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Dramatic Publishing

A Play in Three Acts

Dramatized by

JOHN MCGREEVEY

from the Novel by

LLOYD C. DOUGLAS

The Robe



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE ROBE)

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The Robe

A Play in Three Acts

FOR THIRTEEN MEN, NINE WOMEN, AND EXTRAS *

CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

STEPHANOS
SARAH
MELAS
DEMETRIUS
MARCELLUS GALLIO
CENTURION PAULUS
PONTIUS PILATE
CAPTAIN FULVIUS
LUCIA GALLIO
DIANA GALLUS
HELEN
CORNELIA GALLIO
SENATOR GALLIO
PHOEBE EUPOLIS
THEODOSIA EUPOLIS
QUINTUS LUCIAN
RHODA
SIMON PETER
TIBERIUS
CALIGULA
SARPEDON
SALOME
EXTRAS

* Several of the male roles can be doubled, namely Paulus and Tiberius, Melas and Sarpedon, Pilate and Simon Peter. Other male roles can double as guards and guests in the banquet scenes.

His prematurely white hair lends added dignity.

PHOEBE: She is a pleasant woman in her forties, cheerful and understanding.

THEODOSIA: She is a charming, forthright young girl in her late teens or early twenties. She has a keen mind and depth of feeling.

QUINTUS: He is a fattish, loose-lipped young man, arrogant and peevish—a true bully.

RHODA: She is an attractive, intense girl in her late teens.

SIMON PETER: He is a large man, rough looking, and simple in his speech and manner.

TIBERIUS: He is incredibly old, gaunt, and yellow. His imperial robes hang on his shrunken frame like rags upon a scarecrow.

CALIGULA: He is a pasty-faced young man in his early twenties. His movement, his speech, his dress all convey an inner deformity. His eyes are shifty, and his lips hang half open in a perpetual leer.

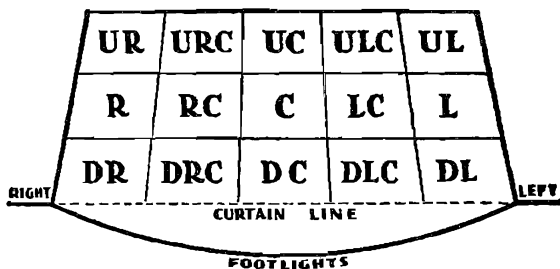
SARPEDON: He is a sullen, peevish man in his late thirties. He covers up his inadequacies with an officious air.

SALOME: She is a beautiful woman, though rather hard looking and over-dressed. An inner bitterness detracts from her beauty.

COSTUMES

Costuming should suggest, rather than strive for complete accuracy of detail. Any of the several costume books dealing with this period will provide excellent ideas. Costumes need not be elaborate; the simpler the better, since the material of the play is timeless and elaborate costuming may well detract from, rather than add to, the impact of the play.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PRODUCTION NOTES

"The Robe" can be effectively staged with the greatest simplicity. A set of black or gray draperies provides you with your background for all scenes.

Against these draperies, simply place a few set pieces and you will achieve an effect that will carry any of the scenes.

If possible, a number of simulated classic pillars can be constructed and used interchangeably to produce different effects in Scenes Two and Three of Act One and Scenes One, Two, and Three of Act Three. These easily constructed pillars, plus your draperies, plus three simple arches for entrances and exits will give you your basic setting.

Emphasis here should fall upon the story rather than its physical setting, and so the greatest simplification is recommended.

At the beginning of each scene, a setting is suggested. In every case, it can be easily adjusted to suit your limitations of space and equipment.

PROPERTIES

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE:

Paraphernalia of Roman soldiers, including, if desired, spears, shields, helmets, bulky wineskin, cups, leather dice cup and dice.

Jug (DEMETRIUS).

The Robe (MELAS).

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO:

Colorful banners and busts (optional).

Banquet table, containing remains of banquet: dishes, wine cups, etc.

Benches.

The Robe (DEMETRIUS).
Ornate scroll (FULVIUS).
Small bag (MELAS).

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE:

Couch.
Bench.
Table and high-backed chair.
Crown of roses (LUCIA).
Large bag containing the Robe (DEMETRIUS).
Ornate dagger (DEMETRIUS).

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE:

Three benches.
Two chairs.
Scroll (MARCELLUS).
Market basket (PHOEBE).
Bag containing the Robe and ornate dagger (DEMETRIUS).

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO:

Two scrolls (MARCELLUS).
Ornate scroll (QUINTUS).
Dagger (QUINTUS).
Basin of water and towels (PHOEBE).

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE:

Long work table.
Smaller table and stool.
Upturned tub.
Bench.
Various pieces of cloth, yarn, and other evidences of weaver's trade.
Bundle containing the Robe (MARCELLUS).
Shepherd's crook (SIMON).

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE:

Couch and two chairs.
Two benches.
Urns filled with shrubs and flowers (optional).

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO:

Blood-soaked bandage (DEMETRIUS).

ACT THREE, SCENE THREE:

Banquet table on dais.

Two other banquet tables.

Benches.

Remains of banquet: dishes, wine cups, etc., on banquet tables.

Heavy bracelet (CALIGULA).

Gold locket (SALOME).

The Robe (MARCELLUS).

ACT ONE

Scene One

SCENE: *A sheltered spot on the hill called Golgotha, outside Jerusalem. The crest of the hill lies just offstage U L, and the path leading back to Jerusalem winds from a point U L, downstage, and off D R. A few dirty-looking grey boulders are piled about here and there. In a little semicircle just slightly right of C stage is a clutter of paraphernalia belonging to the Roman soldiers. There are spears, shields and helmets. Leaning against a large boulder U C, is a bulky wineskin. There are cups on the ground nearby. A leather dice cup and dice are near the wineskin, too.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is Good Friday. There is a low, ominous rumble of thunder. The twilight darkness which holds the stage seems somehow unnatural, and it is split from time to time by vivid flashes of angry lightning. A low murmur of voices is heard off U L, and then figures begin to enter from U L and hurriedly cross off D R. They are not clearly distinguishable in the gloom, and they appear singly or by twos.]*

WOMAN. We must hurry. It's going to storm.

CHILD. I want to watch longer.

WOMAN. Come along or I won't bring you again.

MAN. King or not, he dies like a brave man.

[There is a moment's pause, and then STEPHANOS leads on from U L a sobbing, heavily-veiled, elderly woman. This is SARAH, and she is inconsolable. They cross and go slowly off D R. MELAS, a stocky, red-bearded, grinning Greek slave in his

late twenties, follows them on from U L. He peers D R, and checks over his shoulder U L. Then, furtively, he hurries to the wineskin and pours himself a cup of wine. He drinks it hastily. As he is finishing, DEMETRIUS enters D R. He is tall, well over six feet, broad-shouldered and lithe. He carries a small jug. He stops uncertainly, staring off L. Then he sees MELAS.]

DEMETRIUS. Melas! . . .

MELAS [*starting guiltily and dropping wine cup*]. What—
[*Sees it is DEMETRIUS.*] Oh, Demetrius!

DEMETRIUS [*moving to MELAS*]. You drink the officers' wine?

MELAS [*swaggering*]. Why not? Nothing's too good for us slaves of the Romans!

DEMETRIUS [*looking about*]. Where are our masters?

MELAS [*gesturing off U L*]. Over by the crosses. Quite a mob followed the Galilean—but they only stand and watch.

DEMETRIUS [*moving a little U L, looking off*]. The other two on the crosses—are they his friends?

MELAS. No. Thieves. [*Sits.*]

DEMETRIUS [*held by what he sees off U L*]. The Galilean seems to be unconscious.

MELAS. He spoke a little while ago. [*Sips his wine.*]

DEMETRIUS [*standing near MELAS*]. What did he say?

MELAS [*taking another deep drink, wiping his mouth*]. He said he was thirsty.

DEMETRIUS [*looking at water jug he carries*]. Did they give him water?

MELAS. No. They filled a sponge with vinegar that had some sort of balm in it and lifted it up to his lips. He wouldn't have it—he's no coward.

DEMETRIUS [*intensely*]. I knew that when I first caught sight of him in that crowd. [*Sinks down beside MELAS.*] Remember, as we came into Jerusalem? [*MELAS nods.*] They were calling him their king—and now, they've done this to him.

MELAS. Old Pilate knew he was innocent. Washing his dirty hands in that silver bowl. As if that made any difference!

DEMETRIUS [*brooding*]. I can't understand why none of this Galilean's friends tried to defend him.

MELAS. They're country men. Besides, what good would it do? They'd only end up on crosses, too.

DEMETRIUS [*rising agitatedly, moving D L*]. Wouldn't that be better than to fail him?

MELAS [*sighing and drinking*]. So, he was brave—and what has it brought him? He's thrown his life away.

DEMETRIUS. But he did speak out. He did try.

MELAS. Tomorrow no one will even remember.

DEMETRIUS [*turning to MELAS*]. Maybe there are things worse than dying.

MELAS [*rising*]. No one stands up against money and power. Poor people and slaves do one of two things: they bow and scrape and do the dirty work, or—[*Lowers his voice.*—] they run away.

DEMETRIUS. Run away!

MELAS [*excitedly*]. Have you thought any more about Damascus?

DEMETRIUS [*disturbed*]. No. [*Crosses past MELAS to D R.*] I haven't.

MELAS [*following, insistently*]. Tonight'll be our last chance. Tomorrow, we'll be leaving Jerusalem. Are you going back to Minoa as a slave, Demetrius, or do we strike out for Damascus—as free men?

DEMETRIUS. I—I don't know.

MELAS. There'll be a big banquet tonight. The wine will flow freely. There'll never be a better chance for escape.

DEMETRIUS. Even if we reached Damascus, how could we be sure of freedom?

MELAS. Damascus is Syrian. They hate the Romans like poison. Once there, you're safe as a bug in a donkey's ear.

DEMETRIUS [*moving toward C*]. My master has been good to me.

MELAS [*harshly, following him*]. Good to you! Aren't you forgetting, my friend, what the Romans did to your father? They murdered him—in cold blood. Aren't you forgetting

your mother? Taking her own life because she couldn't live in a world without your father? Aren't you forgetting that stinking galley—the rusty leg chains—the whip——

DEMETRIUS [*sharply*]. Don't! I haven't forgotten those things.

MELAS. And what's ahead of you? Your master's an exile—sent to Minoa because he insulted Prince Gaius in Rome. You'll rot in that fort at Minoa for the rest of your life.

[*There is a jagged flash of lightning, followed by a clap of thunder. The crowd off U L can be heard exclaiming.*]

DEMETRIUS [*his attention on crowd off U L*]. I'll tell you tonight. At the banquet.

MELAS. Not a whisper to anyone else. [*Looks U L.*] They're coming! [*Moves quickly U L and stands more or less at attention. DEMETRIUS moves D R, also at attention.*]

[*MARCELLUS GALLIO enters from U L. He is a handsome young Roman officer. At the moment, he is under a great tension and has had too much wine. CENTURION PAULUS follows him. He is ten or fifteen years MARCELLUS' senior. He has had much more wine than MARCELLUS. MARCELLUS and PAULUS move toward the wineskin. PAULUS picks it up and pours two cups, as MARCELLUS sees DEMETRIUS.*]

MARCELLUS. Well, Demetrius?

DEMETRIUS [*stepping a little forward*]. I brought you some water.

PAULUS [*banding MARCELLUS wine cup*]. That's good. You can wash your hands, Marcellus. Like Pilate. [*Laughs and sits.*]

MARCELLUS. This isn't the kind of work that calls for water. [*Avoids DEMETRIUS' eyes and sinks on ground beside PAULUS.*]

PAULUS. This is the kind of work that calls for butchers.

MARCELLUS [*wearily*]. It'll soon be over.

PAULUS. Then back to Minoa—and boredom. [*Drinks.*]

MARCELLUS [*to DEMETRIUS*]. You gave my letter to the courier?

DEMETRIUS. I did, sir. He promised to give it to the ship's captain personally.

MARCELLUS. Good. [*Drinks.*]

PAULUS [*with a drunken grin*]. Writing to someone special in Rome, Marcellus?

MARCELLUS [*nodding, a little sadly*]. Someone special.

PAULUS. Maybe, someone who can exert pressure in the right places—make the Prince relent?

MARCELLUS. I wouldn't waste my time seeking a pardon from Gaius.

PAULUS [*picking up dice cup and shaking it idly*]. Then it must be to the girl who waits for you in Rome.

MARCELLUS [*ignoring this*]. I can't understand this darkness. It's like the night in the middle of the day.

PAULUS [*throwing dice*]. A game of chance, Marcellus, to pass the time?

MARCELLUS. Surely, it won't be much longer.

PAULUS. Sometimes men live for hours. [*Hands MARCELLUS dice cup.*]

MARCELLUS [*staring down at it*]. He's—he's very brave.

PAULUS. The Galilean? [*MARCELLUS nods.*] He's too brave, and you see where it's brought him. Throw the dice.

MARCELLUS. Pilate washes his hands and we do the dirty work. [*Throws dice.*]

PAULUS [*picking up dice*]. Your lucky day. I'm not sure I want to shake dice with you. [*MARCELLUS hands him dice cup.*]

MARCELLUS [*bitterly*]. I've long since stopped believing in luck.

PAULUS [*rattling dice cup*]. We need a stake to make the game interesting. [*Calls.*] Melas.

MELAS [*stepping down to PAULUS*]. Yes, sir?

PAULUS [*gesturing loosely* U L]. Fetch us that brown coat at the foot of the cross. The Legate and I will throw dice for it. [*MELAS salutes briskly and hurries out* U L. *There is a brilliant flash of lightning. As thunder rumbles, PAULUS throws dice.*]

MARCELLUS. We're going to get a soaking, from the sound of it.

PAULUS [*rising shakily and moving to wineskin*]. If we're to be wet outside, we need more wine inside. [*Fills his own cup, then MARCELLUS'.*]

MARCELLUS [*sighing*]. Perhaps we should stay up there.

PAULUS [*handing MARCELLUS wine cup*]. Why? There's nothing for us to do now but wait.

[*MELAS re-enters U L. He carries the Robe. It is a rough-spun, brownish garment, loose-fitting. He comes to PAULUS.*]

MELAS [*holding out Robe*]. The Galilean's coat, sir.

PAULUS [*taking it*]. Not a bad robe. Woven in the country, dyed with walnut juice. [*Tosses it on ground in front of MARCELLUS. Then he sits again. He drinks, then picks up dice cup.*] Let's toss for it. High number wins. [*There is a flash of lightning and a thundercrash as PAULUS throws. DEMETRIUS has moved a little closer, apprehensively. MELAS looks on, grinning.*]

MARCELLUS [*staring down at dice*]. A five and a four. [*PAULUS picks up dice, puts them in cup and hands them to MARCELLUS. MARCELLUS accepts cup like a man in a dream.*]

PAULUS. You've a nine to beat. [*MARCELLUS throws. All lean forward to read his cast. Disgustedly, PAULUS reaches for his wine cup.*] A pair of sixes! Claim your win. [*Drinks.*]

MARCELLUS [*reaching out, as if to touch the Robe, pausing, drawing back*]. Demetrius—[*DEMETRIUS steps to him.*]—take care of—my winnings.

DEMETRIUS [*picking up the Robe*]. Yes, sir. [*Moves D R.*] Shall I wait for you here, sir?

MARCELLUS [*rising unsteadily*]. No. Go back to the Insula. Start packing. We'll make an early start for Minoa.

DEMETRIUS [*holding the Robe close to him and staring at it as he replies*]. Yes, sir. [*Moves a little farther D R.*]

PAULUS. I suppose we'd better have a look up there. [*Rises with an effort. A blinding flash of lightning causes all to*

throw up their arms as if shielding off a blow. The thunder seems to shake the ground.]

MARCELLUS [*moving D C, staring U L*]. Paulus—see what's happening. We're in for a hard storm.

PAULUS. Even the weather's against us. A dirty day for a dirty job. [*Goes out U L. Another loud clap of thunder is heard.*

MARCELLUS *steps back as if struck. Then, almost as if against his will, he follows PAULUS out U L. DEMETRIUS still stands D R, staring U L, the Robe held close. MELAS comes downstage.*]

MELAS. What will your master do with that thing, Demetrius?

DEMETRIUS [*looking at the Robe*]. I don't know.

MELAS [*coming closer and examining the Robe*]. It'll probably bring him bad luck.

DEMETRIUS. Why *bad* luck, Melas? [*Softly.*] It belonged to a brave man. [*Abruptly, as if seized by a deep grief, he turns and runs off D R. MELAS shrugs and moves toward wineskin. He is stopped in his tracks by a blinding flash of lightning. He drops to his knees as the thunder breaks in fury.*]

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

Scene Two

SCENE.—*A banquet hall in Pilate's Palace in Jerusalem. Here, as in all the settings for the play, the atmosphere can be easily suggested rather than represented in detail. A few colorful banners and a bust or two will add a note of authenticity. A long, low banquet table dominates the stage*

at C. Simple benches are upstage and on either side of this table. Entrances are made D L, to the officers' quarters, and R to the courtyard and quadrangle.]

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is Good Friday night. The banquet is concluding.* PONTIUS PILATE sits at the center of the table. He is a glum, moody man in his forties. MARCELLUS sits on PILATE'S right. He is flushed and nervous. PAULUS is on PILATE'S left. He is drunk. DEMETRIUS stands slightly U R C, watching his master with an anxious eye. Extra soldiers may be used in this scene, seated about the table. They are strident in their forced gaiety. As the curtain rises, there is a burst of laughter.]

PAULUS [*rising unsteadily to his feet*]. A toast, comrades! A toast to the Procurator—[*Bows deeply to PILATE.*]—and to the brave men of Minoa who executed his commands. [*Attempts a sweeping gesture and overturns tall wine cup before him. There is general laughter.* DEMETRIUS steps up and assists PAULUS to sit down. He then cleans up spilled wine and retires upstage again.]

MARCELLUS. I think perhaps the Centurion had better let those who are steadier on their feet propose the toasts.

PAULUS [*settling back morosely*]. The wine was drugged.

PILATE [*to MARCELLUS*]. You haven't eaten your dinner, Tribune Marcellus.

MARCELLUS. I'm not hungry.

PILATE. Possibly your task this afternoon dulled your appetite.

MARCELLUS [*scowling*]. Possibly.

PILATE. A most painful business. I regret it was necessary to order it.

MARCELLUS. Necessary?

PILATE [*frowning*]. Am I to understand the Tribune disputes the justice of Pilate's decision?

MARCELLUS [*recklessly*]. Justice!

PILATE [*sternly*]. You're forgetting yourself!

MARCELLUS. If my candor annoys you, we can talk of something else.

PILATE [*relaxing a little*]. You have a right to your opinions, Marcellus Gallio, though it's unusual for a man to criticize his superior so freely.

MARCELLUS. This is an unusual case. [*Looks directly at PILATE.*] An unusual trial, an unusual decision, an unusual punishment, and the convict was an unusual man.

PILATE [*sipping his drink*]. A strange person. What did you make of him?

MARCELLUS. Out there on the hill, people were saying he was the Son of God.

PILATE. They didn't make trouble?

MARCELLUS [*rubbing his forehead*]. No. There was no trouble—except, of course, the storm and the darkness.

PILATE. Yes. Very strange. Almost like an eclipse.

MARCELLUS. At the end, he called on his God to forgive us.

PAULUS [*loudly*]. Have you presented our trophy to the Procurator, Legate?

MARCELLUS [*looking at PAULUS with concern*]. Trophy, Paulus?

PAULUS [*again hauling himself unsteadily to his feet*]. The Robe—where's the Robe?

MARCELLUS [*trying to quiet him*]. Paulus—this isn't the place for—

PAULUS [*topping MARCELLUS*]. You won it, but don't be greedy!

PILATE [*showing interest*]. What's this, Tribune Marcellus? A Robe?

MARCELLUS [*troubled*]. Yes, sir. A coat that belonged to the Galilean.

PAULUS [*leaning across table*]. Marcellus has all the luck. He threw a double six.

MARCELLUS. I'm sure the Robe is of no interest to the Procurator, Paulus.

PAULUS. Well, it's of interest to me. [*Straightens belligerently.*] I'll go and fetch it myself. [*Starts unsteadily D L.*]

MARCELLUS. No. [*Turns to DEMETRIUS and beckons. DEMETRIUS steps to his side.*] Centurion Paulus wishes to see the Robe. Bring it here.

DEMETRIUS [*showing deep concern*]. Sir, do you think—
[*PILATE turns and stares in amazement at DEMETRIUS. PAULUS sits again.*]

MARCELLUS [*angered*]. Go instantly and get it!

DEMETRIUS. Yes, sir. [*Turns and hurries out D L.*]

PILATE [*watching DEMETRIUS go*]. An unusual slave, Tribune.

MARCELLUS. A present from my father on my seventeenth birthday. He's a Corinthian.

PILATE. The Greeks make good slaves, though they're unpredictable. His loyalty must be a comfort to you in a desolate post like Minoa.

MARCELLUS [*stiffly*]. A soldier accepts the orders he's given. [*DEMETRIUS enters D L, carrying the Robe. He goes at once to the right of MARCELLUS. MARCELLUS stares a moment at the Robe, but does not touch it.*] Take it to Centurion Paulus. [*PAULUS rises to meet DEMETRIUS. He takes the Robe. DEMETRIUS retires a little, watching anxiously. PAULUS holds the Robe up by its shoulders and moves around in front of table. He stops at PILATE'S place.*]

PAULUS. Trophy!

PILATE [*looking with disgust at PAULUS, to MARCELLUS*]. Really, Legate.

PAULUS [*weaving a little downstage*]. Trophy! Minoa presents trophy to Pontius Pilate.

MARCELLUS [*rising in concern*]. Paulus!

PAULUS. Pilate doesn't want trophy! [*Makes an exaggerated bow in PILATE'S direction. MARCELLUS moves around in front of table. DEMETRIUS follows.*] Very well! Minoa keep trophy. Legate Marcellus wear trophy back to Minoa.

MARCELLUS [*at PAULUS' side, DEMETRIUS slightly back and between them*]. That's enough!

PAULUS. Put it on, Marcellus. [*Throws the Robe up to DEMETRIUS.*] Here, Demetrius. Hold the Robe for your master!