MODERN CLASSICS

Albert Camus

Caligula and Three Other Plays

PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS

Caligula and Three Other Plays

Albert Camus (1913–60) grew up in a working-class neighbourhood in Algiers. He studied philosophy at the University of Algiers, and became a journalist. His most important works include *The Outsider*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Plague* and *The Fall*. After the occupation of France by the Germans in 1941, Camus became one of the intellectual leaders of the Resistance movement. He was killed in a road accident, and his last unfinished novel, *The First Man*, appeared posthumously.

Ryan Bloom's translation of Camus's *Notebooks 1951–1959* was shortlisted for the French-American Foundation and Florence Gould Foundation Translation Prize. His translation of Camus's mimodrama *The Life of the Artist* appeared in *The New Yorker* in 2013 and was followed by a translation of Camus's *The First Man: The Graphic Novel* in 2018. He teaches at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

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ALBERT CAMUS

Caligula and Three Other Plays

A New Translation by Ryan Bloom

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Author's Preface

The plays collected here were written between 1938 and 1950.[1] The first, *Caligula,* was initially composed in 1938, after a reading of Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars.* I'd written the play for a small theater I'd established in Algiers, intending simply to play the role of Caligula myself. Aspiring actors can be naive like that. And after all, I was twenty-five at the time, an age when you doubt everything but yourself. Well, the war forced modesty on me, and *Caligula* first premiered in 1946 at the Théâtre Hébertot in Paris.

So then, *Caligula* is an actor and director's play. But it also draws inspiration from the issues that were on my mind at the time, of course, and though French critics gave the play a very warm reception, they often spoke of it, to my great surprise, as a philosophical play. How did that happen?

As the play opens, Caligula, a relatively good-natured prince up until then, has just realized, with the passing of his sister, Drusilla, who was also his mistress, that the world as it stands is unsatisfactory. From this moment on, obsessed with the impossible, poisoned by contempt and horror, he attempts to exercise,

through murder and the systematic perversion of all values, a freedom that he will eventually discover "is not the right kind." He rejects friendship and love, basic human solidarity, right and wrong. He takes those around him at their word, forces logic on them, and levels everything in sight through the power of his refusal and the destructive rage to which his lust for life leads him.

But if his truth lies in rebelling against fate, his error lies in rejecting man. You can't destroy everything without destroying yourself. That's why Caligula empties the world around him and, faithful to his logic, does what's necessary to weaponize against him the very people who will eventually kill him. *Caligula* is the story of a superior suicide. It's the story of that most human and most tragic of errors. Unfaithful to man through faithfulness to himself, Caligula accepts death after coming to see that no one can save themselves all on their own and that a person can't be free at the cost of others.

So then, it's a tragedy of the intelligence. From which it's only natural to conclude that the drama is intellectual. Personally, I think I can see the work's faults rather clearly. But philosophy is not one I find in these four acts. Or if it is there, it's in the hero's assertion: "People die and they're not happy." A rather modest ideology, you can see, and one it seems I share with Monsieur de La Palice and the rest of the world.[2] No, my ambitions lay elsewhere. For the playwright, lust for the impossible is as worthy of investigation as greed or adultery. To show it in all its fury, to illustrate its devastation, to bring forth its failures, that's what I was trying to do here, and it's on this that the work should be judged.

Just one more note. Some who found my play provocative also find it perfectly natural that Oedipus should kill his father and marry his mother and that threesomes should take place, as long as, of course, they only do so in the nice neighborhoods. For my part, I have little time for that special kind of art that chooses to shock for lack of knowing how to convince. And if, as luck would have it, I was being scandalous, it would be solely on account of that inordinate appetite for truth an artist can't abandon without giving up on his art itself.

The Misunderstanding was written in 1941, in occupied France. At the time, I was reluctantly living in the middle of the mountains of central France, a historical and geographical situation that on its own is enough to explain the sort of claustrophobia I suffered from at the time, a claustrophobia that is reflected in the play and that, true enough, leaves little room to breathe. But we were all short of breath back then. Nevertheless, the dark nature of the play bothers me as much as it bothered the public. To encourage readers to give the play a try, I'd say: (1) the play's morality isn't entirely negative; (2) think of *The Misunderstanding* as an attempt to create a modern tragedy.

The subject of the play is a son who wants to be recognized without having to say his name, and who, as a result of a misunderstanding, is killed by his mother and sister. No doubt, it's a very pessimistic view of the human condition, but it's a view that can be reconciled with a relative optimism as far as humanity is concerned, for we can ultimately see that everything would have been different if the son had said: "It's me, let me tell you

my name." We can see that in an unjust or indifferent world, man can save himself, and save others, by using the most basic sincerity and trying to find the right words.

The language was also a shock. I knew it would be. But if I'd dressed my characters in peploses, maybe then everyone would have applauded.[3] Still, having contemporary characters speak the language of tragedy was the point, and to be honest, nothing could be more difficult, given you have to find a language natural enough to be spoken by contemporaries and unique enough to carry the tragic tone. To approach this ideal, I tried to add distance to the characters and ambiguity to the dialogue. As a result, the viewer should experience simultaneous feelings of familiarity and disorientation. The viewer and the reader. But I'm not sure that I've succeeded in finding the right balance.

As for the Old Servant, his character doesn't necessarily symbolize fate. When the drama's survivor calls on God, it's the Servant who answers. But maybe this is only another misunderstanding. If he says no to the one asking for his help, it's because in fact he has no intention of helping her, and because at a certain point, no one can do anything more for someone who is suffering or dealing with injustice, grief being solitary.

In any case, I'm not convinced that these explanations are very useful. I still believe *The Misunderstanding* is an easily accessible work, as long as you're willing to accept the language and the author's deep commitment to it. Theater is not a game. That's my conviction.

When *State of Emergency* premiered in Paris, the critics were unanimous. Indeed, few plays have had the pleasure of being so

thoroughly savaged. A fact that's all the more regrettable given I've never stopped believing that, of all my writings, *State of Emergency* may be, with all its flaws, the one that provides the most accurate picture of me. Readers are perfectly free to decide that this image, no matter how faithful, is not to their liking. For such a judgment to have more force and freedom behind it, though, I'll first have to challenge several misconceptions. To that end, it's useful to know:

(1) that *State of Emergency* is in no way whatsoever an adaptation of my novel, *The Plague.* No doubt, I've given that symbolic name to one of my characters, but given he's a dictator, the description fits.

(2) that *State of Emergency* isn't a play designed in the classic style. Instead, it might be compared with what, in the Middle Ages, were called "morality plays" in France and "autos sacramentales" in Spain, a sort of allegorical performance featuring subjects that would have been familiar to the whole audience ahead of time. I centered my play on what, in a century of tyrants and slaves, seems to me the only living religion, by which I mean freedom. So it's completely pointless to accuse my characters of being symbolic. I plead guilty. My stated goal was to pry the theater loose from psychological speculation so as to spread over our murmuring stages those great cries that today bend or liberate the masses. I remain, from that point of view alone, convinced my attempt is worthy of attention. It's also worth noting that this play about freedom is as poorly received by right-wing dictator-

ships as by dictatorships of the left. It has run continuously in Germany for some years now but has never been performed in Spain or behind the Iron Curtain. Much more could be said about the play's underlying meaning or message, but I wish only to clarify my reader's judgment, not shape it.

The Just has had better luck. It was well received. Still, praise, like blame, can sometimes be born of a misunderstanding. So then, I'd like to further clarify:

(1) that the events recounted in *The Just* are based in history, even the surprising meeting between the Grand Duchess and her husband's murderer. What's left to be judged, then, is whether or not the way I've rendered the truth is believable.

(2) that readers shouldn't let the play's form mislead them. I've used it to try to achieve dramatic tension by classical means, which is to say by pitting characters who are equal in strength and reason against each other. But it would be wrong to conclude that everything balances out and that, with respect to the problem posed here, I'm suggesting inaction. My admiration for my heroes, Kalyayev and Dora, is deeply felt. I wanted only to show that even action has limits, that there is no good and just action that doesn't recognize these limits, and that if such limits must be surpassed, death must at least be accepted. Today, our world shows us a grotesque face

> precisely because it's made by men who grant themselves the right to surpass such limits and, first and foremost, to kill others without having to die themselves. As a result, justice is employed today as an alibi, the world over, by the assassins of all justice.

Just one more note to let the reader know what won't be found in this book. Although I have the most passionate love for theater, I have the misfortune of liking only one type of play, whether tragic or comic. After a good bit of experience as a director, actor, and playwright, I feel that there's no true theater without language and style, nor any dramatic work that, following the example of our classical theater and the Greek tragedies, doesn't play with human fate, in all its simplicity and grandeur. Without claiming to be their equal, they are, at least, the models we have to set ourselves. Psychology, clever anecdotes, spicy situations, though they may amuse me as a viewer, leave me indifferent as an author. I willingly admit that this stance is dubious. But it seems better to present myself, on this point, as I am. So forewarned, readers can, if they wish, decide to read no further. As for those who aren't discouraged by this bias, I'm all the more certain of forming that strange friendship with them that, above and beyond borders, links reader and author, and which remains, when no misunderstanding is involved, the writer's royal reward.

December 1957

Introduction

Bab El Oued, Algeria. January 25, 1936. Outside the popular Padovani dance hall, black waves crash on a dark beach dotted with cafés and bathhouses. It's Saturday. The time is 9:00 P.M., and the hall, some 50 feet wide and 130 long, is filled to capacity, overflowing even, bodies crammed into corners, seats made out of windowsills open to the sea. How many people, exactly, are in the room? Two thousand, an audience member would later recall. "1,500 people of all classes," the newspaper *La Lutte Sociale* would report. Seven hundred, according to a security filing, which would note that three hundred of them were women. They've come for a performance of André Malraux's *Le Temps du mépris,* put on by the Théâtre du Travail, a newly formed troupe led by a young man barely twenty-three years old. The price of admission for the show is four francs, given to benefit the unemployed, who themselves are admitted for free. The stage, makeshift at best, has been set up atop a group of café tables gathered at the back of the room. The props are few—a couple of chairs, a cradle—the backdrop a burlap canvas painted to look like stone blocks. The show is about to begin,

and with it, the career of one Albert Camus, a "student whose youthful literary talents have already," *L'Écho d'Alger* would report, "manifested themselves with great authority."

From this moment until his last, January 4, 1960, Camus would remain committed to the theater, "one of the only places in the world," he said, where he felt truly happy. In 1937, he'd establish a second troupe in Algiers, the Théâtre de l'Équipe, but then, unemployed and barely scraping by giving private French and philosophy lessons, he received word a job had opened up at a newspaper in Paris, and he packed and left the same day, March 14, 1940. By the time he reached France, he was already working on the second draft of his first solo play, *Caligula,* and by the time the German Occupation ended, he'd finished a second, *The Misunderstanding.* It was there, in post-liberation Paris, in the brief five-year period from 1944 to 1949, that all four of his full-length original plays—the two previously mentioned, as well as *State of Emergency* and *The Just*—would premiere onstage, often with the best actors, actresses, designers, and musicians Paris had to offer. After this brief period, though, Camus would write only two more original plays, both of them short, neither of them performed onstage. The first, *The Philosophers' Farce,* a Molière-esque send-up of Jean-Paul Sartre, Camus wrote under a pseudonym, Antoine Bailly, and never published; the second, a silent mimodrama titled *The Life of the Artist,* appeared in a small Algerian journal in February 1953. In these last years of his life, Camus may have spent more time in the theater than ever before, but it was time spent adapting, directing, and translating the work of other playwrights. The most well-known and well-received of these later projects were his 1956 adaptation of William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*

and his 1959 adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed,* which was touring France when Camus was killed in a car accident at age forty-six.

In interviews, in prefaces, and in notes for playbills, Camus was clear about what he was trying to accomplish in the theater. He wanted, he said, to create "a modern tragedy." To create "characters drawn from the world today," but characters who were, "nevertheless, faced with the same fate that crushed Electra or Orestes." He didn't simply want to rehash those ancient Greek myths, though, as so many of his contemporaries were then doing. He wanted to create new ones. This, he was aware, would be difficult. "Modern tragedy's great problem," he wrote, "is a language problem. Characters wearing suits and ties can't speak like Cassandra or Titus. Their language has to be natural enough to be our own and, at the same time, elevated enough to carry the force of tragedy." Even *Caligula,* though grounded in ancient history, wasn't based on myth. If writing modern tragedy was his great theatrical ambition, crafting this unique language would be his great challenge.

Like many languages, French contains different registers, ranging from littéraire, the most refined, grammatically correct, and rarely spoken, to argot, the kind of slang you encounter in marketplaces and among friends. In an attempt to carry "the force of tragedy," Camus wrote his theatrical dialogue primarily in the upper, more formal registers, so that, at its most elevated, a character such as Annenkov in *The Just* can say, "*Il fallait que tout fût prévu et que personne ne pût hésiter sur ce qu'il y avait à faire,*" a line delivered in the imperfect subjunctive, one of French's five literary tenses, which are, and were in Camus's time, all but extinct in the spoken language. Similarly, as E. Free-

man points out in his study of the play, Stepan, a portrait of anti-elitism, a character theatergoers might well expect not only to speak informally but even to be *against* eloquent language, nevertheless opens the play by asking his comrades three straight questions using inversion, such as "*Que dois-je faire?*" which, while commonly taught in formal education, is rarely used in day-to-day conversation. Doing so would be like walking into the office and saying, "What must I do today?" rather than "What do I have to get done?" For Camus, the tragic tone seems to have taken precedence over other considerations. He drew no dialogue-based distinction between *The Just*'s Grand Duchess, on the one hand, and *The Misunderstanding*'s backcountry peasant, Martha, on the other, so that both characters—and all his theatrical characters, for the most part, regardless of class or psychology or other distinguishing factors—speak in the same polished sentences. This, he believed, would help to create an "*always* calculated dissonance," one that would distance the characters just enough, he hoped, to make them, despite their suits and ties and modern problems, tragic.

In short, then, Camus's solution to the language problem lying at the heart of modern tragedy was to create a highly stylized, literary form of dialogue that rarely strays from the upper registers of formality. For an actor cast in one of his plays or a translator attempting to coax them into a new language, Camus's intentions are perfectly clear. When it was Camus himself who was doing the translating, though, his approach to dialogue was a little different.

"No translator," he wrote in his preface for *Le Chevalier d'Olmedo,* which he'd translated from the Spanish, "should forget that Shakespeare, for example, or the great Spanish play-

wrights, wrote first of all for actors, and with an eye toward performance." His goal, as he put it in the introduction to another of his translations, *La Dévotion à la croix,* was to produce "a text that, while striving to remain faithful to the letter and tone of the original, could still be spoken and recited easily. . . . In other words, it seeks to bring the show to life, to rediscover the flow of a play initially intended for popular audiences." Reflecting on these translations, he wrote: "It was then, and is now, a matter of giving a show's performers a text that, while remaining faithful to the original, can be spoken. Between free adaptation and a strict word-for-word approach, there are several different ways to conceive of the translation of a dramatic work."

If in his own plays he leaned in the direction of distance and dissonance, believing a unique language to be central to his project, in his translations of other playwrights—theatrical translation being a craft he believed should be carried out by dramatists, not by professional translators—his stated goal was to produce natural, performable dialogue.

Every translation is an explanation of sorts. An explanation not of the original text but of priorities: what gets weighted, what gets lost. In bringing Camus's plays into English, I've tried to balance both Camus's literary intentions—not only his general approach to dialogue but also his use of rhythm, repetition, thematic word choice, and other such factors—and his insistence on performability, an "ideal demand" that he said he hadn't really been able to satisfy in his own translations, though he'd "endeavored to do so."

When a word such as "nothing" plays a key role, as it does in *State of Emergency,* for example, an attempt has been made to maintain the word in translation, even if, on occasion, doing

so isn't perfectly natural. For example, when the Plague is looking for his first victim, he's about to take Nada, a character representing nihilism, when the Secretary intervenes, saying that Nada's "the sort of person who believes in nothing, and that such a person could be quite useful to us," a sentence that, from a strictly linguistic standpoint, would probably read more naturally as "the sort of person who doesn't believe in anything." Here, preserving the larger thematic element through the individual word choice seems to outweigh any slightly unnatural syntax, as it does when it comes to the many jokes and puns, such as when Nada noisily stumbles into a room and, on noticing the Secretary sitting there, says, "Oh, excuse me," to which the Secretary replies, "*Ce n'est rien,*" a phrase that would smoothly translate as "It's okay" or "No big deal," but which literally reads "It's nothing," a play on the character's name. This same word, on the other hand, doesn't carry the same weight in *The Misunderstanding,* and so there performable dialogue takes precedence over "nothing." In that play, it's a set of interlinking themes—seeing, recognizing, and speaking clearly—that play a central role, and so maintaining those ideas, in their many forms, has been prioritized. At one point, in a more subtle example, Martha says, "*Je ne reconnais pas vos mots,*" which might be translated as "I don't understand the words you're using," or, in a more natural rendering, "I don't understand what you're saying." But both of these, which use the natural "understand," lose the thematic "recognize." Similarly, in *Caligula* and *State of Emergency,* the idea of order and disorder—organization and disorganization—is important, and so, for example, I've let Caesonia say, "put the room back

in order," rather than the more colloquial "tidy the room up" or "get the room back together."

On the one hand, then, when it comes to maintaining these sorts of thematic elements, I've leaned lightly in the direction of literary intention. On the other hand, when these sorts of issues aren't of central concern, I've considered what might sound most natural on the stage today. Still, there are instances, such as Diego and Victoria's "language of love" in *State of Emergency,* where the grandiloquent dialogue appears stilted even in the original French text, and so no attempt has been made to adjust the register of such passages or make them more performable in English.

As a final note, it should also be said that every translation is also an explanation of its translator. Take the word "*grâce,*" for example, as it appears in *The Just.* The most obvious English translation is hardly a translation at all: simply remove the accent. In French, as in English, "grace" has a sense of the religious about it, as in "to say grace" ("*dire les grâces*"), but it also, in both languages, has a more legalistic sense, as in "pardon" or "mercy." In modern American usage, this second, legal sense of the word has faded somewhat, and while religion is discussed in the play, it's not, for the most part, a religious faith in God the central characters debate but a religious faith in political action. When Kalyayev, the play's hero, uses the word "*grâce,*" he doesn't primarily mean "by the grace of God," but "please forgive me." On the other hand, the police chief, Skuratov, leans on the legal sense, "pardon," and the Grand Duchess leans on the religious sense, "divine grace." Kalyayev, unwilling to act in bad faith, to escape his fate through either God or law, asks only

for "forgiveness." The act he is to commit—an attempt on the Grand Duke's life—is, in his judgment, both wrong and right, good and bad, plus and minus. It has contradiction at its very core. The only way to go through with it, he believes, is by willingly sacrificing his own life, while simultaneously acknowledging the contradiction.

This is the way I, as a reader, understand the characters, and by extension, that single word, "*grâce*." It's an understanding informed by my knowledge of Camus's larger philosophy and life, certainly, but also, subconsciously and inevitably, by my own experiences and my own sense of the English language, as it's spoken where I live, among the people I've interacted with, and in the books I've read. Other readers, readers with different backgrounds and experiences, may very well, and with good reason, see things differently. The writer and translator Czesław Miłosz once said, for example, that Camus's novel *The Fall* "is nothing else but a treatise on Grace—absent Grace," and were he to translate *The Just,* perhaps he would suggest that "grace" is precisely the right word for Kalyayev to use in English and that "forgiveness" is misguided. Translation, like Kalyayev's dilemma, is full of contradiction, and there are often no definite answers to be had, only actions taken by a given person in a given time and place.

—Ryan Bloom

Caligula

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

To my friends in the THÉÂTRE DE L'ÉQUIPE[1]

Caligula was staged for the first time in 1945 at the Théâtre Hébertot, under the direction of Paul Œttly, with set design by Louis Miquel and costumes by Marie Viton.[2]

CHARACTERS

Caligula	Caesonia
Helicon	Scipio
Cherea	The Old Patrician (Senectus)
Metellus	Lepidus
The Attendant (Patricius)	Mereia
Mucius	Guards
Servants	Poets

ACT I[3]

The play opens in Caligula's palace.

Three years pass between the first act and those that follow it.

SCENE I

A group of patricians,[4] one of them very old, stand in a palace hallway. They appear nervous.

FIRST PATRICIAN

Still nothing?

THE OLD PATRICIAN

Nothing in the morning, nothing in the evening.

SECOND PATRICIAN

Nothing for three days now.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

The couriers go, the couriers come, they shake their heads and say: "Nothing, no one."

SECOND PATRICIAN

The whole countryside's been searched. There's nothing more to do.

FIRST PATRICIAN

Why worry about things before they happen? Let's give it a minute. He may yet come back the same as he left.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

I saw him leaving the palace. He had a strange look about him.[5]

FIRST PATRICIAN

I was there, too. I asked him what was bothering him.

SECOND PATRICIAN

Did he answer?

FIRST PATRICIAN

A single word: "Nothing."

A pause. HELICON *enters, eating onions.*

SECOND PATRICIAN

(*still nervous*)

It's worrisome.

FIRST PATRICIAN

Oh, come on. Young people are all the same. They all act like this.

OLD PATRICIAN

Needless to say, age wipes it all away.[6]

SECOND PATRICIAN

You think so?

FIRST PATRICIAN

Let's hope he forgets.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

Oh, yes. Plenty of fish in the sea.

HELICON

What makes you think love's the issue?

FIRST PATRICIAN

What else would it be?

HELICON[7]

Indigestion, maybe. Or simply disgust at having to see all of you every day. It'd be so much easier to deal with our colleagues if only they'd try out a new look every so often. But no, the menu never changes. Always the same old gruel.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

I'd prefer to think it's love. It's more endearing that way.

HELICON

And much more reassuring. So much more reassuring. Love's the sort of sickness that spares neither the intelligent nor the dumb.

FIRST PATRICIAN

Either way, it's a good thing grief doesn't last forever. Are you able to suffer for more than a year?

SECOND PATRICIAN

Me? No.

FIRST PATRICIAN

Nobody can.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

Life would be impossible.

FIRST PATRICIAN

You see. Look here, I lost my wife last year. I cried about it a lot, and then I forgot. Every now and then, I start feeling sorry again. But really, it's nothing.[8]

THE OLD PATRICIAN

Nature handles things very well.

HELICON

Yet when I look at you, I get the feeling it occasionally drops the ball.

CHEREA *enters.*

FIRST PATRICIAN

Well?

CHEREA

Still nothing.

HELICON

Keep calm, gentlemen, keep calm. Let's try to keep up appearances. *We* are the Roman empire. If we get all bent out of shape, the empire loses its head. This isn't the time for all that. No, not at all. How about we go get some lunch? The empire will be the better for it.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

Fair enough. We mustn't drop the substance for the shadow.

CHEREA

I don't like it. But then again, everything was going too well. He was the perfect emperor.

SECOND PATRICIAN

He was just what we needed him to be: scrupulous and inexperienced.

FIRST PATRICIAN

But what's the big deal, anyway? Why all the lamenting? Nothing's stopping him from going back to how he was before. Sure, he loved Drusilla, but she was his sister, after all,

and sleeping with her—well, that was a big enough deal on its own. But turning Rome upside down because she's dead, now that's just going too far.

CHEREA

All the same, I don't like it. This running-away business doesn't bode well.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

There's no smoke without fire.

FIRST PATRICIAN

In any case, we can't have an instance of incest appearing as some sort of tragedy. Matters of state won't permit it. Incest, okay, so be it, but be discreet about it.

HELICON[9]

You know, when it comes to incest, there's always bound to be a bit of a ruckus. The bed squeals, if I dare say so. Anyway, who told you Drusilla's even the issue here?

SECOND PATRICIAN

What else could it be?

HELICON

Guess. Keep in mind: misfortune is like marriage. You think you're choosing, then you're chosen. That's just how it is, there's nothing you can do about it. Our Caligula's unhappy, but he may not even know why. He must have felt trapped, so he ran away. We would have all done the same thing. Take me, for example. Here I am, talking to all of you, but if I'd been able to choose my own father, I would've never been born.

SCIPIO *enters.*

SCENE II

CHEREA

So?

SCIPIO

Still nothing. A couple of peasants thought they saw him running through the storm last night, not far from here.

CHEREA *goes back over to the senators.* SCIPIO *follows him.*

CHEREA

So then, that's three full days, Scipio?

SCIPIO

Yes. I was there, following after him as usual. He walked over to Drusilla's body. Touched it with two fingers. Seemed lost in thought a moment, then spun around and left with a firm step. We've been chasing after him ever since.

CHEREA

(*shaking his head*)

That boy was too in love with books.

SECOND PATRICIAN

They all are at that age.

CHEREA

But they're not all of his rank. An artist-emperor? It's inconceivable. We've had one or two, of course—there are a few black sheep in every family—but the others all had the good sense to stay bureaucrats.

FIRST PATRICIAN

More relaxing that way.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

To each their own calling.

SCIPIO

What can we do, Cherea?

CHEREA

Nothing.

SECOND PATRICIAN

We wait. If he doesn't come back, we'll have to replace him. We're not lacking emperors among us.

FIRST PATRICIAN

No, we're only lacking character.

CHEREA

And if he comes back in a foul mood?

FIRST PATRICIAN

My god! He's only a child still. We'll make him listen to reason.

CHEREA

And if he's deaf to reason?

FIRST PATRICIAN

(*laughs*)

Well then, I did once write a treatise about the coup d'état, didn't I?

CHEREA

Yes, of course, if it comes to that—but really, I'd prefer to be left to my books.

SCIPIO

If you'll excuse me.

He exits.

CHEREA

He's offended.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

He's a child. Young people stand in solidarity.

HELICON

In solidarity or not, he'll get old one day, too.

A GUARD *appears.*

GUARD

Caligula's been spotted in the palace garden.

All exit.

SCENE III

For a few seconds, the stage remains empty. CALIGULA *ducks in from the left. He seems lost, he's dirty, his hair is soaked, and his legs are filthy. He brings his hand to his mouth several times. He walks toward the mirror and stops as soon as he catches sight of his own image.*[10] *He grumbles a few words that can't be made out, then goes to sit on the right side of the stage, arms hanging between his knees.* HELICON *enters from the left. Catching sight of* CALIGULA*, he stops at the far end of the stage and silently observes him.* CALIGULA *turns and sees him. A moment passes.*

SCENE IV

HELICON
(*speaking from across the stage*)

Hello, Caius.

CALIGULA
(*in a normal voice*)

Hello, Helicon.

Silence.

HELICON

You seem tired.

CALIGULA

I've done a lot of walking.

HELICON

Yes, you were away for quite a while.

Silence.

CALIGULA

It was difficult to find.

HELICON

What was?

CALIGULA

What I wanted.

HELICON

And what did you want?

CALIGULA
(*in a normal voice still*)

The moon.

HELICON

What?

CALIGULA

Yes, I wanted the moon.

HELICON

Ah!

Silence. Helicon approaches him.

HELICON

To do what with it?

CALIGULA

Well . . . it's one of those things I don't have.

HELICON

Of course. And it's all been taken care of now?

CALIGULA

No, I wasn't able to get it.

HELICON

How annoying.

CALIGULA

Yes. That's why I'm tired.

(*a moment passes*)

Helicon!

HELICON

Yes, Caius.

CALIGULA

You think I'm crazy.

HELICON

You know very well I never think. I'm too smart for that.[11]

CALIGULA

Yes. But anyway, I'm not crazy, and in fact I've never been so rational. It's just . . . I suddenly felt a need for the impossible.

(*a moment passes*)

Things don't seem satisfactory to me as they are.

HELICON

A rather widespread opinion.

CALIGULA

That's true, but I didn't know it before. Now, I know.

(*in a normal voice still*)

This world's unbearable as it is. So then, I need the moon, or happiness, or immortality—something a little mad, maybe, but not of this world.

HELICON

What you're saying makes sense, but generally speaking, there's no sense in carrying such things to their natural conclusion.

CALIGULA

(*getting to his feet, but with the same ease*)

You know nothing about it. It's because we never see any reason to carry things to their natural conclusion that nothing's ever achieved. But maybe carrying logic to its end would be enough.

(*looks at* HELICON)

I know what you're thinking. What a whole lot of fuss over the death of one woman. No, it's not that. I seem to recall that a woman I loved died a few days ago, that's true. But what is love? Not such a big deal. That death means nothing, I swear to you. It's only the sign of a truth—but it's a truth that makes the moon necessary for me. It's a very clear and simple truth, a little silly, even, but one that's hard to come by and heavy to bear.

HELICON

Well, what is this truth, Caius?

CALIGULA

(*turning away, in a neutral tone*)

People die and they are not happy.

HELICON

(*after a moment passes*)

Oh, come now, Caius, that's a truth we handle very well. Look around you. It's not the sort of thing that keeps people from going out for lunch.

CALIGULA

(*suddenly exploding*)

Well, that's because everything around me is a lie, and I . . . I want us all to live in truth! And indeed, I have the means to make them live in truth, for I know what it is they're lacking, Helicon. They've been deprived of knowledge and they lack a teacher who knows what he's talking about.

HELICON

Don't take offense at what I'm about to say to you, Caius, but first and foremost, you need some rest.

CALIGULA
(*sitting down, again gentle*)
That's not possible, Helicon. That will never again be possible.

HELICON
And why is that?

CALIGULA
If I go to sleep, who's going to give me the moon?

HELICON
(*after a moment of silence*)
True enough.

CALIGULA *stands up, the effort required obvious.*

CALIGULA
Listen, Helicon. I hear footsteps and the sound of voices. Hush now and forget you ever saw me.

HELICON
I understand.

CALIGULA *heads for the exit. He turns around.*

CALIGULA
And please, from now on, help me out.

HELICON
I have no reason not to do so, Caius. But I know so many things, and so few things interest me. So with what, then, may I help you?

CALIGULA
With the impossible.

HELICON

I'll do my best.

CALIGULA *exits.* SCIPIO *and* CAESONIA *quickly enter.*

SCENE V

SCIPIO

There's nobody here. Did you see him, Helicon?

HELICON

No.

CAESONIA

He really said nothing to you before making his escape, Helicon?

HELICON

I'm not his confidant, I'm his audience. It's much wiser.

CAESONIA

Please.

HELICON

Dear Caesonia, Caius is an idealist. Everyone knows that. Or, to put it another way, he hasn't quite figured things out yet. Me? I have, and that's why I don't care about anything. But Caius, on the other hand, with that good little heart of his, if he starts putting things together, he's quite capable of taking care of everything. And God only knows what that'll cost us. But, if it's all right with you, it's time for my lunch.

He exits.

SCENE VI

CAESONIA *sits down, weary.*

CAESONIA

A guard says he saw him. But then again, all of Rome sees Caligula everywhere, and all Caligula sees are his own thoughts.[12]

SCIPIO

And which thoughts are those?

CAESONIA

How should I know, Scipio?

SCIPIO

Drusilla?

CAESONIA

Who can say? But it's true he loved her. It's truly hard to see die today what only yesterday you held tightly in your arms.

SCIPIO
(*timidly*)

And you?

CAESONIA

Oh, me—I'm the old mistress.

SCIPIO

We have to save him, Caesonia.

CAESONIA

So, you do love him?

SCIPIO

I love him. He was good to me. He encouraged me. I can remember some of the things he said to me by heart. He told me that life isn't easy, but that there's religion, art, and love to carry

us through. He'd often say that the only mistake you could make would be to make others suffer. He wanted to be a just man.

CAESONIA
(*standing up*)

He was a child.

(*goes over to the mirror and considers what she sees in it*)

I've never had any god other than my body, and it's to that god I'd like to pray today that Caius be returned to me.

CALIGULA *enters. Catching sight of* CAESONIA *and* SCIPIO, *he hesitates and backs away. At the same moment, from the opposite side, the* PATRICIANS *and the* PALACE ADMINISTRATOR *enter. They stop, shocked, and* CAESONIA *turns around. She and* SCIPIO *run toward* CALIGULA. *He stops them with a wave of the hand.*

SCENE VII

THE ADMINISTRATOR
(*in a voice lacking confidence*)

We . . . we've been looking for you, Caesar.

CALIGULA
(*in a changed, curt voice*)

I see.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

We . . . that is to say . . .

CALIGULA

(*brutally*)

What do you want?

THE ADMINISTRATOR

We were worried, Caesar.

CALIGULA

(*moving toward him*)

What right do you have to worry?

THE ADMINISTRATOR

Well, uh . . .

(*suddenly inspired, speaking very quickly*)

I mean, in any case, you know you have a couple of questions to attend to with regard to the treasury.

CALIGULA

(*overcome with laughter*)

The treasury? But of course, you see, the treasury is of the utmost capital concern.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

Certainly, Caesar.

CALIGULA

(*still laughing, to* CAESONIA)

It's very important, isn't it, my darling? The treasury?

CAESONIA

No, Caligula, it's a secondary concern.

CALIGULA

But that's because you know nothing about it. The treasury is a powerful interest. Everything is important: finances, public morality, foreign policy, military provisions, agrarian laws! Everything is of the utmost concern, I tell you. Everything is on equal footing: the greatness of Rome and your attacks of arthritis. Well! I'll just have to take care of all of that. Listen to me a minute, Administrator.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

We're listening to you.

The PATRICIANS *move closer.*

CALIGULA

You're loyal to me, aren't you?

THE ADMINISTRATOR

(*in a tone of reproach*)

Caesar!

CALIGULA

Well then, I have a plan to submit to you. We're going to turn the political economy upside down in two phases. I'll explain it to you, Administrator . . . as soon as the patricians have left.

The PATRICIANS *leave.*

SCENE VIII

CALIGULA *sits down close to* CAESONIA.

CALIGULA

Listen to me carefully. Phase one: All the patricians, every person in the empire who has any sort of fortune—small or large, it makes no difference—must, by mandate, disinherit their children and immediately have a will made up in favor of the state.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

But, Caesar—

CALIGULA

I didn't say you could speak. As our needs require, we will have these people put to death according to an arbitrarily established list. On occasion, we may decide to modify the order, but still in an arbitrary manner. And then we will inherit.

CAESONIA

(*pulling away*)

What's gotten into you?

CALIGULA

(*unfazed*)

In fact, the order of executions holds no importance at all. Or, rather, these executions are all of equal importance, which means they have none. Besides, they're each as guilty as the other, one as guilty as the next. You'll note, too, that it's no more immoral to steal directly from citizens than it is to slip indirect taxes into the price of commodities citizens can't do

without. To govern is to steal, everybody knows that. The only difference is how you go about it. Me? I'll steal openly. It'll be a change from those small-time thieves.

(*to the* ADMINISTRATOR, *harshly*)

You'll execute these orders without delay. The wills are to be signed by every inhabitant of Rome this evening, by everyone in the provinces within a month, at the latest. Send out the messengers.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

Caesar, you're not taking into account—

CALIGULA

Listen to me very carefully, you idiot. If the treasury holds such importance, then human life does not. That much is clear. And anyone who thinks as you do has no choice but to accept such reasoning and take their life to be nothing, given they take money to be everything. As it so happens, I, for my part, have decided to be logical, and as I'm the one in power, you're going to see what logic's going to cost you. I'll exterminate all contradictors and contradictions. If necessary, I'll start with you.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

There's no question as to my willingness to act on your behalf, Caesar, I swear to you.

CALIGULA

No question about mine, either. You can trust me on that one. Though the proof is right there in my agreeing to embrace your point of view and take the treasury to be a matter of serious consideration. In short, you should thank

me, as I'm anteing up for your game and I'm playing with your cards.

(*a moment passes, and then with calm*)

In any case, my plan, in its simplicity, is brilliant, and so that's the end of discussion. You have three seconds to get out of my sight. I'm counting. One . . .

The ADMINISTRATOR *hurries off.*

SCENE IX

CAESONIA

I hardly recognize you. This is a joke, isn't it?

CALIGULA

Not exactly, Caesonia. It's an education. A method.

SCIPIO

It's not possible, Caius.

CALIGULA

Precisely.

SCIPIO

I don't understand you.

CALIGULA

Precisely. It's about what's not possible, or rather, it's about making possible what isn't.

SCIPIO

But that's a game with no limits. It's a madman's entertainment.

CALIGULA

No, Scipio. It's an emperor's virtue.

(*turns away with a wearied expression*)

I've finally come to understand the purpose of power. It's to give the impossible a chance. Starting today, and for all the days to come, my freedom will no longer know any boundaries.[13]

CAESONIA

(*with sadness*)

I don't know if that's something to be happy about, Caius.

CALIGULA

I don't know if it is either. But I guess we're going to have to live with it.

CHEREA *enters.*

SCENE X

CHEREA

I heard you'd returned. I've been praying for your health.

CALIGULA

My health thanks you.

(*a moment passes, then suddenly*)

Go away, Cherea, I don't want to see you.

CHEREA

I'm surprised, Caius.

CALIGULA

Don't be surprised. I don't like men of letters, and I can't bear their lies. They speak so as not to hear themselves, because if they heard themselves, they'd know they're nothing and wouldn't be able to go on speaking. Go on, get out of here. False witnesses horrify me.

CHEREA

If we lie, it's often without knowing it. I plead not guilty.

CALIGULA

A lie is never innocent, and yours attributes importance to people and things. That's what I can't forgive you for.

CHEREA

And yet, we have to enter a plea in favor of this world, if we wish to live in it.

CALIGULA

Don't plead—the case has already been heard. This world is of no importance, and whoever recognizes that wins their freedom.

(*standing up*)

That's precisely why I hate you, because you are not free. In all the Roman empire, I alone am free. But rejoice, for at last an emperor has come to teach you about freedom. Go away, Cherea, and you, too, Scipio. Friendship makes me laugh. Go and let Rome know its freedom has finally been restored and that, with it, a great trial begins.

They leave. CALIGULA *turns away.*

SCENE XI

CAESONIA

Are you crying?

CALIGULA

Yes, Caesonia.

CAESONIA

But what could have caused such a change as this? If it's true you loved Drusilla, you loved her while also loving me and many other people, too. Her death's not enough to have sent you running off through the countryside for three days and nights and to then bring you back with this cruel look on your face.

CALIGULA
(*turns around*)

Who's been saying these things to you about Drusilla, you madwoman? And is it so hard to imagine a man crying about something other than love?

CAESONIA

Forgive me, Caius. I'm only trying to understand.

CALIGULA

Men cry because things aren't what they should be.

She steps toward him.

CALIGULA

Leave it be, Caesonia.

She takes a step back.

CALIGULA

But stay by my side.

CAESONIA

I'll do as you wish.

(*sitting down*)

At my age, a person knows life's no good. But if there's evil on earth, why add to it?

CALIGULA

You can't understand. What does it matter? Maybe I'll snap out of it. But I feel these nameless beings rising up inside of me. How can I possibly fend them off?

(*turning back to her*)

Oh, Caesonia! I knew a person could lose all hope, but I didn't understand what it really meant. Like everyone else, I thought it was a sickness of the soul—but no, it's the body that suffers. My skin hurts, my chest, my limbs. My mind's a blank and my heart's sick. But worst of all, though, the most awful part, is the taste in my mouth. Not blood or death or fever but all of them at once. All it takes is a waggle of the tongue and everything goes black again, and oh how these beings disgust me. How hard it is, how bitter it is to become a man.

CAESONIA

You need to sleep, to sleep for a good long while, to let yourself go and stop thinking about everything so much. I'll watch over your slumber, and when you wake, you'll find the world's regained its flavor. Then you can put your power to loving better what can still be loved. The possible also deserves a chance.

CALIGULA[14]
But that requires slumber, that requires letting go—that is not possible.

CAESONIA
That's the sort of thing people think when they're so tired they can't see straight. A time will come when you'll have a firm grasp again.

CALIGULA
But you have to know what to hold on to. And what good does a firm grasp do me, what use is this awesome power to me, if I can't change the order of things, if I can't make it so the sun sets in the east, can't decrease suffering and make it so people don't die anymore? No, Caesonia, sleeping or staying awake, it makes no difference if I have no control over the order of the world.

CAESONIA
But that's wanting to be equal to the gods, and I can think of no greater madness than that.

CALIGULA
Even you. Even you think I'm crazy. And yet, what is a god that I should wish to be its equal? What I wish for today, with all my strength, is above and beyond the gods. I'm going to lead a kingdom where the impossible is king.

CAESONIA
You can't make the sky not be the sky, make a beautiful face ugly, a man's heart unfeeling.

CALIGULA
(*with increasing exhilaration*)
I want to stir the sky and sea together, blend beauty and ugliness, make laughter spring from suffering.

CAESONIA
(*perched in front of him and begging*)
There's good and evil, high and low, just and unjust. I swear to you that none of that is going to change.

CALIGULA
(*in the same manner*)
My will is to change it. I'll give this century the gift of equality. And then, when everything's been leveled, when the impossible is at last upon the earth and the moon is in my hands, then, maybe I myself will be transformed and the world along with me, and then, at last, people will no longer die, and they will be happy.

CAESONIA
(*crying out*)
You can't deny love.

CALIGULA
(*exploding in a voice filled with rage*)
Love, Caesonia!

(*takes her by the shoulders and shakes her*)

I've learned it's nothing. That administrator was right: it's the treasury that matters! You heard him say so, didn't you? Everything begins with that. Oh, at last, now I'm really going to live. To live, Caesonia, to live is the opposite of to love. I can promise you that, and I can invite you to a limitless celebration, to an open trial, to the finest of spectacles. We must have crowds, an audience, victims, and the guilty.

He throws himself at the gong and begins to strike it over and over again, on and on, his blows growing stronger. He continues to strike it.

CALIGULA

Bring in the guilty. We need some to be guilty. They're all guilty.

(*still striking the gong*)

I want the ones condemned to death brought in. The people, I want my people. Judges, witnesses, accused, all condemned from the start. Oh, Caesonia, I'm going to show them something they've never seen—the only free man in this entire empire.

At the sound of the gong, the palace slowly begins to fill with whispers, which grow louder and closer. Voices, weapons, footsteps, and stomping. CALIGULA *laughs and continues to strike the gong. Some guards enter, then exit.*

CALIGULA

(*striking*)

And you, Caesonia, you will obey me. You will always be there to help me. It'll be wonderful. Swear to help me, Caesonia.

CAESONIA

(*disoriented, between two strikes of the gong*)

I don't need to swear, because I love you.

CALIGULA

(*same manner*)

You'll do everything I tell you to do.

CAESONIA
(*same manner*)

Everything, Caligula, just stop.

CALIGULA
(*still striking the gong*)

You'll be cruel.

CAESONIA
(*crying*)

Cruel.

CALIGULA
(*same manner*)

Cold and implacable.

CAESONIA

Implacable.

CALIGULA
(*same manner*)

You'll suffer, too.

CAESONIA

Yes, Caligula, but I'm losing my mind.

Some patricians have entered, stunned, and with them the palace attendants. CALIGULA *strikes a last blow, lifts his mallet in the air, turns toward them, and calls out to them.*

CALIGULA
(*insane*)

Come one, come all. Step right up. I order you to step right up.

(*stamping his foot*)

This is your emperor demanding you step right up.

Everyone moves forward, filled with fright.

CALIGULA

Come quickly. And now, come closer, Caesonia.

He takes her by the hand, leads her over to the mirror, and with the mallet, maniacally shatters the image on its polished surface. He laughs.

CALIGULA

Nothing more, you see. No more memories. All faces fade away. Nothing, nothing more. And you know what's left? Come even closer. Look. Closer. Look.[15]

He plants himself in front of the mirror, an air of insanity about him.

CAESONIA

(*looking at the mirror with fright*)

Caligula!

CALIGULA *places a finger on the mirror, his appearance changed, suddenly transfixed as he says triumphantly:*

CALIGULA

Caligula.

CURTAINS

ACT II[16]

SCENE I

A group of patricians have gathered at CHEREA*'s house.*

FIRST PATRICIAN

He insults our dignity.

MUCIUS

For three years now!

THE OLD PATRICIAN

He calls me his little lady. He's ridiculing me. To no end!

MUCIUS

For three years now!

FIRST PATRICIAN

And every evening, when he goes out to the countryside, he makes us run alongside his lectica.

SECOND PATRICIAN

And then he tells us the run is good for our health.

MUCIUS

For three years now!

THE OLD PATRICIAN

There's no excuse for it.

THIRD PATRICIAN

No, it can't be forgiven.

FIRST PATRICIAN

Patricius, he confiscated your property. Scipio, he killed your father. Octavius, he pulled your wife right out from under you and forced her to work in his public brothel. Lepidus, he killed your son. Are you all going to put up with this? Me? I've made my choice. Between running the necessary risk and this unbearable life of fear and powerlessness, I have no hesitation.

SCIPIO

When he killed my father, he made my decision for me.

FIRST PATRICIAN

Are the rest of you really still hesitating?

THIRD PATRICIAN

We're with you. He gave our seats at the Circus to the common people and then pushed us to fight it out with the plebes so he'd have reason to punish us afterward.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

He's a coward.

SECOND PATRICIAN

A cynic.

THIRD PATRICIAN

A phony.

THE OLD PATRICIAN

He's impotent.

FOURTH PATRICIAN

For three years now!