

Sunday nights will be empty without 'I, Claudius'

By Pete Mason
Entertainment Editor

Every once in a while, in between the *Gong Shows* and the *Hee Haws* of televisions still arid wasteland, comes a breath of fresh air or a cool drink in the form of a truly fine program.

Eleven weeks ago Public Broadcasting introduced *I, Claudius*, a *Masterpiece Theater* presentation. It seems hard to believe that *Masterpiece Theater* has yet to come up with a clunker. From *Upstairs*,

fessional poisoner compare notes and offer tips about the best ways to poison enemies undetected. The conversation is so matter-of-fact it borders on the hilarious.

Brian Blessed, as Augustus, handles the role with aplomb. Bellowing like an enraged bull or sulking like a child, Blessed makes a very likable emperor.

That can not be said for John Hurt who plays Caligula. Caligula is the emperor you love to hate. Hurt's Caligula is a mad child who never grew up. As a youth he proclaims that one day he will become a god. He makes good on his promise and in Hurt's final scene, as he falls under the knives of his murderers, his astonishment that a god can be killed is so convincing, it's worth the cost of a 24-inch color TV.

But the piece de resistance of this epic

is the portrayal of Claudius by Derek Jacobi. Claudius was a stutterer with a limp. Had he been born to anyone but a royal family, he would probably have been left on a high rock to die when he was an infant.

As a member of royalty, he lived, or rather he survived. Thought to be simple-minded by everyone in the household save a few close friends, Claudius escaped the scrutiny of plotters and was able to observe their furtive goings-on. The entire production is seen through the eyes of Claudius who has the names and deeds of every palace villain stored safely away in his keen mind.

Jacobi is Claudius. He stutters and stammers his way to a certain Emmy Award although he deserves better. Jacobi has

created a character both comic and tragic, a man who because of his affliction must call on his brain constantly just to see the next sunrise. His performance may well be one of the finest in the past ten years on television, either public or private.

I, Claudius is nearly over. Already most of the characters are dead and buried. I mourn them almost as if they were friends. Sunday nights will seem dull when this series finishes its run and although there will undoubtedly be reruns it won't be the same.

We can only hope that *Masterpiece Theater* surprises us once again. I can't imagine anything better than *I, Claudius* and I'm sure I will suffer a withdrawal. And *Gong Shows* and *Hee Haws* will only make the symptoms harder to bear.

television review

Downstairs, through the adventures of Lord Peter Wimsey to *Poldark*, *Masterpiece Theater* has produced masterpiece television.

I, Claudius must rank among the best. The sets are sumptuous and historically accurate and the acting is first-rate.

The 13 episodes, which are adapted from Robert Graves' best-selling novel, are anything but dry lessons from a text on Roman history. Each episode could stand alone as an example of fine drama. It seems the citizens of Imperial Rome were anything but dry or boring.

The rpgream follows the reigns of Roman emperors from Augustus to Claudius amidst bloodletting and intrigue that would make Atilla the Hun blush.

The chief bloodletter is Livia, wife of Augustus, portrayed by Sian Phillips. To ensure that her eldest son, Tiberius, succeeds Augustus as emperor, she poisons more unsuspecting people than Lucretia Borgia, including a younger son, and finally, Augustus himself.

In one wonderful scene, Livia and a pro-

UNL students trudging to class in sub-zero-degree weather probably will agree that this is history's coldest winter, but relief is in sight. That is, eventually.

Temperatures in Nebraska will begin to rise gradually to their norm by April or May, but the warming won't be as rapid as it was last year, according to a UNL meteorologist, in the geography department.

Arthur Douglas and two UNL students have been predicting the long-range weather scene since last spring. The three, who call themselves NORAX, are 60 to 80 percent accurate in their projections, Douglas said.

NORAX makes weather predictions and contracts it services to various organizations, Douglas said. Money taken in is used to pay for data storage and research, he said.

Douglas described NORAX's technique: "From Pacific Ocean water temperature data, a contrast zone is found. Water north of this zone is colder by a degree or less from the water south of the zone.

"Water temperature in the ocean is very stable, and moves very slowly, so it is possible to locate the contrast zone in advance, and thereby know where the jet stream will enter, and where it will go once it is over land.

The stream is totally predictable as to how far north and south it will travel. Last winter-which was very cold-the contrast zone was in Alaska. Having gone that far north, the stream had to come back a long way south at a rather sharp angle. Since temperatures at locations north of the stream are generally below normal, and vice-versa . . . this caused drastic cold in the East, and temperatures in Florida to be far below normal."

NORAX makes no short-term predictions, and can only predict the weather for one season at a time.

"The water temperature at a given location is only stable for about a six-month period," Douglas explained.

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