



Julian the Apostate

Historical drama in five acts

by Christian Lanciai (2010)

The Characters:

Mirella
Chrysantheus, her father
Constantius, emperor
his servant
the sibylla
Julian
Priscus
Marina
Maximus
a cynic
a sophist
a stoic
a neoplatonist

Eusebius, imperial court eunuch
general Sallust
general Nevitta
other generals
the empress Eusebia
a courier
Helena, Constantius' sister, Julian's queen
general Florentius
a courtier
Libanius

Soldiers and people at court

The action is in the Roman Empire from Gaul to Persia in the fourth century.

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Julian the Apostate

Act I scene 1. Delphi.

Mirella This is a desolate place you have brought me to, father. What is the purpose?

Chrysantheus I am tired of always going here alone to cry. Regard it as a part of your education. The strangest scenes have been enacted here and are still happening, but only I can see them,

Mirella Father, you are getting old. Is it your imagination now again inspiring you to try to share your derangement?

Chrysantheus That's the very problem, my daughter. Am I deranged, or am I initiated in an all too wondrous truth? If you see what I see, it is the truth, but if you can't see the ghosts that I experience here, I am prepared to surrender and give up myself as deranged. But it is my reality that the scenes occurring here are eternal and therefore constantly repeated. Tell me what you see, my girl.

Mirella A temple in ruins, deserted and trampled down, perhaps violated, forgotten but buried alive and screaming in its silence.

Chrysantheus So you hear the screams?

Mirella No, I feel them.

Chrysantheus Then you hear them the more clearly. But I now see one of our guests approaching. He comes here every day. My daughter, can you see the characters approaching?

Mirella A rugged and tired but still proud and very serious man, followed by grim warriors.

Chrysantheus Then you see the same as I. Then it is no dream and no fantasies.

Mirella Who are they?

Chrysantheus Just keep quiet and observe carefully. I will explain everything to you afterwards.

Constantius (enters with four warriors) I never thought I would come here, but curiosity had the better of me.

soldier 1 Your majesty, this is a cursed place, notorious for its black magic and world deception.

Constantius But no one could ever prove the oracle to have lied. I just want to hear what she could have to say to me. Then you can tear down the ruins.

soldier 2 You run a great risk, your majesty, by dealing with supreme superstition.

Constantius What more could I lose? The oracle doesn't charge anything any more and does no longer accept any gifts, since we forbade all pagan commerce.

soldier 3 We don't like it.

Constantius Neither do I. But what is there in life to like? Everything is just deception. Already my father realized that, and that's why he became a Christian.

soldier 4 Your majesty, you are blaspheming.

Constantius No, I am just stating the truth, and that's why I am here, to find out if there could be any truth at all.

soldier 1 Leave Augustus alone. He has nothing to lose.

Constantius Exactly.

Mirella Who is he?

Chrysantheus The son of Constantine the Great.

Mirella The emperor Constantius? But isn't he dead since long?

Chrysantheus He seems to live on in his remorse.

Constantius So tread forth, sibyl and oracle, and expound to me my destiny, if you can.

sibyl No one has ever come here in vain.

Constantius We have tried to extirpate all the pagan idols but never with total success, but whatever you say, we will carry on the process. So don't try to please or flatter me. That's no idea. The oracle will be abolished anyway.

sibyl You are afraid. That's why you have come here.

Constantius No, just uncertain. I grope in the dark hopelessly aware that I will never find any light. That's the only reason for my coming here.

sibyl What do you want to know?

Constantius Everything.

sibyl Can you be more specific.

Constantius I succeeded in extirpating my entire family, but I never succeeded in getting any children. My wife and queen is childless and dying. Of the only two cousins that survived I made one a Caesar, whereupon he prided himself so I had to destroy him. The other cousin I had to make a Caesar as well, so that he could quench the rebellion in Gaul, which he succeeded with in spite of massive sabotage,

and he has not prided himself but instead made himself more popular than myself. That's why I recalled him to put him down. Then his troops hail him as emperor. Civil war will be inevitable. Who will prevail?

sibyl You tried to extirpate every religion except your own, and even within it, you wish to extirpate everyone except your own sect. You have murdered all your brothers and relatives. Your establishment as emperor is definite but has cost you your soul, your happiness and freedom. Julian is young and free and tolerant and has won everyone's heart by his openness. He has nothing on his conscience, and he is not just adored by most of his soldiers but also abroad, by Franks, Germans and Persians. You must understand yourself who is bound to win.

Constantius He is a pagan!

sibyl No, he defends history, while you like all Christians believe you could manipulate it. It will always strike back, and who does not learn from it has to be overrun by it.

Constantius This is your last oracular statement, which no one ever will hear, for from now on the oracle of Delphi will remain silent forever.

sibyl Like everyone else, you are just digging your own grave in the greed of your vanity.

Constantius Enough! Slay her!

(The soldiers advance and slay her.)

You haven't heard one word, and neither have I. The oracle is dead and extinguished. Let that be known all over the world. Already my father plundered Delphi of everything of value. All we have to do is to complete his operation. Leave no building standing!

soldier 1 You heard, fellows! Let's tear down the ruins that remain!

(The soldiers do their work. Constantius leaves.)

Chrysantheus What you saw, my girl, was the last visitor to the oracle of Delphi, a Christian emperor, whose father established Christianity as the only official religion, whereupon all religious freedom was driven over and stamped out. His son tried to finish his work but only succeeded in extirpating his entire family and throw the church of the world into hopeless civil wars by dogmatic sectarianism.

Mirella But then there was Julian.

Chrysantheus Yes, then came Julian. He has been here as well. Hark! I hear him approaching.

Julian (enters) I always dreamt of coming here but quaked at the same time at the prospect of it. What do you think, Priscus? Did I do wrong in coming here?

Priscus Everyone is drawn here by the wholesome insecurity of their own vanity to learn something about their own destiny in the hope of maybe some cure of it. No one has succeeded.

Julian So I must also fail?

Priscus I didn't say that. But like everyone else you have come here entirely at your own risk.

Julian Everyone lives but to challenge his own fate. I am no exception. Mother of oracles, tread forth!

sibyl The last son of the destiny of Hellas, what do you wish?

Julian Just some orientation.

sibyl Follow your destiny, like everyone else, and it will show you the way.

Julian Whereto? Philosophy or politics?

sibyl Both.

Julian With success or to tragedy?

sibyl Both.

Julian Defeat and dishonour or the opposite?

sibyl What's wrong with you is that you are your own ideal, but no ideal can be successfully manifested in reality. That's where politics have to enter, which only can survive by constant compromising.

Julian I refuse to compromise with my ideal.

sibyl Then you should avoid politics.

Julian That's the problem. I was born to it as the nephew of the emperor Constantine.

sibyl That's your dilemma. Let destiny solve it for you, for you will never get through with it yourself.

Julian That's what I was afraid of.

sibyl Good luck, Julian, apostate, renewer and restorer.

Julian Shall I restore the world order, like Marcus Aurelius?

sibyl That's the question.

Priscus Come, let's go. You won't get any wiser today. (*drags him along*)

Julian (to the sibyl) I will be back.

sibyl Yes, you will always be back. (*exit Julian with Priscus*)

Mirella Even Julian is dead since many years.

Chrysantheus Is he? That's the question. He is to the Christians, but to immortality he is not.

Mirella What is immortality?

Chrysantheus That's the very question on which Julian brooded all his life. If you want to know more about it, you will have to follow me back to his life and his educational days in Athens as a quite young man.

Mirella You have made me curious.

Chrysantheus That was intentional. Come!

Scene 2. Athens.

Marina My love, you are like a fish in the water fully enjoying life, here is everything you yearned for and everything you need, but still you are not happy. Why?

Julian (quite young) My love, just don't think it is your fault or that you are not sufficient. I love you with all my heart and just wish that my time here in Athens could go on indefinitely. I suffer from my destiny, which I never can get rid of. I am Caesar and doomed as such.

Marina You haven't been established as Caesar like your brother.

Julian It's just a matter of time. I am related with him and the emperor's cousin, which gives me a mark of Cain from the cradle to the grave, for what is the world emperor's family but the dominating murderers of the world? Power survives only by liquidating competitors, and that makes all holders of power accountable murderers. That's why the emperor Constantius is the saddest and gloomiest man in the world, since he is not allowed to be a man.

Marina But you are still free and allowed to be a man.

Julian Free? Every step of mine is being watched, and everything I do is reported to the emperor. I will never be free from what I am and from the curse of what I was born to. I have to endure myself as long as I live.

Marina We all have to. But so far you are free. The emperor has not yet given you any power and not even any responsibility.

Julian It feels like just a respite, as a brief golden moment which I must not waste on anything unimportant. That's why I associate so fanatically from morning until twilight with the philosophers while I unfortunately neglect you.

Marina You never neglect me as long as you think of me and don't forget me. That's all I ask of you until further, for you have already given me what's most important.

Julian What's that? My soul?

Marina No, a child. I am pregnant.

Julian Marina! What a divine gift! I never thought myself capable of that!

Marina It's still early, but I am certain.

Julian Then we are both blessed.

Marina The question is by whom. By your destiny? By the Christian god? By anyone of the others?

Julian Forget all gods. There is only one, and he is not palpable, even less definable, but all gods and adored beings are his expressions and manifestations. The legend of Jesus, Apollo, Zeus, my favourite Hermes and all the others are just efforts at interpreting and characterizing the universal divinity, which comprises all life and all things metaphysical.

Marina You sound like Origen.

Julian He was a wise man who was misunderstood by all wise men. They disgrace Christianity by wanting to discard him as a heretic. His only fault was his tolerance.

Marina Christianity is dominated and led by intolerant fanatics like Athanasius, who only prevails by his ruthlessness.

Julian Athanasius is out and exiled by the emperor, who is an Arian persecuting all who think different to the damnation of Christianity. It is destroying

itself by civil wars. It was born unsound and not as a beneficial religion to humanity, although Jesus meant well and only did good. But his mission was distorted by his followers unto unrecognizability, and the worst one was my uncle Constantine, who established Christianity as an official state religion of state and gave it world power. That was the worst thing he could do, and he did so only for egoistical reasons, to confirm his own power and vanity.

Marina The Christians will never risk becoming a majority here in Athens. We think too much to be able to fall for such ghost stories. So your uncle was just a fake and a fool?

Julian To the highest degree, an opportunist and self-deceiver of such colossal measures, that his tragedy turned into a grotesque absurdity. He had no ideals at all, only egoistic self-indulgence and a greed of lunatic proportions with no distance or perspective. He sacrificed the world to himself.

Marina We are lucky that no one may hear you besides me. A Christian would immediately denounce you to the prefect, and you would be executed tomorrow.

Julian I know. I could never discuss this with the philosophers.

Marina Here is one of them now.

Maximus (enters) Greeting, Julian. I hope I am not intruding.

Julian Your disturbance is always welcome, Maximus.

Maximus I wish I could share your conversation with Marina. She is certain to hear about mystic secrets which you never share with us.

Marina I don't own him, Maximus. His soul belongs to everyone.

Julian You can't guess, Maximus, how happy you should be not to have to hear my self-efficacies to Marina.

Maximus The more interesting they become.

Marina I assign him to you, Maximus. It's for you to bring him up and educate him. I just own him.

Maximus Yours is the best part.

Julian What is today's lecture about, Maximus? What new gods do you have to introduce me to and initiate me into their mysteries?

Maximus You still have all of Zoroastrianism to learn about with the Mithras cult.

Julian Another of those gods, who like Osiris died in order to resurrect?

Maximus The interesting thing is, that the Mithras cult arose completely independent of the Osiris cult in Egypt, although they both are about the same thing, as you say. And both have already been incorporated into the Christian mumbo-jumbo, which acquires Christian souls by corrupting itself unto unrecognizability by taking over all pagan cults and providing them with Christian costumes. The Christian monopoly fanatics thereby imagine they could collect all religions under their umbrella, and there is nothing wrong about that. The problem is that Christianity allows itself to be enslaved by power, thereby walking into a trap and allowing itself to be seduced by the temptation to intolerance and persecution of undesirable seekers of independence such as free-thinkers, philosophers and doubters, like Origen, their own prime father of the church.

Marina That's Julian's view exactly.

Maximus So which religion will you embrace, the honest Mithras cult or the naïve but natural Hellenism of the old believers with its abundance of legends and gods?

Julian The last one is the least harmful and, as you say, the most natural, and it offers most freedom and tolerance. It should be forbidden by law for anyone to persecute anyone for his religious views. Now it's the contrary, and the law sanctions it.

Maximus You are our hope in this matter.

Marina And our future.

Julian I wish to avoid all responsibility for a development that should be natural and obvious.

Marina So far you are free.

Maximus And have time to learn more. The academy is waiting, my son. The philosophers long to have some discussion with you.

Julian And I with them.

Marina I expect you back tonight, my love.

Julian You shall not have to wait in vain. Show me the way, master.

(Maximus and Julian leave.)

Marina It feels as if not only I but the whole world only had him leased for all too short a moment, which for that very reason must become the more valuable and eternal.

Scene 3. The school of Athens.

cynic Idealism is dead. It died by power taking over all free thinking in the world by nationalizing Christianity, turning it political.

sophist Still everyone imagines they have the freedom to keep their thoughts to themselves.

stoic Christianity is like Constantine and all vain emperors just a passing evil for life to survive and eventually manage better without.

neoplatonist You are all right in your one-sidedness, while versatility and broadmindedness keep quietly silent.

sophist Here comes the one now who thinks he knows best of all, the light of the future, the only surviving offspring on the self-truncated family tree of Constantine, who only survived by never being given any power, the anachronistic Julian.

Maximus Are you quibbling about nothing as usual, you narrow-minded experts on one way only?

sophist Says you, hopeless charlatan!

Julian Don't argue now, old men, when your imperial diplomat is here.

stoic How can you diplomatize between the emperor's intolerance established by law and the philosophical absolute demand of limitlessness in everything?

cynic A reasonable question without any possible answer.

Maximus Let the candidate answer.

Julian Nothing is impossible, gentlemen. So far I am alive, and despite that I associate with you, the emperor at least has allowed me to live.

sophist You alone among all his male relatives.

Julian He has even encouraged my philosophical aspirations. I even suspect that he wishes to rescue me from the curse of power by saving me for philosophy.

cynic You are his only heir. You will never get out of that quandary as long as you live. One day you will be obliged to abandon the rescuing philosophy for the doom of power.

Julian That was no problem to Marcus Aurelius. He combined it with success.

cynic In his days power could still persecute the Christians for their subversity. Today it is the other way around. The Christians wish to extirpate all non-Christians and have proved themselves capable of doing so. That's the madness of power which will be difficult to combine with philosophy.

Maximus Wait until Julian becomes emperor.

Julian Quiet, Maximus. People might hear.

stoic He is right. Such a statement could trigger rumours that could get our Julian executed. Since he is our last hope, that would hardly be desirable.

sophist What will you do if you become emperor, Julian? Start a persecution of all Christians?

Julian No, stop all persecutions and try to make all religious people understand that they all adore the same supreme being but in different ways and different manners. Which they should try to understand about each other instead of fighting what they just don't understand.

stoic That's what I call enlightenment.

Maximus Isn't that diplomatically convincing enough?

cynic Only as long Constantius allows his last descendent to live.

sophist The chances are not impossible, since he allowed it so far.

stoic So are you prepared to tolerate the Christians, Julian?

Julian Yes, if they tolerate us. And Christianity is not without interest. Even all non-Christians are quite agreed that Jesus must have been an entirely good man who made the best imaginable example to everyone. It was only his sensationally unfair martyrdom on the cross that made his life's mission extraordinary and a topic of unlimited discussions in unlimited animosity forever, a subject fashioned from the beginning for misunderstandings in absurdum, which misunderstandings you never can finish reckoning with. I always showed Christianity and all Christians respect for the sake of Jesus in spite of all their extreme confusions.

Maximus Someone is coming.

sophist He doesn't look too happy.

Julian (rising) You come like a dark shadow, as if you had a death sentence to deliver, Priscus.

Priscus (has entered) It is worse than that, Julian. You are summoned.

Julian To the emperor?

Priscus You are to meet him in Milan.

sophist That could only mean one thing.

cynic Caesar.

stoic Power.

Maximus Your hour of destiny has arrived, Julian. Handle it with the utmost care.

Julian The destiny given me by the emperor cannot be refused or escaped, only accepted whatever it might be. If it is death directly, I will not complain. Anything else would just mean power, which is worse.

stoic Thus speaks my disciple.

sophist Good luck, Julian. He will last the longest who keeps his silence the longest.

Julian I thank you, uncles, for your schools and your education, which have made these my 48 days in Athens the only important ones in my life so far. I promise to manage your investment well as long as I live.

stoic The only real power is knowledge. Only knowledge is above and can master all power. You have that knowledge. If you use it well, you will overcome all power.

Julian I intend to try.

Maximus All gods are valid, Julian, to the same degree as that local god of the Jews that drove Jesus mad in his absurd monopoly pretensions. Never try anything like that, and you will always be able to remain a true democrat, for monotheism makes autocracy possible while only pantheism is democratic.

Julian Thank you, Maximus.

sophist You never qualified as a sophist, for you were too honest and therefore spoke but little, but that saved you from us.

cynic Never become a cynic. That's the best advice a cynic can offer you.

Julian Thank you, gentlemen. – Priscus, I am yours to command.

Priscus I am sorry that we have to interrupt your symposium, but at least you got a good start.

Julian That's the most important. All that follows is then dependent on how the start was managed, and I shall never forget it.

stoic Farewell, Julian. Be a new Marcus Aurelius.

Maximus Or even better, which you might be.

sophist Fortunately you can't at least be any worse than Constantius.

cynic Quiet, you scoundrel! You speak like a Christian emperor.

Julian I had better not listen to you any more, but I shall never forget any one of you. (*leaves with Priscus*)

cynic There we lost our hope.

sophist Or gained it. He is not yet dead, only elevated.

Maximus Prepare, gentlemen, for any world revolution, for an oracle has stated that Julian was born to complete the mission of Alexander the Great.

sophist And what was his mission?

Maximus To unite the whole world in concord and love, both religiously and politically.
cynic You charlatan will never understand that idealism is dead and will constantly die again as soon as power comes importuning.
stoic Julian has knowledge enough to overcome power.
sophist Yes, that's what Jesus also imagined. He was just crucified.
Maximus Wait and see, gentlemen, with patience. Julian is not yet dead.

Act II scene 1. Milan.

Constantius in all his imperial court and circumstance, receiving Julian.

Constantius Show my poor nephew in, who has arrived to become an officer like everyone else. I am tired of constantly having to sacrifice my relatives. I tried to spare them as long as possible, but they insisted on placing their heads on the block themselves from pure stupidity and thoughtlessness. Now I tried to save the last one Julian anyway from the power to philosophy, but the power has always forced me to act against my will. If you don't have the power you strive for it only to find yourself its helpless prisoner for life when you finally find it. (*Julian is entered.*) Don't be afraid, Julian. I am just your uncle.

Julian How would I not fear my emperor, who killed all my relatives and my only brother?

Constantius Is that an accusation? I tried to save you, Julian, and you have got your philosophy. Now power demands that you sacrifice yourself for it like all the others, as I have done all my life. It can't be helped.

Julian What do you want from me? I was happy in Athens.

Constantius I know. And I would gladly have let you remain happy there. But duty is calling. The Germans have fallen into Gaul, and I must myself drive off the Parthians in Asia.

Julian I am no military man.

Constantius I know. That's why you have to be one.

Julian How?

Constantius By practice and experience. If you start you can never stop. If you become bloody you become bloodthirsty. It's a phenomenon, like drunkards who just have to drink all the time not to wake up from their sensual numbness. Everything in life is but suffering. That's what all life is but a vain effort to escape from.

Julian You force the war upon me?

Constantius I force the war upon you. Unfortunately you are one of us. We are of the same blood, you and I, and we are the last. Marcus Aurelius had to make war all his life no matter how little he wanted it and liked it, and we have inherited his responsibility for a world empire. We just have to bear it like another Atlas, until we are crushed by its weight.

Julian Honestly speaking, uncle, I expected something worse.

Constantius You have managed well, unlike your brother. He was ruined when I made him Caesar. The power madness got hold of him and transformed his soul into a monster of twisted cruelty and evil. He got no less than what he deserved.

Julian He was executed in a cellar dungeon with his hands pinioned like a simple murderer.

Constantius He was no more than that in the end. But I understand your misgivings. I was also summoned here to Milan and was left on the way. You have still never stopped on your way. Carry on like that, and there will be hope for all of us.

Julian What do you want me to do in Gaul?

Constantius Drive off the Germans and cleanse them out of the empire. If I can manage the Parthians in the east and you the Germans in the north we can still maintain the empire for a little while longer.

Julian I have no authority and no rank.

Constantius You are now Caesar. I only keep the title of Augustus for myself. In everything else you are my equal. As proof of my complete confidence, I give you my sister Helena for a wife.

Julian You also gave my brother a sister of yours for his wife when you made him Caesar. It was that wife who twisted his brain.

Constantius The responsibility for his actions was only his own, like you will bear the responsibility for everything *you* do. He disappointed us all. Go not thou and do likewise.

Julian I have no intention to.

Constantius I tried to save you by philosophy. You can save yourself by your philosophy, and if you can avoid corruption you can save the whole empire. If the Germans take Gaul we are driven back to the times before Julius Caesar. Fortunately we now have Julian Caesar.

Julian (kneels) Uncle, I am neither worthy nor mature enough for this task and responsibility, but since you and my destiny demand it, I am ready to sacrifice my life for Rome.

Constantius I have no wish to sacrifice my last relative. Survive and get us and Rome out of our jam. Give me that pleasure, which in that case will be my last.

Julian You are not old, uncle.

Constantius You can't guess how the responsibility of power makes you age on the double. You will feel it yourself when you experience the powerlessness of your super power. Go now. You have your orders, and your generals are expecting you.

Julian Thanks for your friendship, uncle.

Constantius It is not mine. It is my queen's. She has a weakness for you. Only because of that you are still alive.

Julian (bends his neck in subordination and leaves)

Constantius I just hope he won't derail like everyone else. My fate has punished me for all my political murders with childlessness. If only I could save one life I could perhaps feel that at least something in spite of all was atoned for. (*retires*)

Scene 2. In Gaul.

Sallust The emperor is just playing with him. At last we have a competent leader, whereupon the emperor puts him in a straitjacket and still demands of him to work. No wonder the world is going to hell, slowly but for certain, with Christianity for a somnambulist leader to perdition, forbidding common sense and competence since that could be harmful to routine and established etiquette. – Here he is now, the honour betrayed for the sake of his honour.

Julian What can we do, Sallust? The emperor wants me to drive back the Germans but refuses to give me an army to accomplish it.

Sallust You have no choice. You have to do it anyway.

Julian How?

Sallust You have a head. The emperor doesn't. That's your only advantage to him, but all his superiority is inferior to that advantage.

Julian But what do you make of his constant double play?

Sallust He is afraid of giving you power. That's why he won't give you the army. His demand that you still must drive off the Germans is just to save his face. That's his only concern. He will sacrifice anyone and anything for that purpose. He always did.

Julian But that is folly. What can I do against it?

Sallust The only thing is to let you be hailed as emperor.

Julian That would be rebellion.

Sallust Yes.

Julian That would mean civil war.

Sallust Yes.

Julian He has all the armies, and I have none.

Sallust Yes.

Julian It is out of the question.

Sallust Yes, until further.

Julian How would you advise me?

Sallust Fight the Germans with the small means at your disposal, where your greatest weapon is your cleverness. Your only hope is such a considerable success that the emperor has to give you an army.

Julian And then?

Sallust Take one day at a time. Everyone is with you except the supreme power of the imperial bureaucracy and its rusty decadence, but you can grease your own wheels and pass it by.

Julian Thank you, Sallust. You are the only friend I have.

Sallust No, the whole world is your friend, but we all bide our time to make it overcome the resistance of stupidity.

Julian Let's get going then, Sallust.

Scene 3.

Constantius What shall we do with him, Eusebius? He is too successful!

Eusebius I always advised you to have him disposed of, like all the other dangerously over-ambitious of your family.

Constantius Those times are over, Eusebius. There is only Julian left, and the empire needs him. We can't do without him, especially since he is successful. He has recaptured Colonia with almost no resources! Do you realize what that means?

Eusebius That he follows the footsteps of his brother and grows strong in order to topple you.

Constantius His brother had no judgement and was sick in his head, but Julian is sensible enough to stay sober. He gives Rome victories, Gallus never did, that bastard. Julian gives Rome hopes. No one did since the days of Constantine and Diocletian and I least of all. That makes him popular in the eyes of the world, which means I have to give him an army.

Eusebius The most dangerous of all.

Constantius I know, but we have no choice. The empire demands it, especially now when I have to war against the Parthians.

Eusebius An army in his hands will certainly drive him mad.

Constantius He managed well so far. We have no complaints against him. He is already generally adored. *That* is the most dangerous of all.

Eusebius If you give him an army nothing will stop him until he gets dethroned.

Constantius We could always recall him.

Eusebius If you give him an army it will be too late.

Constantius We have to. We must take that risk.

Eusebius You are protecting a snake in your bosom.

Constantius No, Eusebius, my wife protects him, and my sister is his wife. She watches him for me. I think we can trust him.

Eusebius I don't think so.

Constantius You don't think anything, for you are a eunuch, and God knows why I associate with such half men who only exist to say yes and flatter my vanity for the cultivation of my own massive self-deception, which only turns me blind to reality, while all living and competent potentials around me just get intoxicated by power so that I will have to execute them. Only Julian has managed all right and made it. We can't do without him.

Eusebius You will regret it one day.

Constantius I doubt it, Eusebius. No one ever regretted a success, and Julian is so far nothing but a success. Your envy is maladroit, unfair and unjustified. He shall have his army.

Act III scene 1. A military camp.

A tent, Julian with his officers.

Nevitta (raises his cup) Cheers, Julian Caesar, to your decisive victories in Gaul! No one has had such successes in Gaul since the days of Julius Caesar. You are our own Julius Caesar!

(All share the toast most cordially.)

Sallust He has actually done more than Julius Caesar, since he has secured the entire northern border against the Germans for an unsurveyable future. Caesar defeated only the Gauls, but Julian defeated the Germans! *(All heartily share another toast.)*

Julian (rises) We have only just begun. Much remains to be done, and you can never trust a peace with the Germans. They will promise anything but never hesitate to break whatever agreements, as if they had no memory. We pacified them now and drove them back across the Rhine the whole way, but in darkness they will return and attack when we least suspect it and are least prepared, to then burn down everything and immediately disappear into their dark forests again. We have neither defeated nor pacified the Germans. We have only temporarily cleared the flower bed.

Nevitta While the emperor green with envy claims the honour for your victories to himself and spreads propaganda all over the empire that it was he and not you who defeated the Germans at Colonia and Strasburg.

Julian Where do you obtain such information?

Nevitta It is spread even here in the camps by Florentius by the order of the emperor himself.

a general It is not fair!

another What kind of an emperor is that who dares to lie so blatantly and outrageously in public?

Sallust He is afraid of losing his face to Julian Caesar.

Julian Quiet, gentlemen! Never a derogatory word against the emperor! He has my complete loyalty, and he knows it, and I never intend to break it.

Nevitta No matter how he humiliates and uses you? He sent you here without an army with orders to drive off the Germans. He gives you an impossible task while pinioning your hands. Still you made it, so he was forced to give you an army with the utmost reluctance, whereupon he assumes the honour of your victories without having moved a finger. On the contrary, he almost only sabotaged you the whole way.

Julian But we made it and prevailed, and that is all that matters. No evil word against him. He has to consider the security of the entire empire, and is fully occupied with the Persians.

Sallust Here comes a messenger.

Nevitta It's a messenger from Florentius.

Julian What news from Florentius? *(opens the letter, reads and darkens)*

Nevitta No good news from Florentius.

Sallust What does he say, Julian Caesar?

Julian (darkly) Order from the emperor. He needs my armies against Parthia. Orders of immediate march to the east.

(The soldiers start grumbling. The generals show dissatisfaction.)

general 1 We cannot accept that. We are needed here. We can't leave our work here unfinished.

Sallust What's behind it, do you think, Julian?

Julian I can only guess.

Nevitta It is obvious. The emperor can't accept that Julian is more successful and popular than the emperor. Therefore the emperor recalls him to dispose of him, like he did his brother.

Sallust Are you recalled, Julian?

Julian (upset) The emperor wants me to leave all assignments and return to my philosophical studies in Athens.

Nevitta He wants to revoke your title as Caesar?

Julian Yes, as he says, to save me.

general 1 (hits the tables) We can't accept this!

general 2 (rises) Who has fought for Rome? Julian or the emperor?

all Julian!

general 2 What has Julian done for us? And what has the emperor done?

all Everything and nothing!

Nevitta (rises) Hasn't Julian promised us Gallic warriors, that we would never again have to separate from our homes and families for enlistment by force outside Gaul?

all (resounding) Yes!

Nevitta Can you take back that promise to us, Julian Caesar?

Julian (can't meet his eyes, stays silent)

a soldier (out of sight) Julian Caesar Augustus!

A few more Julian Caesar Augustus!

More and more Julian Caesar Augustus! Julian Caesar Augustus!

(the call spreads and grows in resounding force to become almost deafening)

Julian (finally rising) My men, this is rebellion!

The multitude Yes, so it is!

a soldier To Rome!

More and more To Rome! To Rome!

others (carry on) Julian Caesar Augustus! Julian Caesar Augustus!

Sallust You can't get out of this, Julian.

Julian (after some hesitation, rises again, gets up and asks for silence) My men! We can't immediately march against Rome and Constantinople and overthrow the emperor. He is also now heading east to encounter Parthia with an army ten times greater than ours. I beg of you, stay put, and let us wait and see!

A voice He doesn't say no!

several He doesn't say no! He doesn't say no!

others (like before) Julian Caesar Augustus! Julian Caesar Augustus!

Sallust (to Julian) They don't give in. They have made up their minds.

Julian (asks for silence again) Gentlemen, at least give me time to think about it!

several To Rome! To Constantinople!

Sallust They have made up their minds.

Nevitta Julian Caesar Augustus, the united armies of Gaul have already deposed the Christian emperor and demand you to be the new one.

Julian (asks for silence again) I beg to retire and consider the matter.

A voice That means he doesn't say no!

More and more Julian! Julian!

Julian Come, Sallust. *(They leave.)*

(While they are out the soldiers continue their agitation.)

(outside) What are our chances, Sallust?

Sallust As you said, the emperor has an army ten times greater than ours. He hardly stands in any need of yours. Therefore it is likely that he has recalled you to rid himself of your competition.

Julian That hardly gives us any choice?

Sallust No. And the emperor is marching east with his entire army.

Julian I need a year to secure Spain, Italy, Africa and Illyria. Then we can take Constantinople.

Sallust The emperor's Parthian enterprise will take at least three years.

Julian The case is clear. I will follow my soldiers, since they refuse to give me any choice.

Sallust Go to them and tell them.

Julian Come. *(They return inside.)*

As he reenters, he is met with a united cheer of acclaim.)

Soldiers! My generals! Those of you who wish may follow me against Constantinople.

(Overwhelming cheers of acclaim. All become like drunk with joy. Julian is asked to step on a shield, on which he is lifted up.)

Nevitta Long live Julian Caesar Augustus, our emperor!

(The cheers keep on resounding, and Julian is carried out in triumph.)

Scene 2.

Constantius Don't bring me any more bad news. I can't take any more. How bad is it in Amida?

Eusebius I regret to say, my lord, that the town is completely obliterated. Nothing can save it any more.

Constantius Shapur has surely taken the opportunity to attack me in my weakest moment, when the reports from the north constantly only grow worse and worse.

Eusebius Are Julian's victories then bad news?

Constantius Yes, for they increase his power, and by every inch that his power is increasing, I am losing him more and more, for power consumes everyone that it gets hold of, as it has consumed and destroyed me. There is nothing left of me. No matter how much I am a Christian, my soul is lost forever to a worse perdition than hell. In hell you are at least obliged to live forever, but I am already dead. – Where is my queen? Is she still mortally ill, or is she dead?

Eusebius I can hear her slowly drawing nigh.

Constantius She is as much living dead as I. (*The queen appears.*) Eusebia! I thought I would never see you standing again.

Eusebia As soon as you march against the Persians you won't have to see me again, for when you return from that campaign, if you do, I shall be dead.

Constantius Why wouldn't I?

Eusebia I know you better than you yourself. You are more dead than I, for you gave up from the start when you sacrificed your soul to concentrate only on disposing of everyone who threatened your power.

Constantius For the sake of the empire, the emperor's position must be consolidated.

Eusebia And therefore you murdered all your relatives one by one, one after the other, until there was only Julian left.

Constantius I always let your intercessions for him win against all my advisers, who always advocated his death.

Eusebia He only lives because I always managed to keep him out of your reach.

Constantius I have recalled him. I need his armies against Persia.

Eusebia You have all the armies of the empire except his. Will you then leave the country open again to the Germans, which he without any armies made so much bother about driving them back across the Rhine?

Constantius He is too powerful.

Eusebia So that's why. You intend to call him back in order to murder him.

Constantius I have no choice.

Eusebia And what will you do then, when you have disposed of your last relative, the only able man of the empire, and when I have died and left you and you yourself have turned in, while the Persians and Germans come flooding across the borders? What have you done to consolidate the realm? Nothing. You only consolidated yourself, your position and your own forever rotting grave, a monstrous example to Christianity.

Constantius Stop it.

Eusebia Cease yourself your morbid self-destructivity.

Constantius You are hopeless.

Eusebia I know.

Eusebius Your highness, pardon me, but there seems to have arrived a message from the north.

Constantius From Julian?

Eusebius No. Florentius.

Constantius Then it's bad news. Let's hear it.

Eusebius Here is the courier.
courier (*enters, throws himself on his knees before the emperor*) My emperor, greetings from my general Florentius.
Constantius What does he have to say? Has Julian won another victory?
courier It's worse than that. He has proclaimed himself emperor by his troops.
Constantius Impossible. He would never do a thing like that. He isn't like that.
courier He has done it.
Constantius So instead of sending me his qualified army and help me against Parthia, he marches against me. Is that the case?
Eusebius Your majesty, I have heard that the troops refused to accept being sent across half the world to Parthia and that they therefore spontaneously proclaimed Julian Augustus.
Constantius So he is forced to a civil war by his own army? Is that the case?
courier Yes, that's how it is.
Constantius I should never have given him that army. Well, now it is too late, and I will march anyway against Persia. He has no chance in the long run. He has no resources and only a tenth of our strength, and he has Italy and Illyria to overcome. He will never manage that. Like all else he will be driven to perdition by the power and the armies.
Eusebia But he is entirely uncorrupted. That could save him. The whole empire is with him.
Constantius Are you suggesting that he could win?
Eusebia I suggest that it is unavoidable. Now I can die in peace. (*retires*)
Constantius Eusebius, what do you mean? Has he any chances?
Eusebius None at all. You could confidently defeat the Persians.
Constantius He will manage his destruction by himself. I wash my hands. We must gather our armies in Antioch.
Eusebius Enemies first, then the traitors.
Constantius Exactly. (*They go to work.*)

Scene 3. Helena's deathbed.

Helena Julian, I am sorry that I cannot do anything more for you.
Julian On the contrary, Helena. I am the one who is not sufficient for you.
Helena All lacks were mine. I gave you three children, and they all died.
Julian It was not your fault.
Helena It was the fault of the power. Either they were murdered by order of the power, or it was the stress of our position that made me incapable of breeding healthy children.
Julian In either case it was not your fault.
Helena It was the fault of the power, which now when I pass away will take care of you alone. That's the only thing I am afraid of. Power and its destruction of

everything human was the only thing I ever feared, and I had reason to fear it for what it did to my brother, whom it turned into the most ruthless murderer and maddest monster of cruelty.

Julian Don't be too hard on him.

Helena He gave me for your wife just to be able to control you. For years I had to write daily reports to him about you. Or else he would have killed me also. He indirectly kills everyone who at all dares to approach him. That's how power works with its influence. Both I and the empress Eusebia tried to save you from it. Now we are both gone, and you will be left without guardian angels. Promise me to resist the evil of power at any cost, for your own sake. That's the only thing and everything I will ever ask of you.

Julian I promise. Rather than risking happening to become responsible for anything evil or unfair in the name of power I will leave it aside and vanish.

Helena As an emperor you can't just vanish. No emperor ever succeeded in that.

Julian Did anyone try?

Helena No. They all allowed themselves to be chained to corruption, stayed on and enjoyed losing their souls.

Julian I have contacts as far away as in Persia. In the east I would be able to disappear without a trace into a better world, if it would prove necessary.

Helena Then you can still save your soul.

Julian As long as you know yourself at all you can save it.

Helena You can never know yourself and be sure about it, since every soul has unlimited prospects both for the total self-annihilation of an empty black hole, and for universal enlightenment.

Julian I prefer the latter.

Helena Do you think you could make it?

Julian Or else I would not try. Only for the possibility of that prospect I will try.

Helena Then I can only wish you good luck and regret that I cannot follow you any longer, which I honestly wish I could.

Julian You will always remain with me.

Helena Yes, I will. Thank you for allowing me.

Julian I will never let you go.

Helena But I will have to let you go - at least for the sake of the temporary death.

Julian That is unescapable.

Helena Leave me now, my love, and let me die in peace. I need to concentrate and collect myself. We will reunite in eternity if not before then.

Julian We have united to not even let death separate us.

Helena If only that would be the case.

Nevitta (enters) Pardon me, Augustus, but the emperor's troops have recaptured Aquileia.

Julian Our most important harbour!

Helena Go to your duties, my emperor, and vanquish all the emperors of the world. I give you allowance and that mandate.

Julian My love. (*presses her hand tenderly in a farewell.*) I must go.

Helena Me too.

Nevitta The generals are waiting.

Helena Don't let the war wait for you. Then it will take charge.

Julian (*kisses her hand for a departure and leaves with Nevitta*)

Helena (*lets her hand fall down*) There our last physical contact was broken. Let's see now if and how the spiritual will work. (*lays her hands in a cross across her bosom and closes her eyes for the advent of death.*)

Scene 4.

Constantius I am as broken as all this entire failure of a world realm, torn asunder by inner fights and outer barbarians, quibbling fanatics and subversive schismatics, by enemies both at home and outside, all worse and more hopeless than all the others. Why then have I lived? Just to add to the havoc and make the situation worse. All reasonable Roman emperors have dreamt of reintroducing the republic, but no one even tried. Will Julian attempt it and succeed when I am gone? No, he will fail like all the others. If he is lucky he will not have to be emperor for very long.

Eusebius, I am gone to hell. Everything is prepared and ready both for the war against the Persians and my nephew's rebellion from the west, but I am all washed up and can do nothing.

Eusebius You have the greatest army mobilized for your defense that the world has ever seen.

Constantius Do you think that will help when the whole world is rotten? My father gave me this world empire for an inheritance like a dead rotting whale, and with the heritage followed all the fake advisers and flatterers, eunuchs and arse-lickers, who only existed to boost the emperor's morbid and mortal vanity by smothering him to death by disgusting flattery, like by drowning him in syrup. I wanted just to vomit about it all, but the vomit always stuck in my throat and never found a regular outlet. Now I will have to get more than just my vomit stuck in the throat when my nephew succeeded in occupying all Illyria and Italy in no time while at the same time I have to leave the stage to campaign against the Persians. I am as diseased as the entire world empire, Eusebius.

Eusebius Florentius is here.

Constantius He will have to wait. I have to go to the toilet first and puke myself down and unload all my shit to fill the drain, so that his bad news won't give me even worse diarrheas than what's inevitable. I would rather drown him as well in my shit down the drain, that disgusting opportunist.

Eusebius Shall I tell him you are indisposed?

Constantius No, tell him the truth. Tell him that I am sitting and shitting on the toilet. (*leaves*)

Eusebius He leaves me alone with the bearer of bad news. Bad news used to be enough for the bearer of them to be executed, but Christianity changed all that, and the general demoralization is running wild. Here we have now the miserable general.

Florentius (enters) I was hoping to meet the emperor. Is he indisposed?

Eusebius He just went for some small business.

Florentius I understand. Was it urgent?

Eusebius Very.

Florentius How is his health by the way? There is a rumour that the general stress has become too much for his health to cope with.

Eusebius There is never any rumour without exaggerations. He has caught a slight cold. That is all.

Florentius Is it serious?

Eusebius Not at all.

Florentius The lungs?

Eusebius No, the stomach.

Florentius A cold in the stomach?

Eusebius Draft. A constant rush to the stools.

Florentius Is it that bad?

Eusebius No, not bad at all. Just annoying.

Florentius Is he doing it in the pants?

Eusebius All the time.

Florentius I see. He didn't want to do it in front of me.

Eusebius He doesn't want to do it in front of anyone.

Florentius Of course.

Eusebius It always passes.

Florentius After some time, yes. But isn't he supposed to campaign against the Parthians? Then you can't sit and shit in the saddle.

Eusebius He has no intention to.

Florentius But when it comes, no one can stop it.

Eusebius That is obvious.

Florentius So he is doing well, if you just disregard - the cold?

Eusebius As well as you can do under constant stress and exhausting wars on several fronts.

Florentius Has he aged very much?

Eusebius He is tired but not old.

Florentius Is he very tired?

Eusebius Not more tired than that he can keep it up.

Florentius For how long?

Eusebius No one knows. He has in any case secured eternity for himself by becoming an Arian.

Florentius That might amount to his most difficult war. Anastasios and his adherents want to extirpate all Arians.

Eusebius They are only half of Christianity. The other half is Arian like the emperor.

Florentius But isn't he sitting rather long on the toilet? Shouldn't he come out soon?

Eusebius Yes.

Florentius Shall we see if something is the matter?

Eusebius We could always enquire about his health through the door.

Florentius Let's not be hindered by any ceremonies.
(*They proceed to a cabinet door. Eusebius knocks prudently.*)

Eusebius Your highness, is everything all right?
(*No answer.*)

Florentius I hope he hasn't gone to sleep?

Eusebius Hardly, since he suffers from permanent insomnia. No one falls asleep in the toilet, since everyone quickly just want to get out of there.

Florentius Why then doesn't he answer?

Eusebius That is the question.

Florentius As his closest eunuch you must still have some experience from your emperor's earlier visits to the toilet?

Eusebius He has never been so quiet and busy there for so long before.

Florentius Knock again.

Eusebius (*knocks*) Your majesty...

Florentius We had better get in and see if anything has happened.

Eusebius Should we really interrupt him?

Florentius How long should we wait?

Eusebius Until he is finished.

Florentius But he never gets finished.

Eusebius Then I really don't know how we should get around the protocol.

Florentius (*tries the door*) It is open.

Eusebius Yes, he never locks it.

Florentius You should have said that before. (*opens*) Your imperial majesty...
(*the opening shows the emperor sitting slumped on the stool with his pants down*)

Eusebius Things are really not quite all right here. Your majesty! Wake up! (*tries to wake him up*)

Florentius Can't you see that he is dead?

Eusebius Dead? Impossible. Emperors don't die sitting in the toilet.

Florentius We all must die somewhere.

Eusebius But not sitting on the toilet!

Florentius Try then to wake him up.

Eusebius Your majesty! (*shakes the emperor, who then slides down from the stool quite lifeless.*)

Florentius There you are. He is dead.

Eusebius But it must not happen like that! It is against all imperial protocol!

Florentius Obviously he didn't give a damn about protocol.

Eusebius This must never reach the public. No one must know how and where he died. He died in his bed of a cold. Is that clear?

Florentius You know the protocol better than I and therefore know best how to cover it up with lies.

Eusebius Come! Get him out of there! And get him into his pants! This is not decent!

Florentius He doesn't give a shit. What's worse, this can only mean one thing.

Eusebius What?

Florentius Julian is now emperor.

Eusebius Woe betide us!

Florentius Why?

Eusebius He is no Christian.

Florentius Then he will have to become one, like all the others. Constantine converted only for the sake of politics. Julian is no worse politician than Constantine.

Eusebius I fear this new situation. It could lead to anything. All we can do is to at least save the dead emperor's face.

Florentius Yes. We will have to put on his pants, although he won't need them any more.

Eusebius How could he possibly have died?

Florentius Many die by just shitting their pants off. It is no more than human. We don't hear about it, for in all cases the survivors are extremely meticulous about getting the pants properly on the poor wrecks.

Eusebius But an emperor! It ain't worthy!

Florentius Yes, you said that already. You forget, that even an emperor is no more than just a man.

Act IV scene 1. The new court at Constantinople.

Courtier Who is this Julian, our new emperor, a quite young man and an empty leaf? What do we know about him? What may we expect of him?

Priscus I will tell you. He is the hope of the world, the only hope we have had for a hundred years, the best chance of a renewal the Roman Empire has seen since the days of Trajan.

courtier But they say he is no Christian.

Priscus At last someone who isn't! At last someone who for that very reason is capable of turning the world upside down, put Christianity in its proper place, dust it off and restore order!

courtier If he turns against Christianity there will be total disorder all around the world.

Priscus No, he turns away from it! He turns it right! He doesn't bother about it to instead mind what's important and the world order!

courtier We can't turn back. Christianity has conquered the world to remain in charge of it. We are here to stay. If Julian in the least tries to upset Christianity there will only be total civil war.

Priscus You don't seem to get it. He gives the damn about Christianity. He doesn't bother about it. He leaves it alone and behind as the backward superstition it is. It is by the way Christianity which is accountable for all the civil wars in the world with its eternally piteous schisms and quarrels over one single letter in their absurd creed!

courtier Do you mean, Priscus, that Julian takes a distance himself from his predecessor's Arianism?

Priscus He detaches himself from all hairsplitting and pettiness, limitations and superstitious backwardness! That's why he dissociates himself from Christianity! Have you got it?

courtier Constantine the Great made Christianity an official religion of state once and for all.

Priscus (gives up) No, he hasn't got it.

Libanius Here comes the emperor now. He seems to take it rather easy.

courtier (falls on his knees, like so many others) Hell, Caesar Augustus! But we miss a diadem on your head. No purple? No solemn enthronement? No ceremonies?

Julian (has entered like a simple man) Augustus himself appeared simply without manners and encumberments like vanity, etiquette and ceremonies. I am just an ordinary man, and no title will put any mask on me. I only came here to proclaim my immediate program of reforms.

(sits down on the throne and produces a document)

From now on religious freedom will rule in the entire Roman Empire. No one may be persecuted for the sake of his religion. All temples that were ruined by the Christians to be transformed into churches will be restored to their original condition by the Christians themselves at their own cost. No religion shall ever again be made an official religion of state. No god shall be considered more than any other god, since all divine manifestations are an expression of the same universal divinity – everything worshipped shall have the same sacred status, whether it be called Apollo or Aphrodite or Jesus or Zeus or anything else.

courtier Pardon me, Caesar Augustus, but will you then return to the days of Diocletian with full licence for everyone to persecute all Christians?

Julian Don't be ridiculous. We are all just human beings, nothing else, Christians or non-Christians, and no one will be more than anyone else just because he considers himself more holy than anyone else. Everyone shall be equal in the face of the law, which excludes all privileges. That's how simple it is.

courtier It would take a lifetime to implement such a reform.

Julian What luck then that I am young and will have time to implement it. This whole world empire needs to be pulled out of the swamp into which it has gone down by sinking into religious alienation, and it is therefore my first duty as an emperor to bring back the empire to reality. Christendom is nothing but an escape

from reality, which must have a harmful impact on the world order by division and mental confusion. (*rises again from the throne*) But to the reality we need to update, that war also belongs which Persia has challenged us to by ruining the flourishing city of Amida.

Libanius King Shapur has expressed a wish to send a delegation for negotiations of peace.

Julian So he wants to gain time to be able to keep what he has taken away from us. The case is not so simple. Among us we have since of old Ormisdas, the rightful heir to the throne of Persia, which Shapur and his family have usurped. It is our duty to restore Ormisdas to the throne that belongs to him, and the war which Shapur has made against us is our golden opportunity to do so.

courtier If I remember correctly Ormisdas is a Christian?

Julian Yes.

courtier It gives us great pleasure that you wish to carry on the emperor Constantius' war against the barbarians.

Libanius It could amount to a long and bloody fight. Wouldn't peace be preferred, if we have the possibility?

Julian Libanius, my dear teacher, we can't leave the Persian war unfinished. My uncle Constantius gathered an enormous army in Antioch which is just waiting to crush this Persia, which always has kept stabbing us in the back. No one has been able to pacify Persia since the days of Alexander the Great. Now we have the chance. We can't afford to miss it.

Libanius What do you want to accomplish?

Julian An enlightened world empire in good order under the guidance of enlightenment with the constant expansion which Trajan and Marcus Aurelius advocated and also implemented, under the constant overthrow of tyrants for the spreading of our culture, civilization and good order of society with sound civil rights for everyone who sticks to the law that must be equal for everybody.

Libanius You spoke about pulling our empire back to reality. Is it then realistic to wage on a conquest of all Persia to place this Christian Ormisdas on its throne as a Roman tributary king?

Julian No, as an equal king, like the king of Armenia, who is also Christian.

Libanius I would never for a moment trust any Christian concerning power and world politics.

Julian You don't have to. That's my headache now. But your question is reasonable. Alexander coped with Persia, so we can also do it. But we must take one step at a time one day at a time and see what happens. To begin with we must at last set Constantius' army in action against Persia, for which purpose it was created. We will first concentrate on Ctesiphon, where Euphrates and Tigris join together. If we succeed in taking Ctesiphon, we have all Persia in our hand. That's all we need.

Libanius Good luck, Julian Caesar Augustus.

Priscus I will follow him and watch him.

Libanius Do so. Make sure he keeps in control.

Priscus Trust me. I am no Christian.
Libanius But half his army will be.
Priscus The worse part. Almost all officers are educated.
Libanius Watch out indeed with those who aren't for they are Christians.
Priscus Trust me.

Scene 2. Antioch.

Some Christians reasoning.

1 Does anyone know how far he will go?
2 We have to prepare for the worst. He has already got started. The condition for the Christians to restore all ruined temples at their own cost is just an indication. Covertly he has started a campaign to by defamation and propaganda completely undermine Christianity.
3 It is not acceptable.
4 That's what I mean.
1 But he is also sensible and competent at that, and he is already compared to Marcus Aurelius.
2 Even Marcus Aurelius persecuted the Christians.
1 But Julian doesn't.
3 Not yet.
1 There is no indication that he will. He doesn't hate us. He only disdains us and is indifferent to all Christianity. I guess he became allergic to it as a child when his entire family was extirpated by express Christian emperors and so hardened that he turned indifferent.
2 The danger lies in wait, and we cannot ignore it. His policy will only have negative consequences to world Christianity. He has already pulled the ground from under our feet by denationalising the church and making us pay for Christianized temples besides the humiliation of forcing us to restore them.
3 He must not survive this Persian campaign.
4 No. He must not return alive to Constantinople.
1 And what Christian will then take on the responsibility of murdering a competent emperor?
2 There is only one way. We must steal some Christian into his immediate presence, some cupbearer or chamberlain, who always will remain in his presence and who then on an appropriate occasion could poison him.
5 It will not work. He is too fit. He has very basic routines and never gluttons in food or drink. If he fell ill it would raise suspicions, since he never falls naturally sick. No, he must be mortally wounded by some man who in the heat of a battle could stick a lance in his side.
3 We must simply wait for the right moment.
4 Exactly.

1 Do you realize what you are doing? He lives as an ascetic in celibacy like a saint and is the best emperor we have had since Marcus Aurelius. He is wise and highly educated, has read everything and is a brilliant speaker, and all people are for him.

2 Except the Christians, who uniformly condemn and curse him as an apostate.

1 Because they feel threatened by his doubts and criticism, but how real is that threat? Is it actual or just something we imagine? We can't know, but I believe it is the latter.

2 Are you with us or against us?

5 Consider that all Christianity is in danger and only Julian's death could save it.

1 I wash my hands and will not interfere. Do what you will, and I will not betray you, and if you sacrifice the best emperor of Rome for the sake of Christianity, the only thing I will do about it is to keep my mouth shut, since there will be no lack of others to accuse you. I just want no part of any responsibility in a Christian imperial murder.

2 Then you can leave. We will keep you out of it. (*1 leaves.*)

To the point. Who shall we place in his vicinity as our agent and his appropriate murderer?

Scene 3. Inside a tent.

Julian I would rather never return to Constantinople, Sallust. That city gives me the creeps by its imperialism. No matter how much I was born an emperor, an emperor and man of power is the last thing I am in myself. Maybe I should have given in to Constantius' wish that I returned to my studies in Athens. Then we would have done without both the civil war and this Persian war.

Sallust Rome can't spare you, Julian. You are the right man in the right place and indispensable as such. Only you can turn history right again.

Julian There never should have been any emperor at all. Julius Caesar was competent but drowned in his ambitions and was intoxicated by his vanity. Both Claudius and Marcus Aurelius wanted to restore the republic.

Sallust You can do that when you have prevailed over the Persians.

Julian That would almost be the only thing I could have to live for as an emperor. Everything else is just a bother and vanity, powerlessness and boredom, constant overstrain and insomnia, and extreme troubles and conflicts with no end to them. I long home to the quiet reflections and studies of Homer and Plutarch, Plato and Plotinus and the great tragedians.

Sallust When Rome is a republic again you will be a free man who can do whatever you want.

Julian You give me something to live for.

Sallust I give you something important to do as an emperor.

Julian Let's take Ctesiphon first, so that we get the right man on the throne of Persia. That is really my only ambition as a man, Sallust, to do what is right. If you just do that, life is worth living under any circumstances. The problem about humanity is that most people prefer to do what is wrong, and the worst thing about that is that the Christians in the name of Christianity command it and want to make it lawful.

Sallust Therefore the old believers will be victorious. The hellenists will prevail over the Christians by their common sense and tolerance.

Julian Don't forget the Jews.

Sallust The Christian fanaticism has its origin in the Jews.

Julian But if we restore all the fallen temples, we must also restore those of the Jews. Or else we are not consistent.

Sallust You are and remain an idealist with an urge for justice that will go at any length.

Julian I am an emperor, Sallust. Without those qualities I would have no right to be an emperor.

(enter Nevitta.)

Well, Nevitta, what news about the outrageous conspiracy against my life?

Nevitta All Christian officers are behind it.

Julian Of course. But they can't do it themselves, so whom shall they inveigle to do it? All Christianity is helplessly a self-contradictory paradox. It is the religion of love, but it only breeds division and hatred, and no matter how much they preach to love your neighbour, it is almost like a self-evident duty and unwritten law of theirs that all non-Christians must be abhorred and extirpated. They preach turning the other cheek to whatever you are subject to, but conspire to murder their emperor which they can't carry through since they fear the eternal fire of hell that will be the eternal punishment for every murder, but they regard me, who never murdered anyone, as already burning in the eternal damnation of hellfire. How could anyone ever accept the mortal and inhuman self-deceit of fanaticism? Is humanity then so hopeless that it has to be regarded as damned forever by its own lunacy and stupidity, with some unhappy few exceptions, who have to live with this hell that they see through, which no one sees through who takes part in it?

Nevitta The conspiracy must be taken seriously. They will not cease until they at least have tried, and they will not try until they believe themselves certain of success.

Julian So it's just to wait for them and go on as usual until that day comes. I have nothing against becoming a martyr to Christian fanaticism. Rather that, than die like my uncle completely dehumanised by his paranoia, bitter and sick on the toilet.

Sallust It is just a rumour.

Julian So effectively smothered since it's probably true.

Nevitta Wouldn't it be safest anyway to interrupt the campaign and return home while we still only have victories to celebrate?

Julian Now you sound like Libanius and all other wise cowards. Shall we then give up when we are at the most victorious? We almost succeeded in taking Ctesiphon! We would perhaps have taken the capital if general Victor hadn't turned coward and hesitated. We still haven't heard anything from Procopius, who would have been here long ago with his army, and we don't know why he is so silent.

Nevitta Perhaps he is a Christian and expects news about your death.

Julian He is first of all my general and has to obey my orders. He hasn't done that or been unable to. As long as we don't know what is the matter with him we will have to stay here. If he has happened to some disaster we must retreat, if he is on his way we had better stay where we are, and if he is only refractory, we will learn about that as well. What do you think, Sallust?

Sallust I am afraid that Nevitta is right, that he is just waiting for the news of your death.

Julian Then we must not let him wait, must we? Let's interrupt the siege of Ctesiphon. Give the orders of march to the north.

Sallust And what about king Shapur's peacemaker? Shall we leave his offer of peace unanswered?

Julian We still haven't got Ormisdas on to his throne. As long as there is hope for our getting there, we will leave Shapur quaking.

Sallust It is as if you lived most of all just to constantly increase the tension of your tightened string. The Christians threaten your life in an unknown conspiracy, Procopius keeps you in constantly increasing tension by refusing to communicate or to arrive with his army, while the position of your army for that reason just grows more tense by the increasing crisis of uncertainty, while you still believe you could conquer all Asia. Or do you?

Julian If Procopius comes we could. If he doesn't come we can't. He hasn't, and I have given up my Alexandrian dreams. We can never become like him, since he was too unique. I am just the last one of his epigons, and my nemesis is Christianity, if Procopius is a Christian.

Nevitta He *is* a Christian. That's the only reason why he sabotages you.

Sallust Then we will have to deal with him and in the meantime allow Shapur to win. It gives us all great pain, the Roman Empire, the world and me, since we could have surpassed Alexander.

Act V scene 1. Delphi, same scene as act I scene 1.

Mirella How did it happen when he died?

Chrysantheus No one knows. During our retreat north we were constantly attacked in the back by the Persians. In one of those skirmishes Julian had a lance in his side which struck his liver. It could not be pulled out. It was not possible to save his life. But he gave his own brilliant funeral oration in the presence of his generals.

Mirella Was it then as everybody says the Persians who wounded him to death and not any Christian?

Chrysanthus Libanius always asserted that the spear was Roman, so he was killed by his own, probably insidiously from behind in the protection of the heat of the battle. When Theodosius became the last emperor of the entire Roman Empire, Libanius implored him to open an investigation of the case of Julian, since he claimed to have evidence that Julian had fallen a victim to a Christian conspiracy. Theodosius was a Christian and refused. He was also the one who forbade all religious practice except that of Christianity. Thereby he gave the Christians full licence to with their hearts' delight carry through the destruction of all hellenistic temples. Thereby they could ruin and plunder the Serapion in Alexandria and murder the last librarian of the library without risk of any charges.

Mirella What was Libanius' evidence?

Chrysanthus That we shall never know. He claimed he had in his possession Julian's own diary and journal, and that he himself had heard the real murderer's confession long afterwards. He wanted to publish the diary and journal, but Theodosius refused.

Mirella But all Julian's other writings have been preserved.

Chrysanthus Yes, all except the most important one.

Mirella Where is it now?

Chrysanthus One day it will appear and be made public. You can't suppress the truth at length, and the harder you try, the more definitely it will avenge itself, especially concerning such a person as Julian, for he was not like everyone else. He was the brilliant exception who proved eternity and the hope of it and of humanity in spite of all, for as an idealist he was incurable. He would never have given up. If he had been able to continue, the Hellenic-Roman civilization would have comprised not only Persia but also the countries of the wild Germans north of the Rhine and Danube. He was as invincible as Alexander as long as he lived.

Mirella But died even younger.

Chrysanthus Yes, a year younger and young enough to never die.

Scene 2. Julian's deathbed in the tent. Generals and friends are present around him.

Julian My friends, I am not dying one day to soon. And I am not sorry at all. We must all pay back the life we were given as a loan when the creditor comes for a visit, and the more willing we pay, the less painful is the transition, and the lighter the liberation, for death is only about the liberation of the soul from the body, a good liberation, for the soul is always a source of good health while the body always falls sick. It is just an instrument to be entertained and used until it is spent and no more can be tuned and repaired. Then you leave it behind and get yourself a new one. I die happy, since I have nothing to regret. I brought you to victory over the Persians and was called off by the gods before the war had time to grow into a disappointment.

You have won a great decisive victory today, and you should all be able to get home without harm and without difficulty. Concerning my successor, I leave that choice to you. I will not take the risk of choosing the best one who then immediately would risk getting liquidated. I leave it to you to choose the best one, whoever he might be. Whatever you do, don't cry. I am the one who should cry for you. Leave me now with my closest of kin, so that I like Cato the younger may end my life's conversation in discussions over Plato's Phaidon.

. (The generals leave. Only Priscus and Sallust remain.)

Well, Priscus, did I deliver it well?

Priscus Few have been granted the favour of being able to deliver their own funeral oration, and you did it honourably. You have surpassed Marcus Aurelius.

Julian I have neglected my responsibility for him and his legacy.

Priscus It wasn't your fault. The spear that reached your liver was Roman.

Julian I know.

Priscus You know who did it?

Julian Without mentioning anyone, it could only have been one. They will choose you, Sallust, for my successor, since you are the best one.

Sallust Then I had better decline, since it is best for all that I remain alive to be able to continue your work.

Julian All those who deserve the principate will decline. Therefore the next emperor will be a mediocrity, probably an uneducated Christian military thug.

Sallust The more important that I stick to life.

Julian And you have your students, Priscus. My spiritual legacy, which I got from you, I return in safe custody to you. I have no worries that at least your students never will get any wrong opinion of me.

Priscus The truth always prevails and must one day even triumph over the Christian confusion.

Julian Speak no evil of the Christians. They believe in God, like we all do.

Priscus But they claim a monopoly.

Julian That's their problem. We have our Phaidon. With Plato and Socrates we are safe from them. – Well, Maximus, my private high priest, what have you to say about my departure, you, who always claimed to know more about divinity and death than anyone else? Have you even read Phaidon?

Maximus (treads forth, has difficulties in controlling his emotion) My beloved emperor, I consider it the maximal divine injustice that you, the best of all emperors, are to be called off with all your promising life's work only initially started on.

Julian It is not my fault. It is nobody's fault. Don't accuse the gods. It just happened that way.

Priscus And if the spear was thrown by a Christian, should we then not accuse the Christians?

Julian Them least of all, for if they were not responsible...

Priscus You know very well that they conspired against your life.

Julian If they were responsible, they did not know what they were doing. Their ignorance is to be regretted, not accused. No one is responsible for what he does not know and can't understand. If they consider all books to be unnecessary except their dilettantish gospel in four self-contradictory versions, where most of it was contrived posthumously, they sentence themselves to the doom of the comfortless vanity of ignorance, and all which they then can be held accountable for is the cultivation and worsening of their own stupidity. I am glad that I don't have to see and argue with them any more. Religious one-sidedness and indoctrination is the worst thing there is, for it bereaves people of their brains, common sense and soul. The only cure is knowledge and enlightenment. Therefore knowledge is the highest power of all, as Socrates so correctly pointed out, when he said, that the more you know, the more you know that you don't know. Knowledge of the insufficiency of all knowledge is somehow the key to the highest knowledge, for the imagined security in believing that you know is the fool's crown, which only makes him ridiculous. The uncertainty in the consciousness of the insufficiency of all knowledge is the way to constantly growing wisdom, for then you quite naturally demand of yourself to constantly learn more.

Don't be sorry, Maximus. Death will pass. Life will pass. Everything will pass. I will always remain, as long as you think of me. I will be rid of myself, for which I am happy, for then I am also rid of the sick paranoia that binds all established power in the slavery of self-reliance. Instead I will be free and able to laugh at the Christian fools forever without their being able to get at me.

Sallust What do you really have against the Christians? Is your apostasy just a result of your whole family having been extirpated in the name of Christianity?

Julian You provoke me, Sallust, and ask a leading question. My taking a stand against them was only based on reason. What I instinctively have against them and all dogmatic conditioned religions is that it destroys spiritual freedom and kills imagination. The Hellenic mythology consists of inspired and inspiring tales, which uplifts the soul and liberates it by its beauty and charm. Homer is only constructive. Christianity is only destructive. I am in my heart and soul a democrat and would as emperor rather have reestablished the Roman republic, now there is no more time for that, and as such I am instinctively against every kind of slavery, especially spiritual slavery, which is what Christianity wants to enforce universally. It will not work.

Maximus Would you then have eradicated Christianity if you had lived on?

Julianus If I had been allowed to live I had forced it to realize its own absurdity and either reform itself in the course of tolerance, which Origen tried, or dissolved and extirpated itself. I wouldn't have had to eradicate it. General enlightenment and knowledge would have neutralised it. Evil is always self-destructive and digs its own grave. I always refused to have anything to do with it. Let it burn out like an ordinary illness, and it will sober up and then pass away.

Maximus Like life and death, my beloved emperor? How will we then reach you after death?

Julian In time you will come and join me. That's how simple it is. No one is ever lonesome in death, for that is when he is reunited with all his old friends. Just take it easy and live as long as you can, and then we'll meet again later on. Life is a trifle, and death laughs it out as the greatest of jokes, for life never triumphs more than in death. That's the sum of Plato's and Socrates' Phaidon.

Sallust Thank you, Julian.

Julian No, I am to thank you, for having been allowed to live and have you for my friends. That friendship will never die. Trust me. *(He starts bleeding copiously.)*

Sallust The liver is the organ that never complains until it dies.

Julian (in difficult pains, recovers with hard effort) It felt just like a mild blow. I had no pains and hardly felt anything at all. The gods have given me a knockdown blow with gentle charity, and not until now I feel for serious that it is all over. Farewell, my friends. We continue to blend in the golden dreams that never reach an end. *(dies)*

Sallust (closes his eyes) It feels as if the whole world came to an end at this moment.

Priscus The civilized one, and we are obliged to live on in the uncivilized one.

Sallust Alas, this annoying humanity, that it never can take better care of its brilliant exceptions!

Priscus You don't begin to understand them until it is too late, and then it is too late.

Sallust Save your truisms for your students. A man like Julian no one will ever begin to understand, which is why they always will continue to make the effort. Maybe that's the continuity which in spite of all could save humanity.

Priscus Yes, Sallust, there are in spite of all always those who always will continue trying.

Sallust Come, my friends. Let's take care of the poor soldiers without a leader.

(takes care of them both, and they leave.)

(Julian is left alone in his blood on his bed.)

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Postscript

The play is mainly based on Edward Gibbon, Viktor Rydberg and Gore Vidal with their great examples – Gibbon's only masterpiece "*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*" is well known and stylistically impossible to match, where almost a twelfth of the entire work is committed to Julian and his age. Viktor Rydberg's "*The last Athenian*" is his greatest and perhaps the most underrated of Swedish novels, and Gore Vidal's "*Julian*" written during five years in Rome (1957-62) is probably the best work this American classic has written. The scene and characters of the introduction (with also Act V scene 1) are borrowed from Viktor Rydberg, the rest is mainly inspired by Gore Vidal, who though keeps strictly to the accounts of facts by Gibbon and others. Only Julian's final mystery is still unsolved.

Also Henrik Ibsen wrote a play of Julian, "*Emperor and Galilean*", his greatest and most important work before "*Brand*". We studied this play 30 years ago but have completely forgotten it today and left it alone in projecting this work, to be certain about being completely free from any suspicion of having borrowed anything from the great Ibsen.

There were two Sallusts around Julian. The first one was left in Gaul, but he later found another in the Orient. We have made them one person for dramaturgic and natural reasons.