



CALIGULA

at Aarhus International Theatre Company

Existence as it is, is unbearable. I must have the moon or happiness or something.
-- Caligula

It tells of the young Roman emperor who, stricken by the sudden death of his beloved sister, Drusilla, ponders the futility of existence in the Hamlet manner. His meditations on the eternal mystery lead him to consider his position of limitless powers. He is the monarch of the world, but, deranged by sorrow, he strives to control the universe, to make impossibilities come true. He yearns to possess the moon, to blend the sky and the sea and discover the secrets of the dead. As life is madness, he will rule by madness.

Having complete power, he will test it. His experiments are those of an insane sadist. He orders executions and torture without reason, to defy logic and sense. The climax comes when he strangles his mistress without cause and is assassinated by his senators, who have become almost as crazy as him.

Caligula is a play by Albert Camus. Its plot revolves around the historical figure of Caligula, a Roman Emperor famed for his cruelty and seemingly insane behavior. In Camus' version, Caligula deliberately manipulates his own assassination. (Historically, this event took place January 24, 41 AD/CE.)

Camus' portrayal of Caligula is seemingly soft on the surface but below it is seething with details and moral and ethical codes.

CAST

Maria Y. Mouni, Hartvig Hansen, Jo A. Haavind, Daniel A. Fjellgaard, Morten J. B. Olausen, Matias Kuoppala, Richard Olsen, Claus Lund and Thomas Biehl

PRODUCTION

Director: Vladimir Koifman

Script: Albert Camus

Light design: Vladimir Koifman

Set: Vladimir Korshunov

Graphic: Dennis Bahnson

Producer: Thomas Biehl

PLAY DATES

2008

22th February - 06st March

all nights at 19:00

(not playing sunday 24th and 2nd)

TICKETS

100kr. / 70kr. / 50kr. Foreigners FREE

Booking: +45 86760073 or mail@aaite.dk

PERFORMS AT

AAITC

Jægergårdsgade 152, 3C

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ALBERT CAMUS and his play.

Albert Camus, the French existentialist wrote his political allegory, the play about the Roman emperor Caligula in 1944 after spending the war in France fighting with the French Resistance. Camus returned to the play and reworked it throughout his lifetime. Albert Camus was of Algerian origin and much of his political perspective would have been linked to the way Algeria was treated by the French. The Algerian crisis ended in 1963 three years after Camus' death in a car accident. Camus was one playwright in a movement of the 1950s and 1960s known as the Theatre of the Absurd. Absurdists included playwrights like Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco; their dramatic writing reflects the incomprehensibility and futility of the human existence.

The play is ostensibly about a Roman emperor, Gaius "Caligula" Caesar (Emperor AD37 -41) but Camus uses the play to develop his philosophical ideas about the conflict between absolute power and individual freedom. Gaius was the youngest of nine children and the only boy to survive his grandfather, the emperor Tiberius. His father Germanicus, his mother Agrippina and all his brothers were either killed or starved to death by Tiberius and his lieutenant Sejanus. Gaius was given the nickname "Caligula" which means Little Boots by the soldiers because as a child he wore a child size version of army boots.

Caligula is devastated by the death of his sister Drusilla with whom he probably had an incestuous relationship, deserts the Roman assembly for three days and three nights. On his return he is determined to understand the meaning of life. He is to push his power to the limits. His reign will become synonymous with terror, murder, torture, cruelty and sexual excess. "I've finally understood what absolute power is for. It gives the impossible a chance to exist. Freedom has no boundaries any more."

Camus completed Caligula when he was 25. The play begins with the death of Drusilla, and the turning point of Caligula's life. The work itself is about cruelty and the arbitrary exercise of power. Written in 1938 and first performed in 1945, no-one was left with any doubt of the influences and inferences of the play. Consider the time of writing. The world had witnessed dictators from both ends of the political spectrum espousing and putting into practice fantastic ideological plans. Mussolini bragged about a building a "New Rome"; Hilter guaranteed an "Aryan" empire; Stalin assured the necessity of his purges in the bringing about of a communist utopia.

After the death of his sister/lover, Caligula realises a fact: "men die and they are not happy". He is experiencing the absurdity of human existence. Caligula wants to make the impossible, possible. He has realised the meaninglessness of the world and wants to make everyone else aware of it. The plan is to make everything in life obviously meaningless. He arbitrarily kills and makes ludicrous decrees such as a new order of merit based on the number of times a man visits the emperor's brothel (which he has staffed with the wives and mistresses of the Patricians).

Caligula's acts are not one's of random madness, each of his bizarre pronouncements has a curious logic to them. When it is pointed out that he is a terror to the Roman people, he [feigns] surprise, reiterating the fact that what he's doing is a gift to the people - letting them understand the meaninglessness of life. After all, he adds, in the time he's been emperor, he hasn't gone to war, saving thousands of lives. But of course, Caligula is no hero, he represents the governments of Camus' time and the suffering their arbitrary rule creates.

A criticism of the play is that although Caligula represents the authoritarian powers of the day [Fascism, Nazism, Communism] these powers did not express the meaninglessness of life. Camus does not want us to resign ourselves, as Caligula does, to the absurd but neither did the proponents of Nazism et al. If we are to be cautious against the spread of totalitarianism, then we can be so without needing to be aware of the absurd nature of the world.

However, as an elaboration of the absurd, the play succeeds and works in addition with Camus' Myth and Sisyphus in helping us understand a difficult philosophical idea.