Caligula: A Study in Roman Imperial Insanity by Ludwig Quidde (1894)

Abstract

In 1894, the historian, politician, and peace activist Ludwig Quidde (1858–1941) published a pamphlet entitled *Caligula: A Study in Roman Imperial Insanity*. It was ostensibly a study of the Roman emperor Caligula and the dire consequences of his psychological imbalances on the Roman Empire. Contemporary readers, however, would have recognized the real subject of Quidde's study – Kaiser Wilhelm II. His "historical" account of an erratic emperor whose reign was marked by decline and decadence constitutes a thinly veiled critique of political life in Wilhelmine Germany.

Quidde narrowly escaped conviction for *lèse majesté* by denying the charges and thereby forcing the prosecution into the awkward position of insisting upon the similarities between Caligula and Wilhelm II. The incident nonetheless effectively ended his scholarly career. (Professors in Germany, it is important to note, were all members of the German civil service and, as such, government employees.)

Source

Gaius Caesar, known by his epithet Caligula ("Bootikin"), was still very young, not yet matured into manhood, when he was unexpectedly called to rule. Murky and eerie were the events surrounding his accession, wondrous were the previous fortunes of his house. His father [Germanicus] had succumbed to a treacherous fate far from home in the prime of his life, and among the people there was much talk about the mysterious circumstances of his death; people did not shrink from the most terrible accusations, and suspicion reached even those close to the old emperor [Tiberius].[1] The people had lost a beloved figure in him; he had enjoyed a popularity like no other member of the imperial house.[2] He was familiar to the soldier from the many campaigns in which he had shared the hardships of war with the common man; the German land, the regions along the Rhine, resounded with his name. But it was not only as a war hero that he had appeared to the people; he had been popular in the best meaning of the word. His family life, his band of children,[3] his simple bourgeois nature,[4] his friendliness and equanimity in all situations, and the winning witticisms on his lips[5] had won him the affection of citizens and soldiers alike. Of course, as long as the old emperor was alive, he [Germanicus] was, regardless of the high offices that were bestowed on him, condemned to inactivity when it came to the most important questions of domestic politics, regardless of his creative power and desire. But if he had come to power, one would have had reason to expect freer, happier days from him, and the removal of the stifling pressure that weighed on the empire. Thus, the hopes of an entire generation had been buried along with Germanicus.

From this favorite of the people a glimmer of popularity also radiated upon his son,[6] who otherwise, need it be said, grew up very unlike his father, perhaps resembling more closely his proud and passionate mother [Agrippina the Elder],[7] who, undoubtedly, often made her husband's already difficult position even more so. At the same time, he was favored by the old emperor, who pursued Germanicus' wife and children with hatred and suspicion, but who seems to have harbored a certain affection for Gaius, perhaps only because he saw in him the exact opposite of the father he so disliked.

Having assumed the reins of government, the young emperor [Gaius Caesar (Caligula)] was initially for everyone an unknown, still mysterious figure. To be sure, all kinds of speculations had been circulating about him during the previous years, both favorable and unfavorable; some, we may assume,

appreciated the fact that, in order to hold his own under such difficult circumstances, he had to be made of some very tough stuff; some may have feared his willfulness, the penchant for abusing such great power, the influence of his own immature ideas, and many tales could be told about a brutality that had emerged early on; above all, however, what predominated was surely the notion that, in his young years, he would be easily receptive to outside influences; there was reason to believe that the authority of the all-powerful Prefect of the Guard would initially grow even greater; after all, the young emperor, as all the world claimed, was beholden to him to a very special degree![8]

Of all the things one had reason to fear and expect, what actually happened was well nigh the opposite. The leading statesman [Naevius Sutorius Macro] seems to have fallen into disfavor very soon, his influence receded completely, and the emperor himself took the reins of government into his hands and straightaway began his own regime. The people cheered him;[9] for when power changed hands a kind of liberation coursed through all circles, an era of reforms seemed to commence, and to open for itself a path for liberal ideas.[10]

These are the promising beginnings of Caligula, who, as the son of Germanicus – sacrificed too soon – and Agrippina, succeeded his great-uncle Tiberius in the year 37 A.D., and who then amazed the world with his behavior.

It has already been mentioned that Macro, who, by the end of Tiberius' reign had risen to an all-powerful minister and commander of the praetorians, and by whose hand Caligula had in fact risen to the throne, seems to have been pushed aside very quickly. This emancipation of the young emperor appeared at the same time to amount to a change in the principles of government.[11] Old demands by the liberal elements were fulfilled. Above all, political life was once again allowed greater freedom. Caligula seemed to be serious about observing certain constitutional forms that had decayed under Tiberius; when it came to determining the budget and military spending, he seemed to accord public opinion greater influence;[12] the free voting rights of the popular comitia seemed to revive once again;[13] steps were taken against the mischief of the informers, which is more or less comparable to the system of agent provocateurs of our day,[14] thereby liberating public and private life from one of its worst evils; the writings of Labienus, Cremutius Cordus, and Cassius Severus, which had been considered subversive and thus prohibited, were republished;[15] political prisoners were granted an amnesty, trials for *lese-majesté* were struck down, and laws stipulating serious punishment for this crime were repealed.[16] Moreover, oppressive taxes, which burdened the small exchanges of the broad masses in particular, were remitted and relief was introduced in favor of the poorest classes when it came to the grain dole – to say nothing of the games that Caligula gave a boost, following the old formula "panem et circenses" ["Bread and Circuses"]. And so, along with the greater freedom, there seemed to dawn an era of social reforms, or at least a popular approach to economic questions.

But already in these early days of Caligula – as he was being enveloped by the cheers of a people easily roused in offering their acclamation – cautious observers would have nursed worrisome thoughts.

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It was the intoxicating feeling of power, the awareness of suddenly occupying the highest position, the desire to bring about something great, and above all the urge to stand out in world history that temporarily lifted Caligula above himself. He was seized, in this extraordinary transformation of his life, by the desire to stand out through something that was essentially foreign to him, through liberalism and the cultivation of the common good. At the same time, however, troubling qualities quickly appeared. What was lacking was the solid foundation of a balanced view of life gained through inner struggles; the primary driving force behind his actions was not the desire to do good, but the ambition to be admired as the promoter of popular endeavors, and to enter into posterity as a great man;[17] the character trait pervading all his measures was a nervous haste that hurried incessantly from one task to the next,[18] in

an abrupt and often contradictory fashion, to which was added an exceedingly dangerous urge to do everything himself.

The elimination of Macro, of which I have already spoken, should be judged essentially from this perspective. To be sure, it would appear that the relationship between the two men was not severed completely or at least not permanently, for Macro had an opportunity to offer the young emperor advice, to recommend to him moderation and circumspection.[19] Yet he fared badly in his role as cautioner; he merely aroused the utmost wrath of the emperor, who then turned on him and his family in a bloody rage.[20] His ungrateful treatment of Macro is especially singled out among the factors that shook Caligula's popularity.

It soon became apparent that the cause behind the removal of the man who would have initially been destined to guide the affairs of the state was not a clash of two personalities, shall we say, but Caligula's very nature. We hear nothing of high-ranking men who had any real influence under him. The emperor could not tolerate any independent power alongside himself; he wanted to be his own minister, and that was not all: he also wanted to intervene independently in every sphere. But his fundamentally limited nature, even before it degenerated further, lacked the knowledge and talent, the composure and self-discipline for him to do that.

Soon, something much more terrible came to the fore.

His ruthless willfulness,[21] the startling ideas of reform, the sudden and cruel measures taken against men who had risen high may still have unleashed cheers from the masses, who saw in this the expression of the personality of a strong ruler, but more insightful observers already saw the terrible specter lurking behind it: madness.

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We have grown accustomed to speaking of Ceasarean madness as a special form of mental illness, and the reader may remember the thrilling scene in Gustav Freytag's *The Lost Manuscript*, in which the unworldly professor, all unawares, spells out to the insane prince the image of his illness on the basis of Tacitus. The traits of the illness: megalomania heightened to the point of self-deification, disregard for all legal boundaries and for all the rights of other individuals, brutal cruelty without goal or meaning – all this is also found in other mentally ill persons. The difference lies merely in the fact that the position of ruler offers an especially fertile ground for the seeds of such predispositions and allows them an unhindered growth that is otherwise hardly possible, and which, at the same time, can translate into cruel deeds on a scale that is otherwise completely unimaginable.

This specific Ceasarean madness is the product of circumstances that can flourish only in the moral degeneration of monarchically-minded nations, or of the more elevated classes who constitute the ruler's immediate environment. The impression of seemingly unlimited power causes the monarch to forget all the boundaries of the legal order; the theoretical justification of this power as derived from divine law fatefully distorts the ideas of the poor man who truly believes this; the forms of courtly etiquette – and even more so what goes beyond this etiquette, namely the submissive adoration of all those who crowd up to the emperor – completely instill in him the notion that he is a being elevated above all humans by nature itself; at the same time, what he can observe in his environment gives rise to the view that those who surround him are a despicable, common lot. If we add to this that not only is the courtly environment corrupted, but the mass of the people as well, that the ruler, whatever he undertakes, encounters no manful, open resistance, that the opposition, if it ever ventures to stand up, at the very least fearfully upholds the appearance that it does not wish to fight the person of the ruler and his views, and if even the corrupted spirit that has invented the crime of *lese-majésté* and sees in the refusal to show reverence a punishable insult to the ruler has entered into the laws and administration of

justice – it would be truly astonishing if a king who is absolute in this way were to remain of sound mind.

Thus, the preconditions for the development of Caesarean madness were abundantly present in Roman political life, which was already so rotten. Gaius was considerably burdened on both sides to begin with (let us recall Julia, her son Gaius, and the last years of his great-uncle Tiberius); moreover, the circumstance that he had attained power at such a young age had to make all the seeds that were present sprout luxuriously, since the stark disparity between external position and internal entitlement was like poison to his youthful spirit, which had always tended toward excesses of every kind.

Still, Caligula fell into real madness only after a serious illness from which he recovered to his and the nation's misfortune. But one may say that this illness in all likelihood merely accelerated the development, since clear tendencies were already present beforehand, and the unfavorable external factors that invariably promoted them were inseparable from his imperial position in Rome at that time.

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The picture of Caesarean madness that Caligula presents to us is perfectly typical. Nearly all manifestations that we otherwise encounter in various rulers are united in him, and if we combine the seemingly healthy beginnings with the dreadfully rapid intensification into the utmost excesses, we also gain a picture of the development of the illness.

One manifestation, which need not be pathological in and of itself, but within which (if one looks at it in conjunction with other symptoms) the megalomania of Caligula announced itself early on, is the excessive passion for luxury and wastefulness – a character trait of nearly all princes who lose a healthy judgment regarding the limitations of their own position, from Oriental despots to certain wearers of the tiara, to the two Louis of France and their German imitators, a line that for now has found its last famous representative in the unfortunate king of Bavaria. After a short time, not only had the very considerable treasure left behind by the frugal old emperor been used up,[22] but it was also necessary to resort to very alarming measures to increase revenues and cover debts.[23] The taxes that had just recently been repealed were reintroduced, new ones, some very oppressive or disgraceful in nature, were added; the judicial system was abused to supply the treasury with fines and confiscated property; finally, the principle was proclaimed that the wealth of the subjects was at the disposal of the prince.[24]

Of course, in Caligula the mania for luxury and wastefulness operated in the most diverse areas: at feasts and meals,[25] in gifts, in dress and living arrangements, and in all other things that were part of life, especially also in the furnishings of his palaces and villas and in the imperial yachts equipped and furnished with senseless luxury,[26][5a] but most strikingly in gigantic buildings and construction projects.[27] This, too, is a trait peculiar to the inflated ideas of the ruler – one should think only of the examples just touched upon; incidentally, it is easy enough to understand this trait if one bears in mind the Caesars' craving for fame and the desire to stand out in the eyes of posterity.

The extravagance of Caligula's projects and the brevity of his reign meant that a number of his buildings were left unfinished. On the Palatine in Rome they still show the beginnings of "Caligula's Bridge," which was supposed to span the Forum, linking the imperial palace with the Capitol, the city's sacred temple.[28] He launched great aqueducts and circus buildings at the same time, and plans for constructing a canal through the isthmus of Corinth, which had been frequently discussed up to that point, were to be carried out at once.[29] This passion for building was combined with a striking mania for destruction. Buildings worthy of preservation were torn down or remodeled for trivial reasons.[30] But most of what was newly built carried the stamp of the bizarre. The more impossible and pointless a task appeared, the more it attracted him.[31] In the Bay of Naples, remnants of a Roman harbor causeway are still called *ponte di Caligula* in memory of the fantastic bridge he constructed there in order to carry out some crazy idea.

Caligula had an extremely long pontoon bridge built across the Bay of Baiae and then had a veritable country road with inns and drinking water pipes constructed upon it. Dressed in the supposed armor of Alexander the Great, he led his troops across the bridge to Baiae and assaulted the peaceful city with his soldiers in order to conquer it. The next day he held a great triumphal procession on the bridge, with enormous ornamentation, make-believe booty and fake prisoners; in the end he himself celebrated, in a pompous speech and glittering festivities, the glorious campaign, the overcoming of so many hardships, as he said, and the harnessing of the ocean.[32]

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An insane craving for ostentation and extravagance emerges quite starkly in this famous enterprise, but at the same time also a different, quite characteristic direction that the pathological megalomania of the princes and their need for ostentation tends to take: the lust for military triumph.

It is here, in particular, that the ridiculous and the cruel lie cheek to cheek. On the one hand, the penchant for ostentatious and famous actions and for warlike pomp can lead to the most gruesome consequences – to true butchery of nations; on the other hand, if appearance takes the place of terrible reality, then it easily turns into something comical and childish.

This latter aspect of the matter stands out with particular starkness in Caligula. The conditions of the times were not suited to conducting wars and winning warlike triumphs. The borders were calm; the Romans had refrained from a further expansion of the Empire. Caligula's genuinely Caesarean, pathological craving to also shine in the military field was thus directed at staged maneuvers and theatrical make-believe. He did a lot of other things in the style of that triumphal procession across the Bay of Baiae; I shall single out only two especially telling examples.

Caligula suddenly decided to join the army along the Rhine. Everything had to be set in motion in a hurry.[33] Having arrived at the army, he initially distinguished himself through a rather unusual disciplinary harshness also directed against officers;[34] the hapless commanders who did not arrive quickly enough at the assembly field for this sudden mobilization were made to feel his wrath especially. At the same time, while he did not wish to be reminded of his own youth,[35] he seemed intent on making the army younger; he decreed that many older centurions be discharged, on the grounds that they were too old or feeble. He took steps against others on account of financial abuses in the administration. While the sharp tightening of discipline may have impressed some as a special kind of boldness, it caused a good deal of discontent at the same time, as we learn from the accounts of Suetonius, and many measures must have struck unbiased observers as ridiculous posturing, especially when they saw what came next.

The emperor had a maneuver carried out across the Rhine. Germanic soldiers from his personal guard and the sons of princes who were present as hostages had to dress up as Germanic warriors and take up position not far from the Rhine; all this was reported by scouts while the emperor was sitting at his table. A glorious victory was then won over this "sham" enemy, who let themselves be taken captive; the dressed-up guard soldiers and the poor Germanic boys paraded as prisoners.[36]

It was here already that this play-acted soldiering and campaigning degenerated into a farce laughed at by the whole world.

Almost more grotesque still was the campaign against Britannia, during which Caligula eventually had his soldiers collect sea-shells on the beach. This booty of the sea was supposed to be some kind of war trophy.[37]

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For the second time, the fantastic idea of a conquest of the world's oceans returned. The young emperor seems to have had an exceptional fondness for the sea, appealing in and of itself, but once again distorted into something pathological. I have already mentioned the especially ostentatious furnishings of his yachts. We are repeatedly told that he undertook shorter and longer sea voyages, and it seems that he also went to sea in the beauty of the storm. This passion must have been quite inconvenient for his entourage; for he seems to have ruthlessly demanded that all share his predilections, and for poor Silenus, who once remained behind in stormy weather, his fear of seasickness proved his undoing, since Caligula, at that time already in a bloody rage from blind mistrust, suspected other motives behind this action.[38]

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Caligula's play-acted campaigning and soldiering, which we have come to know, his whims about discipline, and the triumphal processions obviously contain a comical element, which is characteristic of the pathological picture of Caesarean madness. In the case of Caligula, it was not limited to military comedies. We are told of his immense passion for theater and the circus – and even more: we are told how he sometimes began to act along himself, how he was dominated by a strange fondness for conspicuous clothes and for constantly changing them,[39] how this playful dress-up degenerated to the point where he liked to see himself in the masks of the various divinities (gods and goddesses!)[40] – a trait we shall return to in a different context – how he also had his own acting talents admired, for example, rousing senators from their beds at night merely to perform for them;[41] we are told that he appeared in public as a circus fighter, as Nero did later,[42] and even as a gladiator,[43] as Commodus did later, that is, in a role that, at that time, drew the curse of social ostracism upon the unfortunate man who filled it.

There are probably two things that enter into this comical trait of Caesarean madness: first, a pathological-imaginative tendency – the arrested penchant of the child, as it were – to fuse images of fantasy with the real world, a tendency that is preserved best under conditions where, instead of simple naturalness, so much weird comic play-acting, so many fictions are dominant, as is the case at an imperial court; second, the need to shine everywhere and in all spheres, a need that is also pathologically nourished by the peculiar position of the absolute ruler.

Therefore, among rulers in whom there was no real mental illness, we so frequently encounter personalities who constantly made miserable fools of themselves in certain areas – in part because their position contains the compulsion and urge to stand out in all things, in part because the environment preserves their belief that they are accomplishing something brilliant and immensely impressive, even where the kindest, honest judges would shake their heads with apprehension.

One particular area in which Caligula strove to stand out was eloquence; he liked to speak a lot and publicly, and we are told that he did have a certain talent for it,[44] that he, especially, possessed the art of hurting and insulting others. He had a special penchant for taking on the eminent authorities of literature. It is said that many a caustic word against them did not come off badly at all. Yet his uninformed fanaticism went so far that he wanted to ban classic authors like Homer, Virgil, and Livy from all libraries.[45]

For all that, it seems that he sometimes liked to use quotes from the hated authors in epigrammatically pointed words to describe his own position. Thus he once barked at his guests the famous verses from Homer: "Let there be one ruler, and one king!"[46] Most famous is his favorite quote[47] from a tragedian, "Oderint dum metuant," that is, let them hate me as long as they fear me – no doubt the most pointed expression of his Caesarean conception of the relationship between the ruler and his people.

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The pleasure in ruthless violence – expressed in the frequent use of this saying as the highest leitmotif, as it were, of his practice of government – dominated his position on all relationships within public life.

Leaving aside positive acts of cruelty for now, it is typical, after all, for these Caesars to almost make it their exclusive prerogative to let everyone feel their power, as with Caligula; nothing enrages them more than the feeling that they are encountering limits to that power, and they regard the spread of fear and terror as the most effective means for nipping all resistance by their subjects in the bud. Like Caligula, they tend to utter the boastful words – in countless variations – that everyone shall be made to feel their power. This is often repeated in Roman imperial history, and there are also plenty of examples outside of it. Even such brilliant Caesarean types like Napoleon were not exempt from it. Happy is the nation in which such rulers are compelled, by the force of external circumstances, to content themselves with mere threats, and are not – like Caligula – able to put them into action.

At first, the ruler's aspiration to make his own power palpable affects not so much the broad masses of the people as the higher social classes, noble families, and high officials. The initial, weak beginnings are all kinds of acts of inconsiderateness[48] – and yet only weak beginnings, for with cynical delight such rulers soon seek to quash everything that can claim independent importance next to them. In Caligula, too, we can observe how he persecuted every distinction and especially every merit with his hatred,[49] how he systematically sought to undercut every good reputation through disdain and mockery, how he strove to humiliate men of high position, forcing them to appear as gladiators[50] (whereby his delight at the shedding of blood naturally came into play as well), having them run behind his wagon, or serve at his table,[51] or offering his foot for them to kiss[52] – the kissing of the hand was undoubtedly no longer regarded as a humiliation, but rather as an honor! He studiously mocked the ancient traditions of noble families[53] and drew on people from the lowest classes to make up his entourage. It was said that coachmen, gladiators, actors, and all manner of traveling folk were his everyday company,[54] while appointed men were pushed aside (another trait one encounters often enough in the history of pathological rulers).

In official political life, Caligula surely behaved similarly with respect to the civil administration and the military.

On this issue, in particular, it is especially regrettable that the account of Tacitus that has come down to us breaks off with Caligula's assumption of power. He would have surely recounted, with inimitable skill, what kind of harmful effect this character trait had on the entire administration of the state. Almost everything left to us by lesser writers merely conveys the external characteristics of madness: how, in the end, Caligula allegedly intended to bestow the consulship on a horse.[55] The stages that led to this pinnacle of childish mockery is something we have to recreate deductively. It is not difficult, though, to imagine how the disdain of all expertise and of every authority that rested on expert training developed into this from barely perceptible beginnings.

We happen to know of only two specific manifestations that belong here. In practice, Caligula sought to entirely eliminate the science of jurisprudence, and to abolish the legal profession.[56] Although this hostility to lawyers may contain a healthy kernel, namely that the existence of a professional jurisprudence conflicts with the nature of the living law, under the conditions of Roman life at the time, this thought is once again genuinely Caesarean. The other occurrence concerns the military. It would appear that a number of gladiators were, abruptly and on a mere whim, appointed officers of his personal guard.[57]

We can probably fill in the rest of the picture, how the emperor bestowed military rank on administrative officials, quaestors, or major tax farmers, placed old soldiers in important posts in the civilian administration, sent dyed-in-the wool jurists, who had grown up in the Forum, to difficult posts along the frontiers with responsibility for relations with foreign nations, or promoted gout-ridden councilors to the

head of his troupe of dancers. Our imagination will not be sufficient to picture just how mad this confusion was – this clash of ability and assignments, this mockery of sound reason, which was finally crowned by the consular horse.

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The emperor believed that above this servile mass of people and estates, wildly muddled and trampled upon, he himself sat enthroned in unapproachable divine majesty, which, in his own eyes, remained fully intact even though he occasionally somersaulted down into the circus. For this is essential to this type of Caesar; he believes in his own right, thinks he has a mission, feels that he has a special relationship to God, considers himself the chosen one, and eventually demands divine worship for himself.

This seems to be the highest pinnacle of Caesarean madness, and yet the ideas of some rulers, who cannot be considered as outright sick, come perilously close to it – Friedrich Wilhelm IV, for example, moved in precisely such a mystical circle of ideas even when he was not yet completely ill. To be sure – and this is, in fact, the ignominious and pathetic foundation of the entire existence of the Caesars – the views of the masses and especially of the ruling classes in nations suffused by real monarchical sentiment often promote these kinds of ideas in dangerous ways. How else would it have been possible to demand deification for Alexander, for Caesar?

In Caligula it was evidently not merely brazen exploitation of popular views or simple political calculation that led him to demand divine veneration; rather, it was utter, naked madness that believes in the divinity of one's self, or at least immerses itself lovingly in the idea of the same.

We can see this best in the way in which he played, as it were, with this idea. Given the paltry nature of our accounts, this is another instance in which we cannot trace the development in its entirety – the inconspicuous beginnings have not survived clearly. The fact that, as a boy, he was already appointed augur and *pontifex maximus* may have exerted a certain influence on his ideas. We can undoubtedly assume that he did in fact perform his functions during religious ceremonies, and that it was only natural for him to link fantastic ideas with the exercise of such functions. However, it is far more important and revealing that he loved to appear in the guise of gods and goddesses.

I have already mentioned how a quality of play-acting manifested itself in this: we must imagine how the imperial actor transported himself into the place of the depicted divinities by acting. It is indeed quite remarkable how the boundaries between reality and make-believe become blurred in persons somewhat inclined to a pathological imagination; at first they play with the idea that they have something in common with the character portrayed, in moments of particular ecstasy they feel one with him, and in cases of pronounced mental illness, they end up believing that they are permanently identical with him. When King Ludwig, as Lohengrin, sailed on his artificial lake in a swan-boat, he surely must have had moments when the distinction between make-believe and reality became blurred. Perhaps one might say: this is the illusion – extended to one's own subject as the result of over-stimulation – that we all come to experience toward the object when artistic stimuli work on our imagination. – And now let us add the appearance before third persons and large crowds, the desire to make an impression on them, and the need to maintain a completely unnatural fiction with stronger and stronger external means! Who has not known individuals who eventually believed that they were the person and had accomplished what they had so long pretended to others and then themselves?

In Caligula, his claims to deification occasionally turned into a mad farce – though that should not make us believe that he intended to mock the cult he had forced upon his subjects in order thereby to heighten the ignominy even more. He made himself the high priest of his own divinity! And he made his horse – his predilection for horses emerges also in other, completely crazy actions – his colleague in this post![58]

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Caligula's contemporaries already considered him truly insane,[59] and it is hard to understand how a modern historian could still doubt it. After all, the path toward insanity corresponds in his case to what was evidently an original, pathological inclination.

We don't know much about his physical appearance, but we do know something. When he came to Tiberius at the age of twenty, he was tall; spindly legs, a prominent belly,[60] and uncanny facial features – with sunken temples and eyes, and a broad and sinister forehead –were his outstanding physical characteristics.[61] He also suffered from epilepsy and terrible insomnia.[62]

Dio Cassius has left us a vivid account of his resulting restlessness, of the contradictoriness and unpredictability of his ideas and impressions.[63] These are qualities of nervousness. In and of themselves, these qualities need not be pathological; they take on greater meaning only in connection with what else we know. One moment he would seek out a throng of people, another moment, solitude; he would then go on a trip. Once when he returned he was hardly recognizable, as he had grown a beard and had not cut his hair (quite against the custom of the time).[64] He was simultaneously annoyed and pleased with flatterers and those who were outspoken. Sometimes he would listen to the worst sort of things, especially from people of the lower classes; sometimes he would punish trifling matters with death. Nobody knew what to do or say, and if someone pleased him, he had to thank his luck for it, not his cleverness.[65] He came up with the most nonsensical ideas, and even if they were relatively harmless, they contained a trace of malice, as for example when he sent an officer who had aroused his displeasure to King Ptolemy in Mauretania with a letter of meaningless content.[66]

For the most part, though, his maliciousness, his pleasure in tormenting others, took on much worse forms. This trait, too, is reported to have already been present in his youth. He did not miss a chance to attend tortures and executions.[67]

This was combined with a penchant for excesses.[68] Terrible stories were told already of his boyhood years.[69] Later, when he lived with Tiberius, he would visit the lairs of vice in disguise, indulging equally in sexual excesses and drunkenness.[70]

The penchant for excesses, the wallowing in bloodshed, the enjoyment of cruel tortures – the image of Caesarean fury is perfectly complete. That pathological sexual proclivities often go hand in hand with a pathological pleasure in cruelty, in blood victims, and in cruel torments is well known everywhere from psychiatric observation. And how this combined manifestation is connected in turn with Caesarean madness is easily understood by the layman in broad terms, even if the precise dissection of the phenomenon still poses some problems to the expert. Already, the external advantages of the very position invite an early lack of restraint, examples of which are provided by the life stories of countless princely sons, no doubt from all dynasties. If there is then added the Caesarean idea of the unlimited nature of one's own pretensions and the irrelevance of all other rights,[71] and if this is joined by the passing on of these factors over several generations – then, of course, all restraints are gone.

Caesarean madness shows itself in its perfect form, as it were, when bloodthirstiness, cruelty, and the lack of restraint are put in the service of the idea of deification. It seems that Caligula wanted to leave the world a grand example also of this intensification of the outgrowths of his madness, when the Jews – and they alone, it would appear – refused to erect his statue in their temple and to worship it. He was on the verge of forcing the entire people to serve him with fire and sword when death struck him down.[72]

But even quite apart from such an aggregation of all traits of Caesarean madness, Caligula's penchant for excesses and his bloodthirstiness seem gruesome enough all on their own. He seems to have imposed some restraint on himself in the first period following his assumption of power, but soon the proclivities

of his youth, of which I have already spoken, re-emerged, and since he was now the absolute, autocratic ruler, he indulged all the more unrestrainedly in his desires, to which countless women and girls fell victim.[73]

At the same time he began in truly horrible fashion, often times incited further by financial motives, to give free rein to his lust for murder and pleasure in tortures.[74] It was not only later writers who told us about it, his contemporary Seneca also recounts the bestial pleasure the emperor took at the sight of executions, and the cruelties with which he tormented the survivors.[75]

A few stories that have come down to us show that his lust for murder should be seen as a mental illness: how he never kissed the neck of his wife or mistress without saying that this lovely throat would be cut whenever it pleased him,[76] or how he burst out laughing during a pleasant meal at the thought that all it took was a nod from him and the throats of the two consuls dining at his side would be cut.[77] He wished that the Roman people had a single neck (this saying has indeed become famous) so he could cut off their head in a single stroke.[78] Such thoughts, and others much worse, not only simple bloodthirsty proclivities, but also the choicest ideas of torture, turned into countless bloody deeds, many of which he partnered with cynical jokes.[79] The details are too horrible for me to go into.

Enough, he terrorized all of Rome with them, and still this Rome did not muster the courage to shake off the yoke of the sick man, who was raging like a bloodhound. The Senate did not dare to depose him or to decide on a regency. He was not removed by an act of the political bodies; instead, it took a conspiracy that found a willing instrument in the personal desire for revenge on the part of a deeply offended colonel of his personal guard, Cassius Chaerea.[80]

So deeply had the state sunk, [a state] at whose gates the barbarism of a people still in the vigor of its youth knocked so threateningly at the time. As we now look back upon this from a safe place, we can say in spite of it all that today, when the material culture and the luxury of the upper classes can be compared once again to the conditions of the Roman Empire, we have advanced a good deal politically – of course, more than 1,800 years have passed –; for anything that would be similar to this Caesarism and the rule of Caesarean madness is so impossible under the conditions of this day and age that the entire account will strike us as a barely credible fantasy or an exaggerated satire by Roman writers on the Caesarism of their time, though by the current state of our study of the sources it is, in all its essential aspects, the sober historical truth.

NOTES

[1] See Dio Cassius 57.18 (Zonaras XI.5). Tacitus, *Annales* II.72 and III.16. Suetonius, *Caligula* 1 and 2. Pliny, *Naturalis historia* XI.71.
[2] Tacitus, *Annales* I.7; 33. II.13. Suetonius, *Caligula* 3 and 4. Dio Cassius 57.18.
[3] There had been a total of nine children; two died very young, a third child, an especially promising and charming boy, was also torn from his parents at a tender age, while six children survived their father (see Suetonius 7).
[4] Suetonius 3, also Tacitus 1.c.
[5] *Patientiam, comitatem, per seria per jocos eundem animum*. Tacitus, *Annales* II.13.
[6] Suetonius 9.13. Josephus, *Antiquitates* XVIII, 6.8.
[7] Tacitus, *Annales* II.72. IV.52; 53.
[8] Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 6. Suetonius 12. Dio Cassius 58.28; 59.10. Tacitus, *Annales* 6.56.
[9] Suetonius, *Tiberius* 75, *Caligula* 13. Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 2; 6.
[10] Dio Cassius 59.3: δημοκρατικωτατοσ τε γαρ τα προωτα δοξας.
[11] Ranke, in his *Weltgeschichte* 3, p. 91, also believes that the removal of the prefect Macro, which caused such a sensation in the world, seemed to amount to a change in the system.
[12] Suetonius 16. Dio Cassius 59.9.

[13] Ibid.
[14] Suetonius 15.
[15] Suetonius 16.
[16] Dio Cassius 59.6. Suetonius 15.
[17] See the revealing statement by Suetonius 16: *quando maxime sua interesset ut facta quaeque posteris tradantur*.
[18] Dio Cassius 59.4: οξθτατα τε προς πραξεις τινας εφερετο και νωθεστατα εστιν ας αυτων μετεχειριζετο.
[19] Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 7.
[20] Philo 8. Suetonius 26. Dio Cassius 59.10.
[21] According to Suetonius 29, Caligula boasted of his αδιατρεψια.
[22] Suetonius 37; Dio Cassius 59.2.
[23] Suetonius 38. Dio Cassius 59.15 and 18.
[24] Suetonius 47.
[25] See e.g. Seneca, *Ad Helviam de consolatione* 10.4.
[26] [25a] Suetonius 36.
[27] Suetonius 21.
[28] Suetonius 22.
[29] Suetonius 21.
[30] See e.g. Seneca, *De ira* III, 21.5. Dio Cassius 59.28.
[31] Suetonius 37.
[32] Dio Cassius 59.17. See Suetonius 19.32. Josephus, *Antiq.* XIX, 1.1. Seneca, *De brevitate vitae* 18.5.
[33] Suetonius 43.
[34] Suetonius 44.
[35] Dio Cassius 59.13.
[36] Suetonius 45. – On the triumph in Rome see Suetonius 47.
[37] Suetonius 47. Dio Cassius 59.25.
[38] Suetonius 23.
[39] Suetonius 52. Dio Cassius 59.26.
[40] Suetonius 22.
[41] Suetonius 54.
[42] Suetonius 54.
[43] Dio Cassius 59.5. – See Suetonius 32.
[44] Suetonius 53. Dio Cassius 59.28.
[45] Suetonius 34.
[46] Suetonius 22. – See also the quote from Virgil in Suetonius 45.
[47] Suetonius 30.
[48] Among other things, it was said of Caligula that he disregarded in the extreme the well-known “civility of kings” and left large masses of people waiting without any consideration. Dio Cassius 59.13.
[49] Dio Cassius 59.27: τω τε γαρ χρειττονι εαυτου ο Γαιος ηχθετο. – See Suetonius 35.
[50] Dio Cassius 59.10.
[51] Suetonius 26.
[52] Dio Cassius 59.27. Seneca, *De beneficiis* II, 12.
[53] Suetonius 35.
[54] Dio Cassius 59.5.
[55] Dio Cassius 59.14. Suetonius 55.
[56] Suetonius 34.

[57] Suetonius 55.
[58] Dio Cassius 59.28.
[59] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.45. Suetonius 50 and 51. Seneca, *De constantia sapientis* 18.1.
[60] Suetonius 50. Seneca, *De const. sap.* 18.1.
[61] Suetonius 50.
[62] Suetonius 50.
[63] 59.4.
[64] Suetonius 24.
[65] Dio Cassius 54.4.
[66] Suetonius 55.
[67] Suetonius 11.
[68] Suetonius 36. Dio Cassius 59.3
[69] Suetonius 24.24 – See Dio Cassius 59.10.
[70] Suetonius 11. – See Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium.*
[71] One saying of Caligula's goes like this: "Memento omnia mihi et in omnes licere": "Remember that I am allowed to do anything and against anyone."
[72] Josephus, *Antiq.* 8.2-8. Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*.
[73] Suetonius 36. Dio Cassius 59.3 and 10.
[74] Suetonius 26 ff. Dio Cassius 59.10. Jos. Flav., XIX, 1.1.
[75] Seneca, *De ira* II, 33.3; III, 18.3 ff.; 19; *De benef.* II, 21.5; *Quest. nat.* IV, praef. 17.
[76] Suetonius 33.
[77] Suetonius 32.
[78] Suetonius 30. Dio Cassius 59.13; 30.
[79] Suetonius 29; 30.
[80] Suetonius 58. Dio Cassius 59.29. – The most detailed account in Josephus, *Antiq.* XIX, 1.3.

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