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JULIUS CAESAR

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Oxford School *Shakespeare*

JULIUS CAESAR

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Introduction

About the Play

Julius Caesar—the Man and the Play

What do you know about Julius Caesar? In Shakespeare's play Mark Antony, Caesar's best friend, calls him 'the noblest man That ever lived in the tide of times' (3, 1, 256–7); and Brutus, one of the men who murdered him, acknowledges that he has killed 'the foremost man of all this world' (4, 3, 22). What did Caesar do to deserve such high praise?

Shakespeare isn't going to show us. The character who gives the play its title appears in only three scenes, and speaks very few lines—none of them particularly memorable. On his first appearance, in public, he gives orders ('When Caesar says "Do this", it is performed'—*1*, 2, 10); but at home with his wife Calpurnia (*Act 2*, Scene 2) he seems less resolute—willing to listen to superstitions and yield to persuasions. He is last seen alive in the Capitol, where he refuses to repeal a sentence of banishment and, unawares, gives the cue for the conspirators' action. They stab—and Caesar dies. Not a very impressive performance!

But Julius Caesar was part of the national curriculum in the Elizabethan education system. Latin was the most important subject in every grammar school, and pupils studied the history as well as the language and literature of Rome. Shakespeare's first audiences (unless they had been asleep in the classroom) would have brought their general knowledge to the playhouse, and would not have needed biographical details to justify the claims of Antony and Brutus.

Early in the first century BC three men—Pompey, Crassus, and Julius Caesar—united to form a triumvirate (from the Latin *tres viri* = three men) to govern Rome and its provinces. In 53 BC Crassus was killed whilst fighting the Parthians; neither Pompey nor Caesar could agree to share power with the other, and civil war broke out. At the battle of Pharsalia (48 BC) Caesar defeated Pompey; then, a little later, he conquered Pompey's two sons at the battle of Munda. The play opens with Caesar's return from this last victory.

Caesar now appeared to have absolute power; but the name of 'king' was hated and feared in Rome. Although the people loved him, some of

the senators and aristocrats were afraid that he would become a tyrant—and the chief among these were Marcus Brutus and Cassius. In the civil war they had both fought on Pompey's side against Caesar, but Caesar had pardoned and befriended Brutus and, at Brutus's request, recalled Cassius to Rome. Despite this clemency, they conspired to assassinate him in 42 BC.

Julius Caesar was born in 100 BC, and before he was twenty years old he had become a distinguished soldier. In the course of a glittering military and political career, he fought and held office in Africa, Spain, and France, and he extended the Roman rule to the Atlantic and to the English Channel. In the intervals between military campaigns he devoted himself, with amazing energy, to re-establishing order in Rome, improving the economic situation, regulating taxation, codifying the law, and instituting a public library. Caesar was also a gifted writer: his *Commentaries* on the Gallic Wars and on the Civil War are masterpieces of narrative skill, and although other writings have not survived, we know that they included a textbook of grammar (written during a journey across the Alps), and a treatise on the stars. He was an expert astronomer and mathematician, and the calendar that he devised in 46 BC is the one we use today, honouring his name in the month of Julius—July.

In the play Caesar is murdered at the beginning of *Act 3*, and you may first think it odd that the hero should vanish from the stage before the play is half-finished. But although the man is dead, his spirit lives on. It is present in the minds of those who murdered him, and of those who seek to avenge the murder. We are so conscious of this unseen presence that it is no surprise when the spirit materializes, and the ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus before the battle at Philippi. Brutus, too, is unperturbed, and accepts with equanimity the promise of another encounter—'Why, I will see thee at Philippi then' (4, 3, 286).

The tragedy of *Julius Caesar* is not the tragedy of one man alone. Brutus shares the tragic fate—and so too does Cassius, although to a lesser extent. The tragedy was not completed when Caesar died in the Capitol, and Brutus makes this plain when he talks to Cassius before Philippi:

this same day
Must end that work the Ides of March begun.

(5, 1, 112–13)

Although the conspirators were defeated, full democracy never returned to Rome. A second triumvirate was formed, consisting of Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius, but Lepidus was the weak link (as Antony remarks in 4, 1, 12–40); and Antony himself was well known to be 'a masker and a reveller' (5, 1, 62). Only Octavius, called 'a peevish schoolboy' by Cassius (5, 1, 61) because he was only eighteen at the time of the murder, was able to sustain his role as one of the rulers of the great Roman empire. He was Julius Caesar's great-nephew and heir, and he later adopted the name 'Caesar', with the addition 'Augustus'—titles which were ever afterwards bestowed on rulers of the Roman empire. In 27 BC Octavius took the further title of 'Princeps'—the chief one—and Rome ceased to be a republic.

Shakespeare had no doubt about the eternal relevance of his theme, and it is tempting to think that the words of Cassius might be the dramatist's prophetic judgement on his own play:

> How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
>
> (3, 1, 111–13)

But Shakespeare seems to have taken very little thought about the future of his dramatic writings: the manuscripts were no longer his property after they were bought by the dramatic company, and *Julius Caesar*, like many more of his plays, was not published during Shakespeare's lifetime.

Leading Characters in the Play

Julius Caesar The greatest and most powerful of the Romans, and the last of the three men who formed the first triumvirate. He has always been ambitious—and it is now suspected that he wants to be king, and sole ruler of the Roman Empire.

Octavius Caesar The great-nephew of Julius Caesar, and heir to his uncle's wealth and position. Only eighteen at the time of Caesar's assassination, he joins Mark Antony in making war on the conspirators.

Mark Antony Caesar's loyal friend, who stirs up the opposition when Caesar is murdered, and, with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, leads the attack on the conspirators.

Marcus Brutus Caesar's great friend, who joins in the conspiracy because his love for Rome is even greater than his love for his friend. An idealist, he assumes that others will share his high principles.

Caius Cassius The instigator and organizer of the conspiracy against Julius Caesar. He is a fanatic, but he is also a practical man who knows his own limitations and those of other men. Although not a very attractive character at first, he becomes more noble—even heroic—in defeat.

Calpurnia The wife of Julius Caesar, whose prophetic dream foretells the assassination.

Portia The wife of Marcus Brutus, who is devoted to her husband and distressed by his anxieties. Through her we see another aspect of Brutus—the gentle, loving husband.

Synopsis

Act 1

Scene 1 The tribunes are angry because some tradesmen are taking a holiday to celebrate Julius Caesar's triumphant entry into Rome.

Scene 2 Caesar, going to see the Lupercal games, is warned to beware the Ides of March. Brutus and Cassius discuss Caesar's career, and Cassius warns of potential danger. Caesar's procession returns, and Casca describes how Caesar refused to accept a crown; Cassius and Brutus arrange another meeting.

Scene 3 A terrible storm is raging; Casca tells Cicero about some unnatural sights, but Cicero is unimpressed. Cassius, rejoicing in the weather and the omens, tells Casca of the conspiracy and of his hopes that Brutus will also join the rebels.

Act 2

Scene 1 Brutus finds a letter urging him to action. Cassius introduces other conspirators, and they plan the assassination of Caesar. Brutus's wife, Portia, is worried about him, but another visitor, Ligarius, adds his support to the conspiracy.

Scene 2 Caesar has also been disturbed by a stormy night; his wife tries to persuade him not to go to the Capitol because the omens are unfavourable, but Decius Brutus is scornful, and Caesar sets out for the Capitol, accompanied by the conspirators.

Scene 3 Artemidorus reads the letter he will give to Caesar.

Scene 4 Portia is anxious to know what is happening in the Capitol, and the words of a soothsayer give her more cause for alarm.

Act 3

Scene 1 Caesar, ignoring Artemidorus and the soothsayer, takes his seat in the Senate House. He refuses to grant a petition—and gives the conspirators their cue to stab him. Brutus takes control, and Antony asks to be allowed to speak at Caesar's funeral. When he is alone on stage, Antony prophesies civil war—and sends a message to Octavius.

Scene 2 Brutus reasons with the citizens, and convinces them that Caesar was a potential tyrant—then Antony makes his funeral oration, speaking of Caesar's love for Rome and its citizens, showing them Caesar's body, and reading his will. The citizens are roused to mutiny, and threaten to murder the conspirators. Antony learns that Octavius has entered the city—and that Brutus and Cassius have fled.

Scene 3 Cinna the poet meets an angry mob: they question him briefly—then kill him.

Act 4

Scene 1 Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus plan their strategy.

Scene 2 Brutus and Cassius are beginning to quarrel.

Scene 3 The quarrel continues; a poet tries to make peace, but Brutus dismisses him—and then explains to Cassius that he is distressed because Portia is dead. The rebel armies must now move on to Philippi to meet Antony and the Roman forces, but first Brutus needs to sleep. The ghost of Caesar appears.

Act 5

Scene 1 Antony and Octavius confront the rebels, then withdraw to prepare for battle. Cassius tells Messala about the omens he has witnessed; he is resolved to die rather than be captured by Antony, and says his formal farewell to Brutus.

Scene 2 Battle has commenced—and Brutus is hopeful.

Scene 3 Deserted by his soldiers, Cassius orders his slave to kill him. His best friend, Titinius, bringing news of victory, finds the body—and kills himself. Brutus continues the fight.

Scene 4 Lucilius, pretending to be Brutus, is captured by Antony's soldiers, but Antony recognizes him.

Scene 5 The rebels are defeated, Brutus kills himself, and Antony speaks his obituary.

Julius Caesar: commentary

ACT 1

Scene 1 Flavius and Murellus are annoyed when they find that the Roman citizens have taken a holiday from work and are crowding on to the streets 'to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph'. A cobbler tries to joke with the tribunes, but they are too angry to laugh. Murellus reproaches the people for their disloyalty: they have forgotten their love for Pompey, and now Caesar is their hero. The blank verse and dignified language of the tribune's speech contrasts with the cobbler's colloquial prose, and mark a kind of class distinction between the major characters in the play (who are identified by name), and the ordinary citizens, the men-in-the-street.

When they hear what Murellus has to say, the people are silent and slink away from the scene. Flavius explains what is happening:

> See where their basest mettle be not mov'd:
> They vanish tongue-tied in their guiltiness.

The Roman citizens are very important in *Julius Caesar*, and provide an essential background to the action. They are influenced by emotion, not by reason, and their affections are not to be trusted: in the past they cheered for Pompey; now they are welcoming Caesar, the man who has defeated Pompey; and soon we shall hear them applauding the men who have murdered Caesar.

Flavius and Murellus are determined to insult Caesar by tearing down the decorations intended to honour him. Their conversation gives us a hint of what is to come—we shall hear from other characters who also fear that Caesar will 'soar above the view of men | And keep us all in servile fearfulness'.

Scene 2 As the tribunes depart, Caesar's ceremonial procession enters, and we have a brief glimpse of the great man. The ominous words 'Beware the ides of March' are spoken, and then the procession leaves the stage. Brutus and Cassius stay behind. Very gently, Cassius tries to win Brutus's confidence. He flatters Brutus a little, then declares his own honesty. An offstage shout from the crowds attending Caesar startles Brutus, and he accidentally speaks his thoughts aloud: 'I do fear the people | Choose Caesar for their king'. The word 'fear' encourages

Cassius to proceed with an attack on Caesar. He recalls two instances when Caesar showed weakness, but Cassius speaks as though the weakness were moral, and not merely physical. Cassius shows a mean spirit here, but Brutus does not seem to notice—or perhaps his attention is distracted by another shout from the crowd. Cassius returns to flattery, reminding Brutus of his own reputation and that of his ancestor, the Brutus who expelled Tarquin from Rome. At last Brutus promises that he will give some thought to the matters that Cassius has raised.

Some relaxation of tension is needed now, and it is supplied by Casca's account of the ceremony with the crown—'yet 'twas not a crown neither, 'twas one of these coronets'. Again there is a contrast between prose and verse, and between the colloquial, idiomatic language of Casca's speeches and the formal, dignified utterances of Brutus and Cassius.

When Cassius is alone, he points out how easily Brutus's nobility of character can be perverted; we realize, too, what a dangerous man Cassius is, and the threat to Caesar becomes very frightening:

> let Caesar seat him sure,
> For we will shake him, or worse days endure.

The threat is echoed in the thunder that heralds the next scene.

Scene 3 The storm renews the tension. Both the Romans and the Elizabethans believed that the world of Nature (the macrocosm) and the political world of human affairs (the microcosm) reflected each other, and that disturbances in one foretold, or paralleled, unusual events in the other. Of course, there were sceptics in both nations who denied that there was any link between the two worlds: Cicero is such a sceptic, but Casca is convinced that the storm is intended as a warning from the gods. Cassius, however, welcomes the storm, and shows his fanaticism as he walks unprotected. He interprets the night's unnatural events as being parallels to the monstrosity in the Roman world, and Casca understands: ''Tis Caesar that you mean, is it not, Cassius?'

Cassius tests Casca's feelings about Caesar, then invites him to take part in the conspiracy. When Cinna joins them, we learn that the plot is well advanced.

Act 2

Scene 1 We now recognize that the play is operating on two time-scales. Cicero's opening remark in *Act 1*, Scene 3 ('Good even, Casca, brought you Caesar home?') suggests that Casca has just left Caesar, having escorted him home after the celebrations of the Lupercal (*Act 1*, Scene 2). When this scene ends, Cassius observes that 'it is after midnight'. The conspirators go in search of Brutus and find him at home, just as dawn is breaking ('yon grey lines | That fret the clouds are messengers of day'). But more than *hours* have elapsed. The storm gives an impression of continuity between *Act 1*, Scene 3 and *Act 2*, Scene 1; but we have in fact moved from 15 February (the feast of Lupercal) to 15 (the ides) March. Brutus has had weeks, not hours, in which to decide upon a course of action, and his soliloquy now reflects the thoughts of that whole period.

A soliloquy—words, not intended for a listener, spoken by a character when he is thinking aloud—is, by the conventions of Elizabethan drama, always to be trusted. Brutus now states his dilemma clearly: he has no personal grudge against Caesar, and no reason to distrust him—but, on the other hand, all power corrupts, and if Caesar is given imperial power, he may prove a danger to Rome. His honour and his patriotism urge Brutus to take action against Caesar, and although he recognizes the ugliness of the situation, he steps forward to welcome the conspirators. He shakes each one by the hand, speaking his name in token of fellowship (and incidentally introducing the different characters to the audience).

Brutus shows his idealism when he rejects the suggestion that they should swear an oath of allegiance. He has taken command of the situation now, and Cassius meekly accepts his decision to leave Cicero out of the conspiracy. He is more doubtful when Brutus—still idealistic—declares that Antony shall not be killed with Caesar, but he again allows himself to be overruled. The striking clock brings to an end the serious business of the meeting and, after a joke at the expense of Caesar, the conspirators leave Brutus to his thoughts.

Portia makes us remember the mental anguish that Brutus has endured. She is a character with whom we can sympathize, in her loving care for her husband, and whom we are intended to admire for her fortitude in bearing the wound in her thigh. Because of our feelings for Portia, we are sympathetic to the man she loves. There is no need, however, for the audience to hear what Brutus tells Portia about the conspiracy, so Shakespeare is able to show us a further example of the

high regard in which the Romans hold Brutus—a 'Brave son, deriv'd from honourable loins'.

Scene 2 Like Casca, Calpurnia is distressed by the unnatural events of the night, and she has also had a frightening dream, which Caesar narrates to Decius Brutus. But Decius is determined to get Caesar to the Capitol, and his interpretation of the dream is flattering. Tempted with the thought of a crown, and also afraid of being laughed at, Caesar has made up his mind to go out when the conspirators come to escort him.

Scene 3 Another warning has been prepared for Caesar. Artemidorus reads his letter aloud, so that we shall know what is in the paper that Caesar refuses to read.

Scene 4 Portia is anxious. Brutus has told her of the conspiracy, and she knows the danger that her husband is in. The tension grows.

Act 3

Scene 1 Caesar, accompanied by the conspirators (like armed guards to see that he does not escape from them), approaches the Capitol. He rejects the petition from Artemidorus, and goes towards the Senate House, where the senators are waiting for him. Brutus and Cassius stay at the back of the procession. There is a moment of panic for Cassius, but Brutus calms him down; and now everything goes according to plan. At the very moment when Caesar is speaking of his own constancy (which reflects the order and constancy in the universe), chaos breaks loose. Caesar is killed; the conspirators (whom we now see as anarchists) proclaim the death of tyranny; 'Men, wives and children stare, cry out and run | As it were doomsday'. Calpurnia's dream comes true when the conspirators, at Brutus's command, bathe their hands in Caesar's blood, congratulating themselves on having performed a deed which will be recorded in history.

Into this hysterical scene comes Antony's servant, calming the riot situation with his master's careful words, before Antony enters. At the beginning of this scene, Trebonius drew Antony aside, so that he did not go to the Capitol with Caesar; after the murder we hear that he has 'Fled to his house amaz'd'. Now he is very controlled. His speech to the conspirators sounds submissive, as though he were anxious to please them; but we ought not to ignore a possible irony in his address to them

as 'gentlemen', nor a disgust in his reference to their 'purpled hand
[that] do reek and smoke'. He is also perhaps ironic in describing them
as 'The choice and master spirits of this age'—although we may no
notice this until we read the play a second time, and know Antony's rea
feelings, which have not yet been made clear.

Antony shakes the hands of the murderers, taking note of thei
names; we remember that Brutus also shook the hands of th
conspirators who came to his house, signifying his allegiance wit
them. Antony knows that he must be creating a bad impression that h
is 'Either a coward or a flatterer'; but we must not be deceived b
appearances. Brutus and Cassius contrast in their reception of Antony
Brutus welcomes him, sure that he will be a friend when he hears thei
explanations. Cassius, however, is still suspicious; he suggests a bribe
but he advises Brutus not to let Antony make the funeral oration. Onc
more, Brutus overrules Cassius.

Left alone on the stage, Antony shows that he is a loyal friend t
Caesar—and a dangerous enemy to the conspirators. He prophesies th
disasters that will follow Caesar's murder, and he has no sooner spoke
than the first signs of impending war are apparent in the news tha
Octavius is coming to Rome. The movement of the play suddenl
changes direction. Until now, everything has been aimed at the murde
of Caesar; from this point, the aim is to secure revenge.

'Lend me your hand.' Antony asks the servant to help him carr
Caesar's body off the stage. There were no curtains in the Elizabetha
theatre, and competent dramatists ensured that after a murderou
episode there were enough living characters on stage to remove th
dead ones. Shakespeare was more than merely competent. Necessit
demanded the introduction of another living character after Antony'
prophetic speech, but Shakespeare makes a virtue out of necessity b
having that character announce the coming of Octavius, so that th
second movement of the play starts as soon as the first movement i
completed.

Scene 2

The scene that follows invites us to make a contrast between two kind
of oratory, considered in terms of their effects on the citizens who hea
the speeches. Brutus speaks in prose, trying to present a reasone
argument to justify the murder. The citizens are fairly satisfied wit
this, but it is ironic that they now wish to elevate Brutus into Caesar'
place: they have not appreciated the principle behind Brutus's ac
Antony's speech is in verse; there is no attempt to produce logica

argument, for the oration—with its repetitions, rhetorical questions, ironies, and open display of emotion—is aimed at the hearts, and not the heads of the people. We see the citizens in the process of changing their minds every time that Antony makes a well-calculated pause in his speech. Antony takes care with his references to the conspirators: his first allusion to them as 'honourable men' seems quite straightforward, but with each repetition the phrase gathers irony. It is a citizen, not Antony himself, who finally gives words to Antony's meaning: 'They were traitors. Honourable men!' Antony cannot be faulted for his understanding of the psychology of crowds, and he easily achieves his desired end.

Scene 3 The black comedy of this scene serves to lighten the tension that built up during and after Antony's oration. At the same time, the scene shows how the movement to avenge Caesar's murder is gathering force; in Act 4 it has erupted into civil war.

Act 4

Scene 1 Passion has now given place to cold calculation as the members of the new triumvirate decide that in the coming 'purge' neither brother nor nephew shall be spared. Antony's dismissal of Lepidus—'a slight unmeritable man'—casts a suspicion of trouble to come; but Shakespeare is content to let the matter rest here.

Scene 2 More immediately serious is the lack of harmony between Brutus and Cassius, which must be kept secret from their armies.

Scene 3 Once again Brutus shows his idealism, which is outraged by Cassius's conduct. But Brutus has another cause for grief—his wife is dead.

Two passages in this scene duplicate the information about Portia's death. Shakespeare probably wrote first the version given in lines 181–95, and then—perhaps thinking that he had made Brutus too much a Stoic—added the lines that now appear as 147–57; and forgot to cross out the first draft. The play was not printed until 1623, and the printer would not tamper with an author's manuscript, even though the author was dead. So both versions were printed.

A decision has to be made by the conspirators whether to march to Philippi and encounter the Roman army there; or whether to remain in their present position. Cassius gives good reasons for staying where they

are, but once more Brutus overrules him. This will prove fatal—as we are assured by the appearance of Caesar's ghost, with its ominous promise to Brutus: 'thou shalt see me at Philippi'.

Act 5

In the scenes that follow, the absence of fixed scenery becomes a positive advantage, as the action moves from one camp to the other, located generally on the battlefield at Philippi. With our modern sound-effects, the noise of soldiers marching and fighting, coming nearer and moving further away, would make a good background for the speeches.

Scene 1 The armies of Brutus and Cassius have advanced towards Philippi, and Octavius's surprise confirms our suspicion that Brutus made the wrong decision. The verbal clash between Antony and Octavius, on one side, and Brutus and Cassius on the other, is in part a substitute for the physical combat impossible on stage. Antony and Octavius are victorious here—just as they will be in the real fighting.

Alone with Messala, Cassius loses the confidence with which he had answered Antony. Cassius has little hope left, and his parting with Brutus is very moving. It seems that Shakespeare is now working to increase our sympathies for the former conspirators.

Scene 2
Scene 3 Now the fight has begun, and we hear from Brutus that things are going well with his soldiers. Cassius's army, however, has been overthrown, and a mistaken report of Brutus's situation causes him to despair. Defeated, he commits suicide. Titinius, finding the body, laments briefly; then kills himself, following Cassius's example in performing 'a Roman's part'. When Brutus comes upon the scene, he underlines the growing sense that Cassius was, after all, an honourable man and a true Roman: 'It is impossible that ever Rome | Should breed thy fellow'.

Scene 4 More skirmishes follow, and all the characters involved in them seem to be demonstrating their nobility: Young Cato dies bravely; Lucilius pretends to be Brutus in order to deceive the enemy soldiers; Antony is generous in his rescue and treatment of Lucilius.

Scene 5 But Brutus, in another part of the battlefield, recognizes that he is defeated. The friends that have gathered round him grieve, more for his sake than for their own; and Brutus rejoices in their loyalty when he finds that none of them will agree to his request and kill him. When at last he runs upon his sword, there is relief in his voice: 'Caesar, now be still, | I kill'd not thee with half so good a will'.

The conflict within Brutus—between love for Caesar and love for Rome—is at an end. His epitaph is spoken by Mark Antony, in terms that make us wonder whether Brutus, said to have been 'the noblest Roman of them all', was perhaps the true hero of Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*.

Brutus—'the noblest Roman of them all'?

The superlative praise of Antony's description of Brutus has a powerful effect on our minds, especially since it comes so close to the climax of the action, and only a few lines from the end of the play. We are left to wonder whether Brutus is, in fact, the hero of *Julius Caesar*—or whether Antony's obituary notice is speaking the whole truth.

Shakespeare takes the character of Brutus, with very little alteration, from *The Lives of the Greeks and Romans*, where Plutarch described him as

> a marvellous lowly and gentle person, noble minded, and would never be in any rage, nor carried away with pleasure and covetousness; but had ever an upright mind with him, and would never yield to any wrong or injustice.

In the play we begin to form a good opinion of Brutus from what the other characters say of him. Cassius is the first to speak his praises, but he assures Brutus (and us) that 'many of the best respect in Rome' (*1*, 2, 59) similarly esteem him. A glowing tribute to Brutus is expressed by Casca:

> O, he sits high in all the people's hearts,
> And that which would appear offence in us
> His countenance, like richest alchemy,
> Will change to virtue and to worthiness. (*1*, 3, 157–60)

From his mocking account of the ceremony with the crown (*1*, 2, 220ff.) we have seen that Casca is not a man who is easily impressed consequently we value his praise more highly.

When we see Brutus himself on the stage, we are conscious most of all of the mental anguish that he is suffering, torn between personal love for Caesar and patriotic love for Rome. He does not wish to worry Cassius, but prefers, as he says, to 'turn the trouble of my countenance Merely upon myself' (*1*, 2, 38–9). It is very much in his favour that Brutus is not immediately won by the persuasions of Cassius but having listened to the arguments, asks for time to consider them (*1*, 2, 165–70). His soliloquy in *Act 2*, Scene 1 confirms our opinion of his sense of responsibility, and our sympathies are moved when he tells us that since Cassius first spoke to him (which was four weeks earlier) he has not slept. Portia's account of his distressed behaviour also makes us

feel sympathetic towards her husband, whilst Brutus's tenderness for his wife (and for the page, Lucius) is an attractive quality that we did not expect to find in a man with so much on his mind.

We have no doubts about Caesar's love for Brutus, although there is little time in the play for this to be demonstrated. It is enough that we hear the famous cry '*Et tu, Brute*' when Caesar discovers that his friend is one of the conspirators (3, 1, 77). Plutarch told how Caesar gave up the fight for his life when he recognized Brutus:

> Men report also that Caesar did still defend himself against the rest, running every way with his body. But when he saw Brutus with his sword drawn in his hand, then he pulled his gown over his head and made no more resistance.

We understand exactly what feelings were involved when Antony explains to the crowd:

> Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.
> Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar lov'd him!
> This was the most unkindest cut of all.
> For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,
> Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
> Quite vanquish'd him. Then burst his mighty heart
>
> (3, 2, 179–84)

Brutus is always conscious of Caesar's love, and of the ingratitude with which he has repaid it. When he has been defeated, and runs on his sword to avoid being captured, he seems to welcome his death, almost as though it were a punishment for his offence in killing Caesar: 'Caesar now be still | I kill'd not thee with half so good a will' (5, 5, 50–1). Yet the needs of Rome, as Brutus understands them, are more important than the demands of friendship, and in his speech to the Roman people Brutus offers justification for his act: 'not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more' (3, 2, 21–2).

Brutus is an idealist. He is descended from patriots, and he is often reminded of the Lucius Junius Brutus who drove Tarquin from Rome and helped to found the first republic. Brutus's motives for joining the conspiracy are wholly pure, and he intends to maintain this purity in everything: to swear an oath of allegiance between the conspirators would, he feels, 'stain | The even virtue of our enterprise' (2, 1, 132–3), casting a shadow of doubt both on the cause and on the men. He will not agree that Antony should be killed along with Caesar, because this

would turn what he sees as ritual sacrifice into bloody butchery. Cassius argues against Brutus here, and also when Antony asks permission to address the citizens at Caesar's funeral. On both occasions Brutus's idealism is strong, and Cassius is overruled; events prove Cassius to have been right both times.

The contrast between the idealist, Brutus, and the realist, Cassius, i never more clearly shown than in their quarrel about money. Th practical Cassius recognizes that, in time of war, 'it is not meet | Tha every nice offence should bear his comment' (*4*, 3, 7–8). Brutus, in a passion of honour, refuses to raise money by ignoble means, and says h would 'rather coin my heart | And drop my blood for drachmaes (*4*, 3, 72–3). We cannot help feeling that this sentiment is very fine—bu not much use for paying soldiers' wages.

The trouble with idealism is that it can so easily blind those wh possess it—and Brutus is blinded. The conspiracy *might* have succeede if Antony, as well as Caesar, had died on the ides of March. All *might* stil have been well for the murderers if Antony had not been permitted to stir the citizens to mutiny with his funeral oration. And there migh even have been some little chance of victory if Brutus had not insiste on marching to Philippi. But the biggest mistake that Brutus makes i his initial decision, arrived at with such difficulty, that Caesar has to die

Brutus is wrong. It is easy to be influenced by a character s sympathetically drawn as Brutus undoubtedly is, and to accept tha character's estimation of his own deeds. But when we read, ver carefully, the soliloquy in the garden, it becomes plain that Brutus i deceiving himself. He confesses that he has 'no personal cause' to fea Caesar and, furthermore, that he has never known 'when his affection sway'd | More than his reason' (2, 1, 11, 20–1). Unable to fault Caesa from Caesar's own conduct, Brutus resorts to a generalization, 'common proof' (2, 1, 21), which says that ambitious men, at the heigh of their power, scorn those beneath them. With no more justificatio than this, Brutus argues that Caesar is a potential tyrant and therefor must be killed. He himself admits that his argument is unacceptable— 'Will bear no colour for the thing he is'; and he attempts to rephrase i ('Fashion it thus') in a more convincing manner (2, 1, 29–30). H convinces himself—and patriotism does the rest.

It is patriotism, very largely, that leads Brutus into the trap laid fo him by Cassius. Caesar shows shrewd judgement when he recognize Cassius as one of those men who are 'never at heart's ease | Whiles the behold a greater than themselves' (*1*, 2, 208–9). Brutus is too innocent t see the danger that Caesar sees in Cassius, but Cassius himself admits i

to the audience when he gloats over his success in manipulating the 'honourable mettle' of Brutus so that it is perverted from its true nature—'wrought | From that it is dispos'd' (*1*, 2, 307–8).

The tragedy of Brutus lies here—not that he attempted to free the republic of Rome from a tyrannous dictator and was killed in the action; but that, *with the best of motives*, he was responsible for the murder of

> the noblest man
> That ever lived in the tide of times. (3, 1, 256–7)

Shakespeare's Verse

Easily the best way to understand and appreciate Shakespeare's verse i to read it aloud—and don't worry if you don't understand everythin Try not to be captivated by the dominant rhythm, but decide which a the most important words in each line and use the regular metre t drive them forward to the listeners. Shakespeare's plays are mainl written in 'blank verse', the form preferred by most dramatists in th sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is a very flexible mediun which is capable—like the human speaking voice—of a wide range c tones. Basically the lines, which are unrhymed, are ten syllables lon The syllables have alternating stresses, just like normal English speec and they divide into five 'feet'. The technical name for this is 'iamb pentameter'.

Murellus

You blócks, you stónes, you wórse than sénseless thíngs!
O yoú hard heárts, you crúel mén of Róme,
Knew yoú not Pómpey? Mány a tíme and óft
Have yoú climb'd úp to wálls and báttleménts,
To tówers and wíndows, yéa, to chímney-tóps,
Your ínfants ín your árms, and thére have sát
The lívelong dáy, with pátient éxpectátion,
To seé great Pómpey páss the stréets of Róme.
And whén you sáw his chários bút appeár
Have yóu not máde an únivérsal shoút,
That Tíber trémbled únderneáth her bánks
To heár the réplicátion óf your soúnds
Made ín her cóncave shóres? *1*, 1, 37–49

In this quotation, the lines are regular in length and normal in iamb stress pattern. Two syllables have to be elided in 'Many a', and 'tower must seem to be one syllable—but these are usual enough in spoke English. Sometimes Shakespeare deviates from the norm that he h set, writing lines that are longer or shorter than ten syllables, an varying the stress patterns for unusual emphasis. Here, for exampl Murellus does not complete the pentameter in line 49; the charact makes a dramatic pause so that his words can sink in to the hearer consciousness.

The verse line sometimes contains the grammatical unit of meaning—'To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome'—thus allowing for a pause at the end of the line, before a new idea is started; at other times, the sense runs on from one line to the next—'have sat The livelong day'. This makes for the natural fluidity of speech, avoiding monotony but still maintaining the iambic rhythm.

Source, Date, and Text

Shakespeare's main source for *Julius Caesar* was Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans*; this was written in Greek in the first century AD, translated into French (by Jacques Amyot) in 1559, and from French into English (by Sir Thomas North) in 1575. North's translation gave Shakespeare the characters and plot outlines for four of his plays—*Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*—and Shakespeare so respected North's vigorous colloquial prose that he often retained its phraseology and idioms, making only slight adjustments for the purpose of rhythm and emphasis (see 'Shakespeare's Plutarch', p.106).

The play was probably written around 1599, and a Swiss visitor to England records a performance that he saw on 21 September 1599 'in the house with the thatched roof'—Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. It was not published until 1623, when it was printed in the First Folio collection of Shakespeare's *Works*.

The present edition uses the text established by Marvin Spevack for the New Cambridge Shakespeare (1998).

People in the Play

Julius Caesar	
Octavius Caesar **Mark Antony** **Aemilius Lepidus**	*triumvirs after the death of* Julius Caesar
Cicero **Publius** **Popillius Lena**	*senators*
Marcus Brutus **Cassius** **Casca** **Trebonius** **Ligarius** **Decius Brutus** **Metellus Cimber** **Cinna**	*conspirators against* Julius Caesar
Flavius **Murellus**	*tribunes*
Artemidorus	*a schoolmaster*
Cinna	*a poet*

Lucilius **Titinius** **Messala** **Young Cato** **Volumnius**	*friends of* Brutus *and of* Cassius
Varrus **Clitus** **Claudio** **Strato** **Lucius** **Dardanius** **Flavius** **Labeo**	*servants or officers attending* Brutus
Pindarus	*servant to* Cassius
Calpurnia	Caesar*'s wife*
Portia	Brutus*'s wife*
	A Soothsayer Another Poet Senators, Citizens, Attendants, Soldiers

'*Enter* Caesar . . . *for the course*', (*1*, 2, 0s.d.). Robert Stephens as Caesar, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1991.

ACT 1

Act 1 Scene 1
The tribunes are angry because some tradesmen are taking a holiday to celebrate Julius Caesar's triumphant entry into Rome.

0s.d. *over the stage*: This direction indicates that the actors should walk from one side of the stage to the other.
1–5 *Hence . . . thou*: The verse immediately identifies the social class of the tribunes.
3 *mechanical*: manual labourers.
4–5 *the sign . . . profession*: the tools of your trade.
5 *thou*: This is the 'familiar' form of the pronoun, used (instead of 'you') to address inferiors, children, and intimates.
7 *rule*: ruler.

10 *in respect of*: in comparison with.
11 *cobbler*: shoe-repairer, clumsy workman.

SCENE 1

Rome: a street. Enter Flavius, Murellus, *and certain* Commoners *over the stage*

Flavius
Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home!
Is this a holiday? What, know you not,
Being mechanical, you ought not walk
Upon a labouring day without the sign
5 Of your profession? Speak, what trade art thou?

Carpenter
Why, sir, a carpenter.

Murellus
Where is thy leather apron and thy rule?
What dost thou with thy best apparel on?
You, sir, what trade are you?

Cobbler
10 Truly, sir, in respect of a fine workman, I am but, as you would say, a cobbler.

Murellus
But what trade art thou? Answer me directly.

Cobbler

A trade, sir, that I hope I may use with a safe conscienc
which is indeed, sir, a mender of bad soles.

Flavius

15 What trade, thou knave? Thou naughty knave, wha
trade?

Cobbler

Nay, I beseech you, sir, be not out with me; yet if you b
out, sir, I can mend you.

Murellus

What mean'st thou by that? Mend me, thou sauc
20 fellow?

Cobbler

Why, sir, cobble you.

Flavius

Thou art a cobbler, art thou?

Cobbler

Truly, sir, all that I live by is with the awl. I meddle wit
no tradesman's matters, nor women's matters; bu
25 withal I am indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes: whe
they are in great danger I recover them. As proper me
as ever trod upon neat's leather have gone upon m
handiwork.

Flavius

But wherefore art not in thy shop today?
30 Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?

Cobbler

Truly, sir, to wear out their shoes, to get myself int
more work. But indeed, sir, we make holiday to se
Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph.

Murellus

Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?
35 What tributaries follow him to Rome
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?
You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless thing
O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
40 Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat

---

13 *use*: practise.

14 *soles*: The Cobbler makes the common pun with 'souls'.

15 *naughty*: good-for-nothing, worthless; the word had a stronger meaning than in modern usage.

17–18 *you be out*: you are out of temper; your shoes are worn out.

18 *mend*: both 'patch your shoes' and 'improve your character'.

23 *awl*: a small pointed tool for piercing holes; an obvious pun with 'all' develops into sexual innuendo with the reference (line 24) to 'women's matters'.
meddle: interfere.

25 *withal*: nevertheless.

26 *recover*: repair—with a pun on 're-cover'.

26–7 *As . . . leather*: The expression was proverbial.

26 *proper*: fine.

27 *neat's leather*: cowhide, shoe leather.

33 *triumph*: triumphal procession bringing captives and spoils of battle into the city; Caesar is apparently returning from the battle of Munda (see 'About the Play', p.v).

35 *tributaries*: captured enemies, paying tribute-money.

36 *grace . . . bonds*: honour by appearing bound as captives.

37 *senseless things*: objects incapable of feeling or perception.

39 *Pompey*: Pompey had been allied with Caesar and Crassus in the first triumvirate (see 'About the Play', p.v).

41–2 *climbed . . . tops*: Shakespeare seems to be describing an Elizabethan scene.

43 *the . . . day*: throughout the whole day.

45 *And when . . . appear*: as soon as you caught sight of his chariot.

46 *made an universal shout*: all shouted at once.

48 *replication*: re-echoing.

49 *concave shores*: overhanging river banks.

51 *cull*: pick, choose.

53 *Pompey's blood*: Pompey's two sons were defeated by Caesar at the battle of Munda.

56 *intermit*: delay.

57 *needs must light*: must inevitably fall.

58 *for this fault*: to atone for this offence.

59 *sort*: class, rank.

61 *channel*: river-bed.

61–2 *the lowest . . . all*: the lowest water-level floods up to the highest bank.

63 *their basest metal*: the cheap metal (i.e. lead) that they are made of; their most contemptible spirits. The pun with 'metal' is continued with 'guilt'/'gilt' in the next line.
mov'd: affected; caused to remove; melted.

65 *Capitol*: The temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill.

The livelong day, with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.
45 And when you saw his chariot but appear
Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tiber trembled underneath her banks
To hear the replication of your sounds
Made in her concave shores?
50 And do you now put on your best attire?
And do you now cull out a holiday?
And do you now strew flowers in his way,
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
Be gone!
55 Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the gods to intermit the plague
That needs must light on this ingratitude.

Flavius

Go, go, good countrymen, and for this fault
Assemble all the poor men of your sort,
60 Draw them to Tiber banks, and weep your tears
Into the channel till the lowest stream
Do kiss the most exalted shores of all.

[*Exeunt all the* Commoners

See where their basest metal be not mov'd:
They vanish tongue-tied in their guiltiness.
65 Go you down that way towards the Capitol,

This way will I. Disrobe the images
If you do find them deck'd with ceremonies.

Murellus
May we do so?
You know it is the feast of Lupercal.

Flavius
70 It is no matter; let no images
Be hung with Caesar's trophies. I'll about
And drive away the vulgar from the streets;
So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
These growing feathers pluck'd from Caesar's wing
75 Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
Who else would soar above the view of men
And keep us all in servile fearfulness. [*Exeu*

66–7 *Disrobe . . . ceremonies*: It would be sacrilege to desecrate the statues in this way.
67 *ceremonies*: ceremonial vestments.
69 *feast of Lupercal*: A feast day in honour of the fertility god Lupercus was held on 15 February. Shakespeare has accelerated the action of the play by merging the triumphant return from Munda (October 45 BC) into the events of spring 42 BC.
71 *trophies*: arms, spoils taken from captured enemies.
I'll about: I will walk about.
72 *the vulgar*: the common people.
74–5 *These . . . pitch*: restraining these early enthusiasms will make him less of a highflier; the image is of plucking feathers from a young falcon's wing.
75 *pitch*: height (of a falcon's flight).

Scene 2

Rome: a public place. Enter Caesar, Antony *for the course*, Calpurnia, Portia, Decius, Cicero, Brutus, Cassius, Casca, *a* Soothsayer, *a great crowd following; after them* Murellus *and* Flavius

Caesar
Calpurnia.

Casca
Peace ho, Caesar speaks.

Caesar
Calpurnia.

Calpurnia
Here, my lord.

Caesar
Stand you directly in Antonio's way
When he doth run his course. Antonio.

Antony
5 Caesar, my lord.

Caesar
Forget not in your speed, Antonio,
To touch Calpurnia, for our elders say
The barren, touched in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.

Act 1 Scene 2
Caesar's procession crosses the stage on the way to the ceremonial games. Brutus and Cassius linger behind, and Cassius hints of future danger. The procession returns, and Casca describes Caesar's refusal of the crown. Brutus arranges to meet Cassius again, and Cassius explains his tactics to the audience.

0s.d. *for the course*: prepared for the race. On the feast of Lupercal (see *1*, 1, 69), young men ran naked through the city, touching spectators with leather thongs; see 'Shakespeare's Plutarch', p.106.

3 *Antonio*: Shakespeare's actors were probably more familiar with this Italian form of the name than with the Latin *Antonius*.

7 *elders*: wise men.
8 *touched*: touchèd.
9 *sterile curse*: curse of sterility.

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