

# Narrative Structure in Graves' Historical Fiction

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In the 1930's and 1940's, Robert Graves' career as a novelist reached its full height. *Goodbye to All That* (1929) had made him more famous and more widely read than had his poetry and criticism, but had led him to live abroad, in Majorca. Here he quite frankly financed his exile and his poetry with a succession of successful novels. After a sort of beginner's attempt at a novel, *No Decency Left*, written with Laura Riding under the pseudonym Barbara Rich, Graves found his voice and his technique with the prize-winning *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God and his Wife Messalina* (also 1934). How did such an inexperienced novelist capture millions of readers of the historical novel, the great popular genre of the 1930's?

The answer is, I believe, that Graves developed during the 1930's very different techniques, some very traditional and useful in third-person narration, and another set of very modern narrative techniques, which rely on the basic device of the unreliable narrator and which exploit verbal, dramatic and even cosmic irony. The former set of techniques were used in Graves' *Antigua*, *Penny*, *Puce*; the latter set of techniques structure *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* and, less successfully, *King Jesus*.

The thorough going irony which permeates *I, Claudius* is, I believe, in large part responsible for its vast popularity. It is entertaining to have a version of an incident reported, then have its meaning reversed or undercut in a following sentence, and equally entertaining to experience the dramatic irony of Graves' reinterpretation of classical history. Finally, the cosmic irony of the prophecies' fulfillment—stammering, foolish, Claudius raised to Emperor—is one reason millions of readers have kept turning the pages of *I, Claudius*.

The epigraph from Tacitus that begins the text of *I, Claudius* sets the tone for the novel:

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.

The text of *I, Claudius* is a tapestry of ironies, some large and some small. Lying and scheming, of course, require ironies of certain kinds, as when "Tiberius professed to be shocked by Germanicus's revelations" (190) or when Tiberius and "his loving mother" make "a show of reconciliation: but neither trusted the other." There are ironic speeches made in the Senate (167) by parodists, ironic situations involving the mistaken identities of Postumus and the slave sent to replace him (177-180). Speaking in codes—"A certain person..." for example—makes for dramatic irony of a mild sort, of course, as do misunderstood messages such as Tiberius's mistaken conclusion that the "incompetent, avaricious, bloody-minded sexagenarian debauchee is himself" in Germanicus's interview with Piso, rather than Piso himself (202).

Some of these ironies result from the methods Graves/Claudius chooses to write the text. Just as he consciously decides not to relate "merely my own performance," which would "make very dull reading," but to include the more problematic "personal histories of Livia, Tiberius, Germanicus, Postumus, Castor, Livilla, and the rest, which are far from dull, I promise you" (117), the author provides a veritable catalogue of wonderful verbal ironies—including, probably, Claudius' own continual self-assessment of his prose style: "But this has been a very ill-judged digression. . ." (155) or "to return to the order of events. . ." (156). Tiberius greets the Trojans who bring him condolences on the death of his son with the reply, "And I condole with you, gentlemen, on the death of Hector" (223). There is massive irony, both verbal and otherwise, in the "sentences" passed under the Emperors, such as that inflicted on Asinius Gallus, "paying back irony with irony" for his ironical speeches of praise in the Senate (264-265) or the necessity of first "outraging" a virgin so she can be legally executed (271). The conversations with Caligula, once he has "become a god" are wildly ironic, as are the quotations from Homer, which save Claudius from Caligula's wrath (323-324). There are a number of ironic devices used in the narrative, such as the short, final sentence which contradicts an entire preceding incident: "It was not, as a matter of fact, suicide" (212) or "Tiberius did outlive Sejanus, as it happens, by a number of years" (222) or "His eldest son lived to cause me much distress" (228).

Readers of *I, Claudius* are presented, of course, with the fiction that the book they are holding was really written by Claudius; Graves

explains in his foreword that among other pains he took to further this illusion, "digressions" are "awkwardly placed" purposefully. For only one such example, consider: "I went back in time a few years to tell of my uncle Tiberius" (66). Claudius worries that his remarks on his style are "exciting rather than disarming suspicion" (2), but Claudius' attitude toward himself as a historian and as a stylist is frequently very ironic and self-deprecating. While he is pleased with Livy's remarks on his efforts at history and with his advice (48-49), Claudius frequently addresses himself in the mode of "you tedious old fellow" (36) or the reader "and before I forget it" (28) or even more self critically, "I have written more about Cato than I intended" (45) or even "Before I record more of this conversation, ... a few words about Pollio" (85).

Another undeniable source of irony in *I, Claudius* is the atmosphere of trickery and delusion which is a constant in Graves' picture of Rome and a constant context of dramatic irony. At times, the reader understands one character better than another, or understands what may happen as a result of an invitation to dinner at the palace better than some character may. At times, we must ask ourselves if Claudius is reliable, whether he is describing acts or motives, especially after he has explained pages or chapters later that Livia may have, for example, only pretended rage and jealousy. All the facts are in question until Claudius tells us what he discovers: is Germanicus' gangrene "natural" or caused by Livia's agents? For the reader with a knowledge of classical history there are even more sources of irony. As Alan Massie reminds us in the "Introduction" to the London Folio Society 1994 edition, "almost every death in the imperial family for forty years is attributed to [Livia]; there is no evidence that she was responsible for any of them" (xi). Similarly, "no reader should think this is a fair or credible portrait of [Tiberius] whom the great German historian Mommsen considered 'the most capable of the emperors'" (xi).

Graves once admitted to Tom Matthews that he had "no imagination." Martin Seymour-Smith concludes that Graves was "talking specifically about his own capacity for the conventional novel: the novel set in the writer's own time. What Graves meant was that he lacked the kind of inventiveness shown by an Anthony Powell, a Graham Greene, a Simenon." In fact, Graves and Riding once thought they could make money quickly by writing popular fiction that simply presented a bizarre or engaging situation and that as they wrote, "things would happen of themselves." As Seymour-Smith puts it, "This may be the way in which certain competent novelists happen to

work; but such novelists are interested in the outcome, whereas Graves and Riding weren't; the contemporary world was already rejected, godawful, historical, and 'all that.'"

Graves attempted to write such conventional novels—"damp squibs" that he never finished. But his most successful attempt at conventional narrative may, in fact, be his most successful novel finally, *Antigua, Penny, Puce*. Here "he was satirizing family history, family nastiness. . . some traits in the character of his brother John—who was predictably much hurt by it; 'the family' held it against him, and still do" (Seymour-Smith, 230).

The writing and production of *Antigua, Penny, Puce* was rapid: by late February 1935, one-third of the novel was finished (in a letter of 10 October 1934 to his brother John, he had called the novel "a silly story which may come to nothing"). During this period, Graves was very busy with visitors and with writing: the unpublished *Fool of Rome*; a screenplay of *I, Claudius*; collaborative projects such as Riding's *Poets*, volume 1 of *Epilogue*, and *Focus*, and Tom Matthews' novel *The Moon's No Fool* are only some of the projects undertaken by Graves. Yet by July of 1936 Constable announced that they would publish *Antigua*, and by August Graves was working on the proofs; by October he was celebrating the novel's publication. The book was begun in Mallorca, the proofs finished in England after the Spanish Civil War had driven Graves and Riding from the Mediterranean (*Years with Laura*, 223-255).

All this collaboration belied the competition that was going on in the Graves-Riding compound. Laura Riding, despite her contempt for the historical novel that she'd displayed in 1934, was busy writing *A Trojan Ending*. She claimed that she was not competing with Graves; rather, the Trojan War was the only period with a vitality which made it relevant (besides, Graves had given her the details for the background of the story) and Riding shared Graves' belief that Alexander Korda "having seen a film in *I, Claudius* would also see film potential in Laura's novel" (Seymour, 225). When it was published in 1937, *A Trojan Ending* excited little critical or public interest and no interest in the movie industry.

But *Antigua, Penny, Puce* has been quite the opposite: a long-term publishing success. The English edition (Seizin) appeared in October of 1936; a Canadian first impression, with corrected text, was also published in 1936, and the American edition followed in March of 1937, published by Random House. A second edition, in 1948 (some copies are dated 1947), was brought out by Penguin Books; this issue sold for

2s. and numbered 60,000 copies. Penguin brought out a third English edition in 1968, which was an identical reprint of the 1948 edition, and a 1984 reprint of the 1948 edition. Early on, in 1936, Paramount pictures had indicated an interest in filming the novel—such “interest” continues to this date. In fact, of all the Seizin Press books, only *Antigua, Penny, Puce* ever posted more than “negligible” sales.

Miranda Seymour concludes that Graves saw *Antigua, Penny, Puce* “as a pot-boiler,” that “he planned at first to publish the novel under a pseudonym.” She considers the novel to be very closely related to Graves’ own personal and private concerns at the time:

The central theme, the distinction between ownership and possession, was prompted by his own curious situation as the non-owning possessor of a considerable amount of property in Deyà. The character of Oliver Palfrey, a novelist who admiringly reads the works of Graves’ own pet hates, the Powys brothers and Mary Webb, was carefully distanced from himself: Oliver’s sister, Jane, while occasionally evocative of Rosaleen, was a light hearted portrait of Laura. (230)

The character of Jane is based very solidly on the character of Laura Riding, Seymour argues:

Who am I? was a favourite question of Riding. In his novel, Graves provided some imaginative answers. Jane has the protean abilities which he saw in Riding, changing herself effortlessly from an art-gallery owner into an exotic dancer, from an astrologist into a cigarette manufacturer. She excels at whatever she does. Jane also displays Riding’s manipulative skills; the other characters are effortlessly outwitted by her. As a matchmaker, a lover of elaborate clothes, player of games and teller of obscure jokes, Jane comes closer still to Laura. But Graves never criticizes her. It was more agreeable to see herself reflected in Jane than in Livia or Messalina; Riding willingly helped to revise the book and showed no hostility towards it. (230)

Seymour-Smith, using Graves’ diary now at the University of Victoria, indicates that Graves worked very hard at getting the details of *Antigua, Penny, Puce* exactly correct and that such hard labor indicates, “whatever he said,” Graves “did not regard it as only a potboil-

er." However, his entry of February 25, 1935 clearly states that he wrote the novel "during a money shortage as a means for extracting higher royalties from Harrison Smith for *C. the God*." That Laura Riding insisted on "going over every word" does not necessarily mean that Graves took the novel seriously; indeed, Riding edited even Graves' correspondence during this period (252).

*Antigua, Penny, Puce* is unique in Graves' canon. It is a novel nearly as popular—for well over half a century now—as the Claudius novels. It is the only Graves novel set in a contemporary English setting. The novel sheds light on Graves' attitudes toward his family, toward women—his own sister and Laura Riding in particular—and toward popular art and the processes by which it is created. (In this last facet, *Antigua, Penny, Puce* is at once beguilingly self-reflexive and self-contradictory.) Yet oddly, *Antigua, Penny, Puce* has received little critical attention, perhaps because the themes and plots of the novel seem too self-evident to invite analysis.

Miranda Seymour maintains that much of the brother-sister rivalry in *Antigua, Penny, Puce* derives directly from Graves' relationship with his sister Rosaleen:

Rosaleen's rhymes were better and she could compose music to go with them. At school, Rosaleen shone where Robert sometimes lagged; in word games, she could always match or defeat him. When Graves wrote the novel *Antigua, Penny, Puce* in 1936 and presented his portrait of a chuckle-headed brother in the web of a scheming, brilliant sister, he was drawing in part on the memory of his own resentful admiration for Rosaleen. He never doubted that a woman could outwit a man and that it was in her nature to do so. (Seymour, 17)

In fact, much of Jane's strategy is owed to the model of Rosaleen's *modus operandi*. When Robert wrote to her in confidence, for example, during his last term at Charterhouse saying that his friend Peter Johnstone claimed a master had attempted to seduce him, Rosaleen immediately told their father everything she had read (37).

Philip Larkin, in a 1983 letter to Richard Perceval Graves, wrote that *Antigua, Penny, Puce* was "unique among novels. . .for its variety of original invention, not to mention its humour" (quoted in *Robert Graves: The Years with Laura*, 237). This variety of invention makes for a novel rich in character, in plot, and in details. Even the most improba-

ble characters and twists of plot are made plausible, sometimes by the simple device of repetition: one minor character, Dormer, is responsible for at least three plot twists, and even the most incidental characters, such as a Mother Superior from Tuscany with stamps to auction, reappear with regularity.

Parallel plots put these characters into action. One plot-line, the legal-philatelic plot, follows James' legal attempts to gain possession of the most valuable stamp in the family collection, the Antigua one-penny, puce in color, the single survivor of an entire lot of stamps lost in a shipwreck. This plot line uses two auctions, court orders, trials, a "legal" theft, substitutions of identical collections to move itself forward. The resolution of this plot line hinges on a relatively obscure legal point, the very fine distinction between ownership and possession. Graves explains the difference with the analogy of an umbrella: a thief may possess your umbrella, but you have ownership; should a second thief steal the umbrella, "the new thief would have possession, the first thief would have a 'right to possession' against him, and you would have ownership." If the owner does not challenge the possessor for six years, no legal remedy is possible, but the owner may take back possession by non-legal remedies. One can easily imagine how complex a legal plot might be created by a stamp given to a child twenty years before by another child, who may or may not have taken it without permission and who now is, at any rate, married to the grown-up child to whom she gave it—and whose sister is contesting his ownership.

Interwoven with the legal-philatelic plot are two romantic plot lines: Oliver is in love with Edith Whitebillet, who is Jane's business partner. Jane eventually falls in love with "the Emu," the distant Australian relative who helps her attempt to thwart Oliver. The Emu is revealed to be a great deal more intelligent than he seems at first—and is therefore worthy of the superior Jane—when he solves a very Gravesian riddle, involving the reconstruction of a broadsheet song which accompanied the letter and Antigua stamp. Using recovered local history and folklore to narrow down the search, the Emu discovers the Oxford Christian Science practitioner who is the legatee of the shipwrecked sailor who put the single surviving Antigua one-penny stamp on a letter to his brother. When she deeds her rights to the stamp to Jane, several plot lines are nicely resolved (and the rules of Mrs. Eddy make for several auxiliary jokes).

Still another plot line follows Jane's success as a businesswoman and

theater manager, a story sufficiently complicated by the romance between her brother and partner. Jane's early success with *Havana Resurrections*, the proceeds of which finance the Burlington Theatre, allow Graves to tell one of his funniest and most fantastic stories: Havana Resurrections are cigarettes are made from the recycled butts stubbed out in theater lobbies all over Britain. "But why leave the stubs to charwomen's husbands? There's a fortune in them." The legal and scientific aspects of the recycled cigarette business are taken over by Edith, who reports on the idea in a long letter, and Graves reports on the economics of production and sale with several long tables of figures. Packaging seems to have been the trick:

Resurrections were quite a good smoke if you did not know what they really were. . . The cellophane was a great recommendation, too: any product wrapped in cellophane looks completely hygienic, however unsanitary the conditions under which it was manufactured, however dirty the fingers that did the wrapping. (91)

The arch tone of the novel is easily illustrated, along with the shameless manipulation of minor characters, by a paragraph that dispatches Dormer, the gallery guard who had helped Jane find a second stamp album identical to Oliver's, and Adelaide, an early love interest of the Emu:

Harold Dormer flew halfway round the world, beating several records, but then crashed; so Adelaide had to go halfway round the world to nurse and marry him. The reason for her switching from The Emu to him was that, being a sensible girl, she soon realized that her ambition of becoming his marchioness was sordid—because impossible. And when Harold took up flying he became interesting. After he recovered from his accident the Emu gave him a bigger, faster and more dangerous plane still, as a wedding present. Harold and Adelaide stepped into it one day for a non-stop flight from San Francisco to Tierra del Fuego. They got killed, somewhere in the Andes, but they were together, and in love, and going at two hundred and fifty at the time, so the general effect was gay rather than gloomy. All this happened a good deal later, however. (244-245)

Notice the very "Claudian" technique of that final sentence, with its

narrative self-consciousness. In fact, characters in *Antigua, Penny, Puce* marry or postpone marriage for the thinnest of reasons. Jane and The Emu seem almost to marry for business reasons. Oliver is interested in Edith because her twin is otherwise occupied. He postpones his marriage when Jane sees that he is studying the genetics of twins and she creates a fiction to convince him that Edna is the infertile one of a pair of identical twins.

The narrative devices, and even the tone, of *Antigua, Penny, Puce* are distinctly old-fashioned. The tone is the arch, omniscient tone of the mystery novel; the narrator withholds or doles out information at odd moments: "Let us deal openly with the reader" (136). The novel is full of asides and addresses to the reader, with the narrator self-consciously drawing out meanings, inferences, and connections for the reader. For example, after what is actually a very entertaining segment on Oliver's public school, the narrator includes this long address:

We apologize for having written at such length about fas and nefas at Charchester; but their formative influence on Oliver's character cannot be over-emphasized. And about bloods; but if Oliver had somehow managed to get his First Eleven cap it would have made a vast difference to his subsequent outlook on life, and this story would have taken, we think, an altogether calmer and happier course. (57)

There are epistolary chapters in *Antigua, Penny, Puce*, and whole chapters, twenty-five pages at a stretch, of transcripts of court proceedings. "It was all reported in the press. We shall give, in a minute, a sequence of three extracts from three different newspapers" (174). The narrative voice frequently "runs ahead," anticipating the next chapter and, just as frequently, generalizes about subjects such as psychiatry, sex roles, the collapsing Empire and dozens of other only vaguely-related topics.

But for all its ironic humor, *Antigua, Penny, Puce*, like the Claudius novels, seems a strangely cold bloodless world; indeed consider the comic balance of the resolution. Jane loses the theatre, but wins the stamp and marries The Emu, "her rich, handsome, intelligent and sympathetic cousin," and makes a killing in the movies. Oliver fails at theatre:

He had no sense of what the theatre-going public wanted, he tried

to bully his actors and actresses, he did not spend enough money on advertising, he staged his own plays [earlier in the novel the reader learns that Oliver is a dreadful playwright as well]. The longest run he ever had for a play was a fortnight, and the profession, being notoriously superstitious, concluded that there was a hoodoo on the theatre and boycotted it. (302)

When Edith's health fails and Oliver sells the Burlington theatre, Jane takes it over and turns it into "a glamorous picture house." When Edith fatally injures herself in an electrical experiment and Edna divorces her husband, Oliver marries his dead wife's twin. "The same unaccountable chemistry of the heart," says Jane.

Thus, in the 1930's Robert Graves had discovered ways to wield both a very consciously artful and ironic, old-fashioned third person narrative and a narrative with a very modern reliance on intellectual puzzle-solving, irony, unreliable narrators, and very complex narrative devices and situations. With *Count Belisarius* (1938), the Sergeant Lamb novels (1940 and 1941), *Wife to Mr. Milton* (1943), and *Hercules, My Shipmate* (1944) Graves used the more straightforward narrative technique. But with what was to be his last really popular venture into the historical novel, *King Jesus* (1946), Graves discovered the subjects that dominated his prose until the mid-1950's and that dominated his poetic themes until the end of his career. In *King Jesus*, Graves returned to the "puzzle-solving" narrative.

Graves uses here, as he did in the Claudius novels, the analeptic method, "the intuitive recovery of forgotten events by a deliberate suspension of time." As he indicates in his "Historical Commentary" to *King Jesus*, for this novel he achieved analepsis just as he did in the Claudius novels, by "impersonating the supposed author." In *King Jesus* he chose Agabus the Decapolitan, an aged scholar who narrates the events of Jesus' life in a learned and scholarly tone, skeptical on some points, but proud of his insider's knowledge of secret doctrines (which Agabus obtained by interviewing an Ebionite bishop).

In *Robert Graves and the White Goddess*, R. P. Graves says that "the story told by Graves/ Agabus, though initially weighed down, like *The Golden Fleece*, by too much detailed learning, develops into an enthralling reinterpretation of both the Jewish and the Christian tradition" (*White Goddess*, 77). It is this reinterpretation (again similar to that in the Claudius novels), I believe, that keeps the reader turning the pages; certainly there is little character development—Jesus has to

say the familiar sayings—and there is no suspense—we know the story—and curiously, even the Crucifixion and its aftermath seem anticlimactic and of little interest to Graves. But each page has an intellectual interest of its own: Graves reinterprets virtually every detail of the Gospels' accounts of the life of Jesus.

In *King Jesus*, there is one sin of which Jesus becomes finally conscious: in what later of course became a typical Gravesian context for any discussion of religion, this conflict is framed as a paternal/maternal struggle: for Graves, Jehovah had been legitimized once only because he was a son of a Great Goddess. In ancient Israel descent for Gods, Kings, and men was once matrilineal. Once Jehovah had formed a trinity with two incarnations of the Goddess, Anatha of the Lions and Ashima of the Doves (called Aholah and Aholibah in Ezekiel 23), and a third aspect of the Great Goddess, Sheol, ruled the underworld. At some later point, Jehovah divorced "his two partner-Goddesses," and "since then, although remnants of Goddess-worship had survived here and there, the Jews had been sadly obsessed with 'celestial patriarchy'" (R. P. Graves, 77; summarizes *King Jesus*, 8-9, 51).

As King of the Jews, Jesus refuses to consummate his marriage to his Queen, Mary of Cleopas. By refusing the Female, he believes that he defeats death, preparing for the thousand year reign of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. But of course, rejection of the Goddess is error. The crucifixion, as was the coronation, is ironically a rite of the Goddess's priest-kings, and indeed the ritual death on the cross is presided over by Miriam (Mother), Mary of Cleopas (Lover) and Mary the Hairdresser/Mary Magdalen (Witch, Layer-Out) and disciple of the old goddess-religions (R. P. Graves, 78). It is the latter who pointedly tells Jesus that during his fasting and visions in preparation for the coronation and investiture as King, he may have conquered three of the symbolic beasts, the lion of anger, the goat of lust, and the seraph of fear, but the Fourth Beast, the Beast of the southern quarter of the circle in which he sat on Horeb, was the Bull of Haste [and a beast which Jesus could not distinguish from himself]. "His fault was this: that he tried to force the hour of doom by declaring war upon the Female. But the Female abides and cannot be hastened" (*King Jesus*, 408-9).

Jesus is a true follower of this masculine Jehovah, and he dedicates himself to the eradication of the feminine remnants of the older religion. Indeed, in a long dialogue in Chapter 19 of *King Jesus*, Mary the Hairdresser, a sort of witch priestess, and Jesus debate the history of

the Jewish religion in a sequence of dual interpretations of familiar scenes from the Old Testament books, in a process Graves calls iconotropy, the central device of reinterpretation in *King Jesus*.

In iconotropy, the icons are not defaced or altered, but merely interpreted in a sense hostile to the original cult. . . The unpleasant story of the seduction of Lot by his two daughters, which reflects Israelite hostility to Moab and Ammon—tribes reputedly born of these incestuous unions—becomes harmless when restored to its original iconic form: it is the well-known scene in which Isis and Nephthys mourn at the bier of the ithyphallic recumbent Isis, in an arbor festooned with grapes, each with a son crouched at her feet. (“Historical Commentary,” *King Jesus*, 423)

Thus, through this long debate, Mary the Hairdresser interprets these scenes as original icons of the Goddess religion; Jesus interprets them as icons of the religion of the male Jehovah. “I am released from the jurisdiction of the Female; I have come to destroy her works,” (*King Jesus*, 256) Jesus says to this priestess.

It is important to remember that Graves wrote the first version of *The White Goddess* in a rush of only a few weeks, but during the much longer period in which he added to *The White Goddess* and elaborated his argument, he wrote the first draft of *King Jesus*. In fact, early in December 1943 Lynette Roberts had sent Graves Reverend Edward Davies’ *Celtic Researches*, from which Graves took “the key (the relations of bardic letters to months and seasons. . .) to Celtic religion: a Key which unlocks a succession of doors in Roman and Greek religion and (because the Jewish religion was a Semite one grafted on a Celtic stock), also unlocks the most obstinate door of all—the story of the Nativity and Crucifixion” (O’Prey, 320). Graves first used this key in *King Jesus*, probably not in *The White Goddess*.

In *King Jesus*, Graves thus had a puzzle to solve, a reinterpretation to present to the reader. So, in what was to be the last of his novels to actually record “best-seller” sales, Graves went back to the techniques that had served him well in the Claudius novels—indeed, one can hardly conceive a traditional, if ironic, third person narrative reinterpreting the story of Jesus’ life while narrating it to readers who already know the events and most of the dialogue. The result would, in all likelihood, have been a tone so hectoring as to be unbearable. And, one might even speculate that, had the ironic answer to the puz-

zle in *King Jesus* been more dramatically related to the action—less purely an intellectual puzzle—*King Jesus* might have been, like *I, Claudius* in the 30's, the historical novel of the 1940's.

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