

**Honors 2290**  
**Ancient Rome in Historical Fiction:**  
**Narratives, Sources and Screen Adaptations**  
**Spring Semester 2010**  
**Assignment #2: Due March 11, 2010**

In a short essay (2-4 pages double spaced, typed and proofread), please compare and contrast how Robert Graves represents the deaths of Asinius Pollio and Augustus in chapters 9 through 13 of *I, Claudius* with how Thornton Wilder's represents the deaths of Catullus and Caesar in *The Ides of March*.

Your essay should take into account the format of the two novels, their "fruitfully selective" use of actual ancient sources, and their historical accuracy; it should also note how both Asinius Pollio and Augustus (known as Octavius before Caesar's death) figure in Wilder's novel. It should devote some attention to Claudius' special perspective on the events of these years. Above all, it should consider why you think Graves and Wilder selected (and invented) the details they did in terms of narrative effect and impact.

The two novels share striking similarities. Both purport to view the historical events that they depict through the eyes of contemporary witnesses. Yet Claudius, the narrator of Graves' novel, was not born until mid-way through Augustus' principate and hence views this period from a different vantage point than the major "actors" in the main scenario. To be sure, Wilder's "epistolary" novel advances its plot "interactively", through correspondence (of Wilder's own invention) by Caesar himself and other individuals; Graves presents his novel as Claudius' first person memoir. Still, *The Ides of March* concludes by quoting a passage from Suetonius' biography of Julius Caesar, frequently features actual poems by Catullus, and relies on Suetonius and other sources; so, too, Graves incorporates letters and information he has obtained from Suetonius, among others, into his narrative.

But there is an important difference. Wilder prefaces his novel by acknowledging that and how he has altered basic details of what happened from 62 to 44 BCE to create a "fantasia" on certain events and persons of the last days of the Roman republic. Graves did not say anything about the relationship of his fiction to his sources in the preface to *I, Claudius*, only—in response to reviewers—in the preface to *Claudius The God*, where he claims to be relying on historical authority and "credibility."