Greek Mythology, *The Greek Myths*. His translation of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (with Omar Ali-Shah) is also published in Penguin. He was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1961, and made an Honorary Fellow of St John’s College, Oxford, in 1971. Robert Graves died on 7 December 1985 in Majorca, his home since 1929. On his death *The Times* wrote of him, ‘He will be remembered for his achievements as a prose stylist, historical novelist and memorist, but above all as the great paradigm of the dedicated poet, “the greatest love poet in English since Donne”.’

BARRY UNSWORTH is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and holds an honorary doctorate from Manchester University. He is the author of 15 novels, among them *Sacred Hunger*, which won the 1992 Booker Prize. *Pascali's Island* (1980) and *Morality Play* (1995) were shortlisted for the same prize. His most recent novel, *The Ruby in Her Navel* is due for publication in 2006. He lives in Italy.

Introduction

The success of *Goodbye to All That*, his memoirs of the First World War, enabled Robert Graves to quit the industrial civilization he so much detested for a simpler style of life. In the year the book was published, 1929, he and the American poet Laura Riding went to Majorca and the island became his permanent home. It was in his early years here that the Claudius books were written, appearing in 1934, when his reputation as a poet was already established. They were brought out by Penguin in 1943 and have enjoyed continuous success ever since.

How Graves came to fasten on Claudius as his narrator I have no means of knowing, whether it was after long deliberation or came as a shaft of light. But it is hard to imagine a better vehicle for recounting the first half-century of Imperial Rome – a chronicler who lived at the very centre of its far from healthy heart.

Others lived there with him but none of them would have done. His grand-uncle Augustus, founder of the Empire, was too much concerned with promulgating his own glory and establishing the central authority of the State to give us more than propaganda; his cruel and gloomy uncle Tiberius was too secretive to make any kind of autobiographer; it could hardly have been his demented predecessor Caligula, who believed himself to be a god, or the posturing and perverted Nero who followed.

No, Claudius is the only one in all that company who we can believe in as a chronicler, the only one who would have been capable of the detachment and introspection needed. He was an outsider, always a good thing in a writer. Childhood illness left him with a permanent limp, he had a speech impediment that earned him general derision, he suffered from acute

abdominal pains all his life. ‘Cripple, stammerer, fool of the family’, as he calls himself. He was in fact regarded as little better than an idiot by the imperial family, and left to his own devices. This was the saving of him, of course. In that world of murderous power struggles no one took him seriously as a rival, no one thought him worth killing. This enabled him to live to the advanced age of 51 before succeeding to the imperial purple, and it was his own character, timorous certainly, but quick-witted and surprisingly firm in emergencies, that enabled him to survive 13 years as emperor and so to become, in the words Graves gives him, the recorder of his own life and times.

He was otherwise qualified too. In his lonely and neglected childhood he took naturally to study, encouraged in this by the historian Livy, who was one of the few to recognize his talents. He became a historian in his own right, and one of astonishing industry – he wrote 20 volumes of Etruscan and a further eight of Carthaginian history, all in Greek, plus an autobiography, a treatise on the Roman alphabet and an essay on dice-playing, to which it seems he was addicted. Not one syllable of all this has survived. All we have is a couple of letters and a speech in the Senate to the Conscript Fathers, urging them to extend Roman citizenship to provincials. (He was interrupted, even heckled, but bore it with patience.)

It is not enough for us to form any judgement of his merits as a historian or his qualities as a stylist. It is Graves that gives him a voice, and what a voice it is: garrulous, digressive, spiced with gossip and scandal, at the same time strangely dispassionate and sober. There is a range of tone here that enables Claudius, in his persona as professional historian, to deal with matters widely diverse, to be equally convincing whether talking about the waste and excess of military triumphs, the fate of Varus and his regiments in the forests of Germany, or the endless intriguing for power and influence among the members of the imperial family. To take one example among many of the capacity of Graves’s style to encompass incongruous elements, often within a short space, there is the account of the assassination of Caligula in 41 AD and the immediate hailing of Claudius as his successor. We move from the brutal and bungled killing of the crazed Caligula, who

firmly believes he is divine even while his limbs are being hacked off, to the violent confusion of the aftermath with the German bodyguards clamouring for vengeance on the killers, to the discovery of the terrified Claudius hiding behind a curtain, and his acclamation as the new emperor. The scrambled killing, the disordered movement as the Guards search out the conspirators, the grotesque comedy of the trembling Claudius borne aloft, represent together a sustained triumph of narrative.

Occasional vivid images spring through this chronicle of the crime and folly that accompanied the birth and early years of the Roman Empire. Athenodorus, who replaced the hated Cato as Claudius's tutor, had the most marvellous beard. 'It spread in waves down to his waist and was as white as a swan's wing,' Claudius says. It is a comparison that does justice both to its amazing extent and to the purity of its whiteness. But he hastens to assure us that this is no mere idle figure of speech, that he is a serious historian, he means it literally. And he goes on to tell us that one day he actually saw Athenodorus feeding swans from a boat on an artificial lake in the Gardens of Sallust and was struck by the fact that his beard and their wings were of an identical colour. The relation of this occupies a few lines only, but the disclaimer is of first importance for the appreciation of the method that characterizes the whole. In all the annals of our western history there can be no period less in need of rhetoric or even metaphor. This was a time when a cruel and debauched ruling class, in whom hysteria and madness were never far below the surface and were often made manifest in acts of public outrage, sought and maintained power through systematic murder, a time when the demoralised and unruly masses had to be pacified by the distribution of free grain on an ever larger scale and entertained by shows and spectacles ever more bloody and ferocious. It is lurid enough, it needs little in the way of emphasis or descriptive flourishes.

Claudius of course is not really a reliable narrator, though frequently reminding us of his bona fides as a historian. Even a genuine autobiography can never be more than a version of events, there will always be gaps and glosses in it. How far are the silences and exaggerations in this account those of a man who lived in the world, who was named Tiberius Claudius

Drusus Nero Germanicus, who was fourth emperor of Rome from 41 to 51 AD and went often in fear of his life? How far are they due to the fact that he is a fictional figure whose creator is exploiting the uncertainties inherent in all periods of the past, even those so relatively well-documented as this one? These questions can be formulated in other ways, by addressing the text more closely. Why the long digression in which Claudius attacks Cato the Censor, for example? Is there some concealed political motive, or is he just letting off steam? Then there is the story of Julia's love potion. She was advised to drink this herself, not the usual way with love Potions – surely it should have been administered to Tiberius whom she wanted to make fall in love with her. It was an aphrodisiac, Claudius tells us. Why did she go on so long with it when it was obviously having no effect on Tiberius? Is Spanish Fly addictive? It looks as if the whole thing is a fabrication designed to excuse Julia for her notorious licentiousness and to discredit Livia Drusilla, the detested grandmother who is said to have made up the potion and prevailed on Julia to take it.

Much of the earlier part of the autobiography is devoted to the evil machinations of this Livia, third wife of Augustus, her lust for power at any cost, her unswerving aim to have her son Tiberius succeed as emperor and so rule through him, the strong suggestion that she used poison to eliminate any who stood in her way. (There seems to be no firm evidence of this, but it is true that obstacles to her ambition tended to disappear at just the right moment.) Above all, Claudius lays great emphasis on her influence over Augustus, who was, he says, more or less completely under her thumb.

Now Augustus, who died when Claudius was 24, is regarded today as having been a brilliant military commander, a consummately skilful politician and an administrator of genius who brought stability and prosperity to the Greco-Roman world. It is true that those nearer his own time viewed him differently. Tacitus, writing within a century of his death, saw him more coldly as the last of the warlords who dominated the Roman Republic. But whichever view we take it seems highly improbable that it was Livia who was making the decisions.

Claudius the historian and Claudius the private person with his grudges and prejudices part company here as they do often enough in this autobiography. We know little for certain of Livia. We know she was powerful and influential; we know she was devoted to Augustus and a faithful counsellor to him; we know – if the marble bust of her in the Vatican Museum can be trusted – that she had great beauty and dignity. The extreme wickedness attributed to her in this account is an invented thing and the invention serves Graves extremely well. She becomes a symbol, almost a personification, of ruthless manipulation, a sort of presiding evil genius. Like the real Claudius himself and all the Julian emperors of Rome, she has become in the popular imagination untethered from history, criminal matriarch in a family of monsters and freaks. Their misdeeds have become legendary to us, like those of the Plantagenets or the Borgias. Involved with them, and of their time, there was a different set of legends, and these too breathe in Claudius's pages, a nostalgia for the republic that was never to return, not in its disordered latter days but in its prime of discipline and virtue, a remote past exemplified by heroes like Cincinnatus, who in the fifth century BC at a time of grave peril to Rome, was elected dictator. Those who came to tell him found him ploughing on his small farm. He answered the call and saved the Republic. Sixteen days later he resigned his dictatorship and returned to his farm.

Graves takes something of a risk at the start of the second volume, or so it least it seems to me, devoting a substantial section to the career of Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, relating his travels and adventures prior to the death of Caligula, the event which bound his fortunes to those of the newly honoured Claudius. The escapades of this engaging con-man and political opportunist are very well told and make entertaining reading but we sense the absence of Claudius from the narrative – or at least his much greater distance. We realize how present he has been before and we want him back.

He returns at the beginning of Chapter Five, still being borne aloft in triumph by the Praetorian guards. And almost at once, in his handling of the Senate and in his dealings with Caligula's assassins, he shows a mixture of

firmness, judgement and political cunning that takes us by surprise. And so we are launched on the main narrative theme of this second book. Claudius is the classic underdog, yes. But he is the underdog who makes good, or at least is very far from the dismal failure that is anticipated on every hand. He cultivates the loyalty of the army on which future emperors will be increasingly dependent. He invades Britain in AD 43, conquering much of it and establishing client kingdoms. He acquires Mauretania in North Africa. He improves the empire's judicial system and extends Roman citizenship in the provinces. We follow him through 13 years of absolute power and growing paranoia and we leave him at the age of 64, worn out and sick at heart, awaiting the death which has been foretold by the soothsayers – he is soon to be poisoned by his niece and fourth wife Agrippina, who is set on ensuring the succession of her son Nero.

‘Write no more’, he enjoins upon himself – they are the last words of the book. The end of his writing spells the end of his life. He has failed to protect his son Britannicus, whom he knows to be doomed. His marriage to Messalina, the only woman he is said to have truly loved, has followed an appalling course. When a man of fifty marries a girl of fifteen he is bound to have trouble, Claudius sagely reflects somewhere. The prospect of trouble in this case is ludicrously enhanced when the girl turns out to be sexually insatiable – in his Sixth Satire Juvenal famously depicts her as an empress by day and a common prostitute by night.

The questions persist. Was it his paranoid fears or Messalina's whims and lusts that brought about the reign of terror when so many public figures were executed on Claudius's orders? Did he give the order for her execution as is generally believed, or was it done without his knowledge by his freedman Narcissus, as he asserts in these pages? We don't know, nobody does. But of course it doesn't matter. Yet again we have to remind ourselves of what we are always in danger of forgetting as we read this compelling narrative, with its impeccable research, the tremendous intellectual feat of organization that it represents. It is fiction, after all.

Barry Unsworth

I am indebted for the Latin version of the Sibylline verses mentioned in the first chapter to Mr A. K. Smith, I.C.S.
They are here first printed:

Punica centenos durabit poena per annos:
Res Romana viro parebit caesariato:
Calvus caesarie dominus dominabitur urbi:
Omnibus ille viris mulier mas ille puellis:
Rex equitabit equo bifidis equus unguibus ibit:
Filius imbelli fictus mactaverit ictu.
Imperium hinc alter ficto patre caesariato
Caesariae crinitus habet, qui marmore Romae
Mutabit lateres. Non visis vinciet Urbem
Compedibus. Fictae secreto coniugis astu
Occidet ut fictus bona filius occupet heres.
Tertius hinc sumet ficto patre caesariato
Calvus caesarie regnum cui sanguine limus
Commixtus. Victrix penes ilium et victa vicissim
Roma erit. Ille instar gladii pulvinar habebit,
Filius et fictus regni potietur iniqui.
Quartus habet solium ficto patre caesariato
Calvus caesarie invenis, cui Roma ministrae est.
Feta veneficiis Urbs impia serviet uni.
Quo puer ibat equo vectus calcatus eodem
Se iuvenem ferro cecidisse fatetur equino
Caesariatus ad hoc quintus numerabitur hirtus
Caesarie, toti genti contemptus avitae.
Imbecillus iners, aestivas addere Romae
Aptus aquas populo frumenta hiemalia praebet.
Ille tamen fictae secreto coniugis astu
Occidet ut fictus bona filius occupet heres.
Sextus habet regnum ficto patre caesariato.
Flamma pavor citharoedus eunt tria monstra per urbem.

Sanguine dextra rubet materno. Septimus heres
Nemo erit, at sexti busto cruor ibit ab imo.

R. G.

Galmpton, Brixham
1941

... A story that was the subject of every variety of misrepresentation, not only by those who then lived but likewise in succeeding times: so true is it that all transactions of pre-eminent importance are wrapt in doubt and obscurity; while some hold for certain facts the most precarious hearsays, others turn facts into falsehood; and both are exaggerated by posterity.

TACITUS

Chapter 1

I, TIBERIUS CLAUDIUS DRUSUS NERO GERMANICUS This-that-and-the-other (for I shall not trouble you yet with all my titles), who was once, and not so long ago either, known to my friends and relatives and associates as ‘Claudius the Idiot’, [A.D. 41] or ‘That Claudius’, or ‘Claudius the Stammerer’, or ‘Clau-Clau-Claudius’, or at best as ‘Poor Uncle Claudius’, am now about to write this strange history of my life; starting from my earliest childhood and continuing year by year until I reach the fateful point of change where, some eight years ago, at the age of fifty-one, I suddenly found myself caught in what I may call the ‘golden predicament’ from which I have never since become disentangled.

This is not by any means my first book: in fact literature, and especially the writing of history – which as a young man I studied here at Rome under the best contemporary masters – was, until the change came, my sole profession and interest for more than thirty-five years. My readers must not therefore be surprised at 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? I may add that this is not the first history of my own life that I have written. I once wrote another, in eight volumes, as a contribution to the City archives. It was a dull affair, by which I set little store, and only written in response to public request. To be

frank, I was extremely busy with other matters during its composition, which was two years ago. I dictated most of the first four volumes to a Greek secretary of mine and told him to alter nothing as he wrote (except, where necessary, for the balance of the sentences, or to remove contradictions or repetitions). But I admit that nearly all the second half of the work, and some chapters at least of the first, were composed by this same fellow, Polybius (whom I had named myself, when a slave-boy, after the famous historian), from material that I gave him. And he modelled his style so accurately on mine that, really, when he had done, nobody could have guessed what was mine and what was his.

It was a dull book, I repeat. I was in no position to criticize the Emperor Augustus, who was my maternal grand-uncle, or his third and last wife, Livia Augusta, who was my grandmother, because they had both been officially deified and I was connected in a priestly capacity with their cults; and though I could have pretty sharply criticized Augusta's two unworthy Imperial successors, I refrained for decency's sake. It would have been unjust to exculpate Livia, and Augustus himself in so far as he deferred to that remarkable and – let me say at once – abominable woman, while telling the truth about the other two, whose memories were not similarly protected by religious awe.

I let it be a dull book, recording merely such uncontroversial facts as, for example, that So-and-so married So-and-so, the daughter of Such-and-Such who had this or that number of public honours to his credit, but not mentioning the political reasons for the marriage or the behind-scene bargaining between the families. Or I would write that So-and-so died suddenly, after eating a dish of African figs, but say nothing of poison, or to whose advantage the death proved to be, unless the facts were supported by a verdict of the Criminal Courts. I told no lies, but neither did I tell the truth in the sense I mean to tell it here. When I consulted this book to-day in the Apollo Library on the Palatine Hill, to refresh my memory for certain particulars of date, I was interested to come across passages in the public chapters which I could have sworn I had written or dictated, the style was so peculiarly my own, and yet which I had no recollection of writing or

dictating. If they were by Polybius they were a wonderfully clever piece of mimicry (he had my other histories to study, I admit), but if they were really by myself then my memory is even worse than my enemies declare it to be. Reading over what I have just put down I see that I must be rather exciting than disarming suspicion, first as to my sole authorship of what follows, next as to my integrity as an historian, and finally as to my memory for facts. But I shall let it stand; it is myself writing as I feel, and as the history proceeds the reader will be the more ready to believe that I am hiding nothing – so much being to my discredit.

This is a confidential history. But who, it may be asked, are my confidants? My answer is: it is addressed to posterity. I do not mean my great-grandchildren, or my great-great-grandchildren: I mean an extremely remote posterity. Yet my hope is that you, my eventual readers of a hundred generations ahead or more, will feel yourselves directly spoken to, as if by a contemporary: as often Herodotus and Thucydides, long dead, seem to speak to me. And why do I specify so extremely remote a posterity as that? I shall explain.

I went to Cumae, in Campania, a little less than eighteen years ago, and visited the Sibyl in her cliff cavern on Mount Gaurus. There is always a Sibyl at Cumae, for when one dies her novice-attendant succeeds; but they are not all equally famous. Some of them are never granted a prophecy by Apollo in all the long years of their service. Others prophesy, indeed, but seem more inspired by Bacchus than by Apollo, the drunken nonsense they deliver; which has brought the oracle into discredit. Before the succession of Deiphobe, whom Augustus often consulted, and Amalthea, who is still alive and most famous, there had been a run of very poor Sibyls for nearly 300 years. The cavern lies behind a pretty little Greek temple sacred to Apollo and Artemis – Cumae was an Aeolian Greek colony. There is an ancient gilt frieze above the portico ascribed to Daedalus, though this is patently absurd, for it is no older than 500 years, if as old as that, and Daedalus lived at least 1,100 years ago. It represents the story of Theseus and the minotaur whom he killed in the Labyrinth of Crete. Before being permitted to visit the Sibyl I had to sacrifice a bullock and a ewe there, to

Apollo and Artemis respectively. It was cold December weather. The cavern was a terrifying place, hollowed out from the solid rock; the approach steep, tortuous, pitch-dark, and full of bats. I went disguised, but the Sibyl knew me. It must have been my stammer that betrayed me. I stammered badly as a child and though, by following the advice of specialists in elocution, I gradually learned to control my speech on set public occasions, yet on private and unpremeditated ones I am still, though less so than formerly, liable every now and then to trip nervously over my own tongue; which is what happened to me at Cumae.

I came into the inner cavern, after groping painfully on all-fours up the stairs, and saw the Sibyl, more like an ape than a woman, sitting on a chair in a cage that hung from the ceiling, her robes red and her unblinking eyes shining red in the single red shaft of light that struck down from somewhere above. Her toothless mouth was grinning. There was a smell of death about me. But I managed to force out the salutation that I had prepared. She gave me no answer. It was only some time afterwards that I learnt that this was the mummied body of Deiphobe, the previous Sibyl, who had died recently at the age of 110; her eyelids were propped up with glass marbles silvered behind to make them shine. The reigning Sibyl always lived with her predecessor. Well, I must have stood for some minutes in front of Deiphobe, shivering and making propitiatory grimaces – it seemed a lifetime. At last the living Sibyl, whose name was Amalthea, quite a young woman too, revealed herself. The red shaft of light failed, so that Deiphobe disappeared – somebody, probably the novice, had covered up the tiny red-glass window – and a new shaft, white, struck down and lit up Amalthea, seated on an ivory throne in the shadows behind. She had a beautiful mad-looking face with a high forehead and sat as motionless as Deiphobe. But her eyes were closed. My knees shook and I fell into a stammer from which I could not extricate myself.

‘O Sib ... Sib ... Sib ... Sib ... Sib ...’ I began. She opened her eyes, frowned, and mimicked me: ‘O Clau ... Clau ... Clau ...’ That shamed me and I managed to remember what I had come to ask. I said with a great effort: ‘O Sibyl: I have come to question you about Rome’s fate and mine.’

Gradually her face changed, the prophetic power overcame her, she struggled and gasped, and there was a rushing noise through all the galleries, doors banged, wings swished my face, the light vanished, and she uttered a Greek verse in the voice of the God:

Who groans beneath the Punic Curse
And strangles in the strings of purse,
Before she mends must sicken worse.

Her living mouth shall breed blue flies,
And maggots creep about her eyes.
No man shall mark the day she dies.

Then she tossed her arms over her head and began again:

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.

The God laughed through her mouth then, a lovely yet terrible sound – ho! ho! ho! I made obeisance, turned hurriedly and went stumbling away, sprawling headlong down the first flight of broken stairs, cutting my forehead and knees, and so painfully out, the tremendous laughter pursuing me.

Speaking now as a practised diviner, a professional historian and a priest who has had opportunities of studying the Sibylline books as regularized by Augustus, I can interpret the verses with some confidence. By the Punic Curse the Sibyl was referring plainly enough to the destruction of Carthage by us Romans. We have long been under a divine curse because of that. We swore friendship and protection to Carthage in the name of our principal

Gods, Apollo included, and then, jealous of her quick recovery from the disasters of the Second Punic War, we tricked her into fighting the Third Punic War and utterly destroyed her, massacring her inhabitants and sowing her fields with salt. ‘The strings of purse’ are the chief instruments of this curse – a money-madness that has choked Rome ever since she destroyed her chief trade rival and made herself mistress of all the riches of the Mediterranean. With riches came sloth, greed, cruelty, dishonesty, cowardice, effeminacy, and every other un-Roman vice. What the gift was that all desired but myself – and it came exactly ten years and fifty-three days later – you shall read in due course. The lines about Claudius speaking clear puzzled me for years, but at last I think that I understand them. They are, I believe, an injunction to write the present work. When it is written, I shall treat it with a preservative fluid, seal it in a lead casket, and bury it deep in the ground somewhere for posterity to dig up and read. If my interpretation be correct it will be found again some 1,900 years hence. And then, when all other authors of to-day whose works survive will seem to shuffle and stammer, since they have written only for to-day, and guardedly, my story will speak out clearly and boldly. Perhaps on second thoughts I shall not take the trouble to seal it up in a casket. I shall merely leave it lying about. For my experience as a historian is that more documents survive by chance than by intention. Apollo has made the prophecy, so I shall let Apollo take care of the manuscript. As you see, I have chosen to write in Greek, because Greek, I believe, will always remain the chief literary language of the world, and if Rome rots away as the Sibyl has indicated, will not her language rot away with her? Besides, Greek is Apollo’s own language.

I shall be careful with dates (which you see I am putting in the margin) and proper names. In compiling my histories of Etruria and Carthage I have spent more angry hours than I care to recall, puzzling out in what year this or that event happened and whether a man named So-and-so was really So-and-so or whether he was a son or grandson or great-grandson or no relation at all. I intend to spare my successors this sort of irritation. Thus, for example, of the several characters in this present history who have the name

of Drusus – my father; myself; a son of mine; my first cousin; my nephew – each will be plainly distinguished wherever mentioned. And, for example again, in speaking of my tutor, Marcus Portius Cato, I must make it plain that he was neither Marcus Portius Cato, the Censor, instigator of the Third Punic War; nor his son of the same name, the well-known jurist; nor his grandson, the Consul of the same name, nor his great-grandson of the same name, Julius Caesar's enemy; nor his great-great-grandson of the same name, who fell at the Battle of Philippi; but an absolutely undistinguished great-great-great-grandson, still of the same name, who never bore any public dignity and who deserved none. Augustus made him my tutor and afterwards schoolmaster to other young Roman noblemen and sons of foreign kings, for though his name entitled him to a position of the highest dignity, his severe, stupid, pedantic nature qualified him for nothing better than that of elementary schoolmaster.

To fix the date to which these events belong I can do no better, I think, than to say that my birth occurred in the 744th year after the foundation of Rome by Romulus, and in the 767th [10 B.C.] year after the First Olympiad, and that the Emperor Augustus, whose name is unlikely to perish even in 1,900 years of history, had by then been ruling for twenty years.

Before I close this introductory chapter I have something more to add about the Sibyl and her prophecies. I have already said that, at Cumae, when one Sibyl dies another succeeds, but that some are more famous than others. There was one very famous one, Demophile, whom Aeneas consulted before his descent into Hell. And there was a later one, Herophile, who came to King Tarquin and offered him a collection of prophecies at a higher price than he wished to pay. When he refused, so the story runs, she burned a part and offered what was left at the same price, which he again refused. Then she burned another part and offered what was left, still at the same price – which, for curiosity, he paid. Herophile's oracles were of two kinds, warning or hopeful prophecies of the future, and directions for the suitable propitiatory sacrifices to be made when such and such portents occurred. To these were added, in the course of time, whatever remarkable and well-attested oracles were uttered to private persons. Whenever, then,

Rome has seemed threatened by strange portents or disasters the Senate orders a consultation of the books by the priests who have charge of them and a remedy is always found. Twice the books have been partially destroyed by fire and the lost prophecies restored by the combined memories of the priests in charge. The memories seem in many instances to have been extremely faulty: this is why Augustus set to work on an authoritative canon of the prophecies, rejecting obviously uninspired interpolations or restorations. He also called in and destroyed all unauthorized private collections of Sibylline oracles as well as all other books of public prediction that he could lay his hands upon, to the number of over 2,000. The revised Sibylline books he put in a locked cupboard under the pedestal of Apollo's statue in the temple which he built for the God close to his palace on the Palatine Hill. A unique book from Augustus's private historical library came into my possession some time after his death. It was called 'Sibylline Curiosities: being such prophecies found incorporated in the original canon as have been rejected as spurious by the priests of Apollo'. The verses were copied out in Augustus's own beautiful script, with the characteristic mis-spellings which, originally made from ignorance, he ever after adhered to as a point of pride. Most of these verses were obviously never spoken by the Sibyl either in ecstasy or out of it, but composed by irresponsible persons who wished to glorify themselves or their houses or to curse the houses of rivals by claiming divine authorship for their own fanciful predictions against them. The Claudian family had been particularly active, I noticed, in these forgeries. Yet I found one or two pieces whose language proved them respectably archaic and whose inspiration seemed divine, and whose plain and alarming sense had evidently decided Augustus – his word was law among the priests of Apollo – against admitting them into his canon. This little book I no longer have. But I can recall almost every word of the most memorable of these seemingly genuine prophecies, which was recorded both in the original Greek, and (like most of the early pieces in the canon) in rough Latin verse translation. It ran thus:

A hundred years of the Punic Curse
And Rome will be slave to a hairy man,
A hairy man that is scant of hair.
Every man's woman and each woman's man.
The steed that he rides shall have toes for hooves.
He shall die at the hand of his son, no son,
And not on the field of war.

The hairy one next to enslave the State
Shall be son, no son, of this hairy last,
He shall have hair in a generous mop.
He shall give Rome marble in place of clay
And fetter her fast with unseen chains,
And shall die at the hand of his wife, no wife,
To the gain of his son, no son.

The hairy third to enslave the State
Shall be son, no son, of this hairy last.
He shall be mud well mixed with blood,
A hairy man that is scant of hair.
He shall give Rome victories and defeat
And die to the gain of his son, no son –
A pillow shall be his sword.

The hairy fourth to enslave the State
Shall be son, no son, of this hairy last.
A hairy man that is scant of hair,
He shall give Rome poisons and blasphemies
And die from a kick of his aged horse
That carried him as a child.

The hairy fifth to enslave the State,
To enslave the State, though against his will,
Shall be that idiot whom all despised.
He shall have hair in a generous mop.
He shall give Rome water and winter bread
And die at the hand of his wife, no wife,
To the gain of his son, no son.

The hairy sixth to enslave the State
Shall be son, no son, of this hairy last.

He shall give Rome fiddlers and fear and fire.
His hand shall be red with a parent's blood.
No hairy seventh to him succeeds
And blood shall gush from his tomb.

Now it must have been plain to Augustus that the first of the hairy ones, that is, the Caesars (for Caesar means a head of hair), was his grand-uncle Julius, who adopted him. Julius was bald and he was renowned for his debaucheries with either sex; and his war charger, as is a matter of public record, was a monster which had toes instead of hooves. Julius escaped alive from many hard-fought battles only to be murdered at last, in the Senate House, by Brutus. And Brutus, though fathered on another, was believed to be Julius's natural son. 'Thou too, child!' said Julius, as Brutus came at him with a dagger. Of the Punic Curse I have already written. Augustus must have recognized in himself the second of the Caesars. Indeed, he himself at the end of his life made a boast, looking at the temples and public buildings that he had splendidly re-edified, and thinking too of his life's work in strengthening and glorifying the Empire, that he had found Rome in clay and left her in marble. But as for the manner of his death, he must have found the prophecy either unintelligible or incredible: yet some scruple kept him from destroying it. Who the hairy third and the hairy fourth and the hairy fifth were this history will plainly show; and I am indeed an idiot if, granting the oracle's unswerving accuracy in every particular up to the present, I do not recognize the hairy sixth; rejoicing on Rome's behalf that there will be no hairy seventh to succeed him.