Julius Caesar

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was the son of a prosperous leatherworker, John Shakespeare, and a prominent farmer's daughter, Mary Arden. Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and they had three children together: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith. Shakespeare left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, where he died three years later. Shakespeare left behind a legacy of 39 plays and over 150 poems, and remains the most well-known and celebrated writer of the English language to this day.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The historical Gaius Julius Caesar lived from 100 B.C.E. to March 15, 44 B.C.E. In 60 B.C.E., Caesar formed a political alliance with Crassus and Pompey called the First Triumvirate. Caesar led many wars, which expanded Rome's territory as far as Britain, and subsequently touched off a civil war; his victory led to his being proclaimed a dictator for life, which in turn led to his assassination and the rise of the Roman Empire. In Shakespeare's time, due to government censorship, writers who wished to comment on contemporary politics had to do so indirectly, which they often did by focusing on historical situations that seemed similar to current events. In 1599, Queen Elizabeth was getting old and had produced no heirs, and there was concern that political strife—even civil war—might follow her death. It is likely that Shakespeare intended *Julius Caesar* as a warning to ambitious British nobles who might try to seize power after Elizabeth died.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The assassination of Julius Caesar and the ensuing power struggles are among the best-documented events ever dramatized by Shakespeare, meticulously chronicled by Roman historians and a favorite subject of poets for centuries thereafter. Shakespeare's chief source for *Julius Caesar* was Thomas North's translation of *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, by the famous historian Plutarch. Other Shakespeare plays based on events from Roman history include *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Being a historical play, *Julius Caesar* draws on real-life events and references. It takes place just after Caesar's defeat of Pompey, a struggle that is chronicled by Caesar himself in *The Civil War*. Beyond Caesar's exploits, Brutus's beliefs and behavior are rooted in the philosophy of Stoicism, a Greek school of thought that came about in the 3rd century B.C.E. Popular Stoic works include *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius, *Letters from a Stoic* by Seneca, and the writings of Epictetus.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Tragedy of Julius Caesar
- **When Written:** 1599
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1623
- **Literary Period:** Renaissance
- **Genre:** Tragic drama; history play
- **Setting:** Rome and environs, 44 B.C.E.
- **Climax:** Brutus's suicide
- **Antagonist:** Cassius
- **Point of View:** Dramatic

EXTRA CREDIT

Time Warp. As in many of his plays, Shakespeare manipulates time in *Julius Caesar*, both for dramatic convenience and to make the setting less foreign to his audience. For example, the time between Caesar's triumphal march with Pompey's sons and the defeat of Cassius and Brutus was around two years in real life, but Shakespeare compresses it into two months. And at one point a mechanical clock strikes the time, yet such clocks wouldn't be invented for over 1,000 years after the play takes place!

Et tu, Bruté? Despite the title of *Julius Caesar*, one could argue that this play could just as easily be titled the *Tragedy of Brutus*. Caesar dies less than halfway through the play and has fewer lines than several other major characters. The story of the noble Brutus being undone by his dispassionate logic and his trust in Cassius conforms much more closely to the literary model of tragedy.

PLOT SUMMARY

The play opens with Julius Caesar's triumphal entry into **Rome** after defeating his rival, Pompey. It's also the feast of Lupercal, an annual Roman holiday. During the festivities, a soothsayer warns Caesar to "Beware the idea of March"—an omen Caesar

quickly dismisses. Meanwhile, Cassius tries to persuade Brutus that Caesar is dangerously ambitious. Brutus admits that although he loves Caesar, he doesn't want Caesar to become king, and he desires the good of Rome above all else. After the Lupercal race, Casca informs them that Antony offered Caesar a crown three times, and Caesar refused it each time, although he thinks that Caesar looked increasingly reluctant to say no with each refusal. Brutus and Cassius agree to talk later; Cassius plots to leave Brutus fake letters denouncing Caesar's ambition. Later, the streets of Rome are filled with fearful **omens** like meteors, earthquakes, lions, and owls. Cassius persuades Casca that the omens are signs of Caesar's imminent tyranny, winning him over to the conspiracy.

Brutus, who hasn't slept since Cassius spoke to him of the conspiracy, talks himself into believing that assassinating Caesar is the best thing to do for Rome. He reads an anonymous letter urging him to "redress" unspoken injustices against Rome. Then Cassius arrives with the other conspirators. Brutus continues to be motivated more by principle than by ambition, emerging as a leader of the plot—he rejects the inclusion of Cicero and the assassination of Antony, who's close to Caesar. After the conspirators part ways, Brutus's wife, Portia, begs Brutus to tell her what's going on. She says that as his wife and Cato's daughter, she's stronger than most women; in fact, she's wounded herself in the thigh to demonstrate her trustworthiness. Brutus promises to confide in her later.

Meanwhile, Caesar can't sleep, either. His wife, Calpurnia, has dreamed of Caesar's murder and begs him to stay home from the Capitol that day. In spite of this warning and a fearful augury, Caesar, needing to project invulnerability, determines to go anyway. When conspirator Decius arrives, he confirms Caesar's decision by reinterpreting Calpurnia's bloody dream in a favorable light and telling Caesar he'll be crowned by the Senate that day.

At the Senate, the crowds are chaotic, with various attempts either to warn Caesar or encourage the conspirators. Inside the Capitol, the conspirators kneel before Caesar, presenting the case of Metellus Cimber's brother's banishment. They use this opportunity to stab Caesar to death in turn. Caesar dies after saying, "You, too, Brutus?" The conspirators dip their hands and weapons in Caesar's **blood** as a sign of Rome's newfound "liberty" from tyranny. Antony comes in, ostensibly makes peace with the conspirators, and gains Brutus's permission to speak at Caesar's funeral, despite Cassius's suspicions. After the others leave, Antony prophesies that brutal civil war will break out, prompted by Caesar's vengeful spirit, and he begins to plot with Caesar's nephew and heir, Octavius Caesar.

At Caesar's funeral, Brutus appeals to the people's reason, arguing that it was necessary to kill Caesar for the sake of Rome. At first, they shout their approval. When Antony addresses the people, however, he gives an emotionally charged speech, grieving Caesar and ironically praising Brutus as "honorable." By the time he concludes his speech with a reading of Caesar's will, he has incited the people to vengeful rebellion, and Brutus and Cassius have fled the city.

Later, Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus—the Second Triumvirate—make battle plans and consider whether to execute other conspirators. In their own army camp, Brutus and Cassius have a disagreement, centered on Brutus's stubborn sense of principle and Cassius's pragmatism. After the argument descends into an exchange of insults and Cassius's dramatic demand that Brutus kill him, the two reconcile. Brutus explains he is short-tempered because of the news of Portia's recent suicide—she killed herself by eating hot coals because she feared that Brutus couldn't defeat Antony and Octavius. Brutus successfully argues that their army should go on the offensive, marching to confront Antony and Octavius's troops at Philippi. That night, Caesar's ghost appears to Brutus for the first time, warning him that they'll meet again at Philippi.

On the battlefield, the leaders exchange taunts. Later, Brutus and Cassius bid farewell to each another—Cassius newly wary of omens, and Brutus asserting that his Stoic beliefs will keep him from suicide, no matter what happens. As the battle rages, Brutus prematurely orders Cassius's forces to attack Octavius's vulnerable ones, giving Antony's forces a chance to overrun them. Influenced by omens and a hasty assessment of the battle's outcome, Cassius commits suicide. When he learns of this, Brutus believes that Caesar's Ghost is getting revenge on the conspirators' wrongdoing, but he commits to seeing the battle through.

Later, on the run from the enemy, Brutus finally falls on his own sword, believing it's justice for his killing of Caesar. When Antony finds his body, he declares Brutus to have been "the noblest Roman of them all" and arranges for his honorable burial before going off to celebrate his army's victory.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Julius Caesar – Julius Caesar is a famous Roman general and husband to Calpurnia. At the beginning of the play, Caesar has just defeated the faction of his rival, Pompey. His followers wish to make him king, though he has rejected Marc Antony's offer of the crown three times. Others do not want this to happen for fear of Caesar enacting tyranny over Rome, prompting Brutus, Cassius, and the other conspirators to kill him before that can happen. Caesar is a complex character. Belying his reputation for strength, Caesar has epilepsy and is deaf in one ear. Though Caesar's ambition is supposedly the reason he is killed (according to both his murderers and to the rules of tragedy), his ambition is not strongly evident in the play. Caesar is

arrogant, even to the point of self-delusion (he convinces himself that **omens** don't apply to him and that he's basically invulnerable to harm), but also displays firm adherence to his principles and is a perceptive judge of character. By the time his assassination is imminent, he seems to accept the likelihood of his death and goes to the Capitol despite Calpurnia's wishes, reasoning that death comes to everyone when it's fated to come.

Marcus Brutus – Brutus is a high-ranking and well-respected Roman, husband to Portia, and one of Caesar's murderers. Brutus is torn between his personal affection for Caesar and his political ideals, which are motivated by his abiding loyalty to **Rome**. An intelligent and self-possessed Stoic, Brutus is respected by friend and enemy alike—his honorable nature causes Caesar to question, "Et tu, Bruté?" in disbelief as Brutus kills him. Ironically, it is Brutus's admirable qualities—loyalty, reason, self-control—that cause him to betray Caesar and participate in his murder, once these qualities are manipulated by Cassius. Brutus loves Caesar, but is so opposed to Rome having a king that his reason demands Caesar's death. Brutus's strict moral code also brings about his own undoing, since he honorably allows Marc Antony to give a speech at Caesar's funeral which turns the plebeians against Brutus and the other conspirators. Despite taking up an army against Antony, Brutus refuses to kill Antony as Cassius suggests they should. After being haunted by Caesar's ghost during the army campaign, Brutus commits suicide while on the run from Antony's troops. Even Antony concludes that Brutus was "the noblest Roman of them all."

Caius Cassius – Cassius is the instigator of the conspiracy against Caesar. Cassius served beside Caesar in many wars and even once rescued him from drowning. Unlike Brutus, who loves Caesar but is opposed to the idea of a monarchy, Cassius seems more motivated by jealousy of Caesar than by any political ideology. Indeed, Cassius begins to exhibit many of the bad qualities for which he initially argued Caesar must die, like ambition, dishonesty, and greed. Cassius is skilled at using language and his perceptive nature to steer conversations to his own ends, which is how he wins over Brutus in particular to the conspiracy. At the end of the play, he commits suicide, assisted by Pindarus, when he assumes that his and Brutus's army is about to be defeated.

Mark Antony – Antony is Caesar's close friend. He desires to make Caesar king, and he brings about the undoing of the conspirators after Caesar's murder. Described as a passionate man who loves art and music, and teased by Caesar for staying out late at parties, Antony is the opposite of the coldly logical Brutus. While not perceptive enough to suspect the plot against Caesar, his masterful speech to the plebeians at Caesar's funeral stirs up the masses to mutiny. He then takes up an army against Brutus and the other conspirators to avenge Caesar's death. Antony can be devious when necessary, planning to cheat the people by altering Caesar's will, and to eliminate his ally Lepidus. It is the combination of these qualities that make him a better all-around politician—and replacement for Caesar—than either Brutus or Cassius. At the end of the play, his army triumphs over Brutus's, yet he praises Brutus as having been the noblest of Romans.

Portia – Portia is the wife of Brutus and daughter of the famous Roman statesman Cato. She is proud of her identity as a member of two prominent Roman families and takes her role as Brutus's wife seriously, demanding to be included in his plans. Despite this pride, Portia also concedes to Roman gender expectations, associating femininity with weakness and identifying with the ideal of the fearless Roman man, stabbing herself in the thigh to prove she is trustworthy, and eventually killing herself in a gruesome manner, by swallowing hot coals. Her logical personality contrasts with Calpurnia's.

Octavius Caesar – Octavius is Caesar's nephew and adopted heir. He is young and inexperienced when he returns to Rome as an ally of Antony after Caesar's death—he protests Antony's plan to betray Lepidus, and he is initially outmaneuvered by Brutus at Philippi. After the events of the play, however, Octavius eventually overcomes both Lepidus and Antony (as Shakespeare dramatized in his play *Antony and Cleopatra*) and rules successfully as Augustus Caesar.

Cicero – Cicero is an acclaimed Roman statesman and orator who makes a speech in Greek during the festivities in Act 1, baffling Casca and other hearers. Though Cassius wants to include him in the conspiracy, given the persuasive potential of his age and eloquence, Brutus rejects this idea on the grounds that Cicero isn't a follower. He is executed under Antony.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Casca – Casca is one of the conspirators. He is an adherent of the Cynic school of philosophy—a type contrasted with the stoicism of Brutus and the Epicureanism of Cassius—and is therefore sarcastic and rude. Casca is the first of the conspirators to stab Caesar, after which the others follow suit.

Calpurnia – Calpurnia is Caesar's wife. She suffers from infertility. Calpurnia is associated with supernatural **omens** in the play. She dreams of Caesar's murder and accordingly begs him to stay home from the Capitol, but he refuses on the grounds that not going to the Capitol would appear cowardly.

Decius Brutus – A conspirator. His job is to ensure that Caesar shows up to the Capitol on the day of the assassination.

Metellus Cimber – A conspirator. The case of his brother Publius's banishment forms a pretext for Caesar's assassination in the Capitol.

Caius Ligarius – A conspirator.

Cinna – A conspirator. The mob attacks Cinna the poet after Caesar's death, confusing Caesar with Cinna.

Trebonius – A conspirator.

Lucius – Brutus's servant.

Lepidus – Along with Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar, Lepidus is a weak member of the Second Triumvirate, tolerated by the other two as an easily manipulated errand-boy.

Flavius – One of the first characters to speak in the play, Flavius is a tribune. He questions some commoners, including a carpenter and a cobbler, regarding the public celebration of Caesar's victory. He is later executed for defacing statues of Caesar.

Murellus – One of the first characters to speak in the play, Murellus is a tribune. He questions some commoners, including a carpenter and a cobbler, regarding the public celebration of Caesar's victory. He is later executed for defacing statues of Caesar.

Publius – Metellus's brother. A Senator who was banished by Caesar and is therefore sympathetic to the conspirators.

Popilius Laena – A Senator who expresses sympathy to the conspirators at the beginning of Act 3.

Soothsayer – During the Lupercal festivities, the soothsayer warns Caesar to "Beware the ides of March." He tries a second time to forewarn Caesar before he is assassinated, but to no avail.

Artemidorus – Somehow having learned of the conspiracy, Artemidorus attempts to intercept Caesar outside the Capitol, but Caesar declines to read his letter of warning.

Cinna the Poet – At the end of Act 3, Cinna the Poet is pursued by the plebeians on the way to Caesar's funeral. Even though he insists that he's not Cinna the conspirator, he is carried off by the vengeful mob.

Pindarus – Cassius's indentured servant, who assists his suicide.

Titinius – One of Cassius's officers.

Lucilius – One of Brutus's officers.

Messala – One of Brutus's officers.

Varrus – One of Brutus's officers.

Claudio – One of Brutus's officers.

Young Cato – Portia's father and one of Brutus's officers.

Strato – An officer of Brutus, who assists his suicide.

Volumnius – One of Brutus's officers. He declines to assist Brutus's suicide.

Dardanius – One of Brutus's officers. He declines to assist Brutus's suicide.

Clitus – One of Brutus's officers. He declines to assist Brutus's suicide.

Poet – Interrupts an argument between Brutus and Cassius.

Cobbler – The cobbler is participating in a public celebration of Caesar's triumphal return at the start of the play; he is questioned by Marullus and Flavius.

Carpenter – The carpenter is participating in a public celebration of Caesar's triumphal return at the start of the play; he is questioned by Marullus and Flavius.

Plebeians – The plebeians are common people, first pacified by Brutus, then stirred up by Antony, after the murder of Caesar. They also carry off Cinna the poet.

Messenger – Brings news to Antony at Philippi.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MANHOOD AND HONOR

Julius Caesar is a play preoccupied with questions of masculinity, with characters constantly examining their actions in light of their relationship to accepted ideas of manly virtue and strength. Over the course of the play, those accepted ideas are presented in surprisingly ambiguous ways. For example, Julius Caesar himself suffers from weaknesses that earn onlookers' scorn, yet he still inspires fear, and he doesn't falter in the face of likely assassination. Some of the "manliest" actions are displayed by a female character—Brutus's wife, Portia—who apparently longs for greater involvement in the world of men. And Brutus, though mocked by Antony for questionable honor in the aftermath of Caesar's killing, is universally praised as a noble man after his own death. By portraying the varied motivations and perceptions of these characters, culminating in their respective deaths, Shakespeare argues that one's manhood and honor are ultimately proven by the way a person perseveres to the end of life and faces his (or her) death.

Caesar's manliness is questioned throughout the play. In Act 1, Caesar reportedly asks that his throat be cut rather than endure the shame of the crowds' displeasure at his being offered kingship by Antony. And yet, the strain of the moment causes a spell of the "falling sickness" (an epileptic seizure). When Caesar recovers, he asks onlookers to attribute his untoward words to his illness, and while some "wenches" among the crowd forgive him, Casca, reporting this to Caesar's detractors, dismisses the whole scene as mere "foolery." This scene suggests that Caesar's illness makes him inherently variable and unreliable, appealing to women but not taken seriously by most men. Ironically, his perceived ambition is still enough to cause those men to want to eliminate the threat that

he poses. Later, however, Caesar goes resolutely to his death, spurning Calpurnia's fearful attempts to detain him and stoically concluding that "Death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come." Caesar's refusal to be deterred by "feminine" fears, instead accepting the likelihood of his death with equanimity, does lead to his death. This ultimately suggests that he's resolute and honorable when it counts most—shrinking, perhaps, in the face of an unpredictable crowd, but prepared to face death even when he could make excuses and avoid it. This supports the argument that manhood isn't reducible to isolated episodes, but is proven by the way a person endures to the end.

Something similar is demonstrated by the "masculine" character of Portia. In Act 2, Portia establishes the case for her trustworthiness on the claim that she's an atypical woman: "I grant I am a woman, but withal / A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife. / I grant I am a woman, but withal / A woman well-reputed, Cato's daughter. / Think you I am no stronger than my sex, / Being so fathered and so husbanded?" In other words, Portia's high-regarded reputation among exceptional men separate her from the "weakness" that's to be expected of other women, and thus she can be entrusted with the matters of state that trouble Brutus. Not only that, but Portia wounds herself in the thigh to demonstrate that, like a man, she's strong enough to stoically endure suffering and is therefore worthy of Brutus's confidence. Later, Brutus is grieved when he learns that Portia, ashamed of his possible failure at war, has swallowed hot coals to commit suicide. Portia leaves an impression of a woman struggling to garner respect in a world governed by inexorable masculine norms. In the end, there's no enduring place for her in such a world, and she follows those norms to an exaggerated conclusion by choosing the most painful possible death. Ultimately, then, Portia proves her "manhood" through the only means available to her—pursuing suffering all the way to death.

Like Caesar, Brutus is doubted throughout the play, and is presented as an ambiguous character as far as manliness and honor go. During Antony's funeral speech for Caesar, Antony deploys the refrain "Brutus is an honorable man" ironically in order to cast doubt on Brutus's allegedly honorable intentions, which the masses had been praising moments before. Antony's emotionally-laden speech ends up shifting the people's allegiance from Brutus to himself, and sends Brutus and the conspirators into exile from **Rome**. And yet, at the end of the play, Antony celebrates Brutus's masculinity even after the latter's death, concluding that of all the conspirators, only Brutus's intentions were noble. Because of his rejection of envy and consistent action according to honest principle, the world can look upon Brutus in death and say, "This was a man." This suggests that, despite the shifting loyalties of the masses and changing political expediencies, Brutus is really proven to be "an honorable man" by the way he follows his principles in the long run, even unto death.

In some ways, Shakespeare avoids an overly rigid code of manliness in *Julius Caesar*. No single character exemplifies masculinity in an unvarying, wooden manner, and even women can embody it. On the other hand, manhood and honor can only finally be assessed upon one's death, meaning that, to a certain extent, it's an unattainable ideal in life—one that is constantly sought after and subject to the assessments of one's peers.

LOGIC AND LANGUAGE

Though there is certainly violence in *Julius Caesar*, characters spend far more time talking to one another than they do fighting or killing, and much of that talk takes the form of argument and debate. Though such argument and debate certainly involves the use of logic—the approach Brutus favors—other characters, namely Cassius and Antony, are skilled at manipulating language to make something seem logical when it is not. By contrasting these approaches and ultimately showing how Brutus's adherence to logic fails, Shakespeare argues that logic alone is not sufficient to move people, but that skillful use of language, even manipulation of emotion, are vital to achieving real change.

In Act 1, Cassius picks up on Brutus's reluctance regarding Caesar's possible kingship. Seizing on this opportunity, he then gives a logical demonstration of Caesar's less than godlike qualities. He uses Brutus's instinctive regard for "honor" to prove that he and Brutus are no less worthy of public regard than the "godlike" Caesar. Remembering Caesar's illness while they were on campaign together in Spain, Cassius remarks, "'Tis true, this god did shake [...] And that same eye whose bend doth awe the world / Did lose his luster." From this basis, he's able to go on and establish a case for the conspirators' obligation to oppose Caesar's arbitrary elevation to monarchy. Along with logic, Cassius also uses his perceptive read of Brutus in order to effectively target his use of language and win Brutus over to his side.

Shakespeare also shows how logic functions in ambiguous ways. For example, another key in Cassius's plan to sway Brutus is to leave anonymous notes praising Brutus's virtues and blaming Caesar's tyranny, but he uses an exceptionally light touch—he leaves large gaps in the letters (e.g., "Awake, and see thyself! Shall Rome, etc. Speak, strike, redress!"). This letter is basically illogical—it's an unclear summons to action that requires the reader to infer what's missing. Cassius cunningly plays on Brutus's existing fears, knowing that he'll interpret the letter as meaning that Rome is suffering under tyranny, and that Brutus himself should act to redress it. It's another example of the crafty use of language, here making the illogical appear logical.

After Caesar's assassination, it's Brutus's adherence to bare logic that ultimately leads to his undoing. On Antony's fervent appeal, Brutus decides that Antony should be permitted to speak at Caesar's funeral, and even that this will serve the

conspirators' advantage: "What Antony shall speak I will protest / He speaks by leave and by permission [...] It shall advantage more than do us wrong." Though the shrewder Cassius warns him "how much the people may be moved / By that which he will utter," Brutus does not think this way—he assumes that if he prefaces Antony's speech with a reasonable case that Caesar's death was in the people's interest, the people will agree. Ostensibly, it is a logical conclusion to reach, but because Brutus doesn't account for the power of language beyond mere logic, he ends up undermining himself.

At first, it seems as though Brutus's reasoning will prove to have been sound. In his funeral speech for Caesar, he builds a careful case for Caesar's death, counting on the masses to grasp that it's "not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved / Rome more..." Notably, the people respond favorably to this speech, with cries like, "Give him a statue with his ancestors!" and "Let him be Caesar!" They aren't actually responding to the inherent logic of Brutus's speech—in the passion of the moment, they're praising Brutus himself, superficially transferring their allegiance from Caesar to Brutus (much as they did when celebrating Caesar's defeat of Pompey at the beginning of the play). Shakespeare uses this detail to show that Brutus has an inadequate grasp of the psychology of the crowd—in other words, that logic alone won't suffice to achieve his goals.

By contrast, Antony's speech succeeds in capturing the plebeians, precisely because he gives vent to his emotions rather than relying on cold logic to do the job. Though he protests that, "I am no orator, as Brutus is," the opposite is the case. Antony ably uses various rhetorical techniques—pausing to openly weep, for example, displaying Caesar's will at the climax of his speech, and even using Caesar's dead **body** as a sort of prop—to heighten the people's emotions much more effectively than Brutus was able to do when he spoke. Significantly, too, his speech is not *devoid* of logic—his intentional refrain of "Brutus is an honorable man" is meant to paradoxically undermine people's confidence in Brutus. And a plebeian's comment that "methinks there is much reason in his sayings" ironically shows that this rhetorical tool is working, not necessarily by causing the crowd to use sounder logic, but by using language to incite a less fleeting emotional reaction.

In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare demonstrates that people's motivations are more complex than they realize. After all, even Brutus is susceptible to manipulation when Cassius figures out his fears and uses them to make illogical things appear eminently logical. Likewise, the fickleness of the crowds throughout the play isn't necessarily meant to suggest that the masses are unintelligent, but that, especially in moments of high drama, people are swayed as much by their emotions—and the proximity of others' emotions—as by the precise arguments being presented to them.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

Julius Caesar isn't only a play about political intrigue, but about the internal and domestic struggles that sometimes churn underneath such intrigue. Shakespeare takes care to portray the private struggles of major characters as they agonize over their future actions and are even advised by their wives. In particular, both Caesar and Brutus wrestle in different ways with the interplay between public and private. In both cases, private concerns must ultimately yield to what each man believes is the best for the public—in Caesar's case, a display of inexorable strength, and in Brutus's case, the murder of Caesar, a man he loves. By portraying the contrast between private and public, and especially by using domestic scenes to set up consequential public events, Shakespeare argues that public figures aren't always what they appear, and that public acts often come at a cost to personal integrity or happiness.

Though Caesar projects a public persona of invulnerable strength—"I rather tell thee what is to be feared," he tells Antony, "than what I fear; for always I am Caesar"—he is privately hampered by various weaknesses. For example, only those closest to Caesar seem to be aware of his deafness and his apparent susceptibility to frequent illness. And, more markedly, his devotion to his wife, Calpurnia, exerts a strong mitigating effect on his desire to project unvarying strength. When Calpurnia tells Caesar about the various dreams and **omens** she fears, his claims of fearlessness ("What can be avoided / Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?") initially yield to Calpurnia's emotional offer of a way out ("Call it my fear / that keeps you in the house, and not your own"). His earlier urging of Calpurnia to participate in a Lupercal superstition thought to cure infertility also shows how much private concerns compete with public demands in Caesar's mind. Yet, though it looks at first as if the former will supersede the latter, conspirator Decius's flattering reinterpretation of an omen changes Caesar's mind just as quickly; he decides to go to the Capitol after all, even if his determination to uphold the appearance of strength costs him his life. It's clear, then, that both private and public concerns weigh heavily on Caesar's mind, and that he is easily swayed to favor one over the other. However, he ultimately yields to what's necessary in order to preserve his public image as strong and fearless.

Brutus's public acts are also heavily influenced by what takes place in private. Especially, Brutus is tormented by the contrast between his personal regard for Caesar and his need to act for the public good of Rome. His ruminations about this take place largely in private—the beginning of Act 2 finds him pacing in his garden, in the middle of reasoning that "I know no personal cause to spurn at [Caesar]," yet "it is the bright day that brings forth the adder" which must be crushed while still in the shell. In other words, the two men's friendly private connection must yield to what might pose danger to the broader public—and the

latter will only be revealed once Caesar gains too much power, meaning that it will then be too late for private scruples to outweigh the public good. His belief that he's backed into a corner causes Brutus anguish, shown by his insomnia and the rebellion of the "little kingdom" of his **body**—that is, a private, small-scale parallel to the upheaval of the public world. And, like Caesar, Brutus is influenced by his wife; Shakespeare's inclusion of the private scene with Portia—in which the conspirators' nighttime visit is followed by Portia's modeling of "masculine" fortitude—suggests that his wife's strength steels Brutus for what he believes he must do ("Render me worthy of this noble wife!"). While Brutus isn't concerned with upholding a public persona as Caesar is, he, too, ultimately yields his private concerns to what he perceives as the public good.

All the major characters of *Julius Caesar* are public figures—some are even like celebrities—and are conscious of the fact that they live their lives and make their decisions before the audience of the Roman people, who may or may not be receptive. Even Antony, who appears to be a "man of the people" and a loyal friend, plans to cheat the people out of Caesar's legacy, despite his public self-presentation as the people's champion. Through self-contradictory portrayals like these, Shakespeare shows that the tensions inherent in a celebrity-driven culture are consistent across time.

POLITICS AND MORALITY

Since the **Rome** of *Julius Caesar* is portrayed as the pinnacle of civilization, arguments about Rome's governance are also arguments about what constitutes an ideal government. The entire play centers around Brutus upholding the truth of two moral statements: First, that monarchy is intrinsically tyrannical; and secondly, that killing Caesar, an as-yet-innocent man, is morally acceptable if it prevents Rome from becoming a monarchy. Brutus's strict moral code makes no allowance for self-preservation, however, and so he rejects the killing of Antony, and even allows Antony to address the plebeians—a step that wins Antony mass support and proceeds to Brutus's and the conspirators' ultimate demise. Giving in to Cassius on either of his moral points, then, would have prevented Brutus's ruin, but violated his principles. Through Brutus's moral plight, Shakespeare argues that it's hardly possible for moral principle and political advancement to coexist; one will inevitably undermine the other.

Brutus's principled opposition to monarchy is exploited by more politically ambitious characters like Cassius, who are simply hungry for power. One of the central arguments of the play is that, in the context of ancient Rome, kingship is equated with tyranny. When Cassius begins manipulating Brutus in the direction of the conspiracy, he appeals to the "shame" of Rome accepting a king: "Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods! / When went there by an age, since the great flood, / But it was famed with more than with one man?" In this view, it's not just immoral but "un-Roman" for Rome to be governed by a solitary figure; historically, Rome has been distinguished by its elevation of many worthy men. Cassius uses this argument to sway Brutus not only in the belief that Caesar is too ambitious, but that he, whose "hidden worthiness" rivals Caesar's alleged godlike status, has a moral obligation to actively oppose it. This reasoning works on Brutus even more effectively than Cassius expects—or wants. Later, in private, Brutus recalls his forebears' expulsion of the "Tarquin," Rome's last king: "Shall Rome stand under one man's awe? [...] O Rome, I make thee promise [...] thou receivest / Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus." Brutus believes that opposing Caesar is not just a matter of current political expediency, but of maintaining an inherently Roman tradition of preserving greater liberty by resisting the pretensions of the ambitious.

This belief also shapes Brutus's attitudes about the assassination and its aftermath, to Cassius's frustration. Brutus opposes the idea of killing Caesar's close confidant, Antony, on the grounds that this would make the conspirators mere butchers. He reasons that because Antony is simply a "limb" of Caesar, killing Caesar is sufficient to stifle any backlash; furthermore, "Our purpose [must be] necessary and not envious [...] We shall be called purgers, not murderers." In other words, in order to remain consistent with their own ethics, the conspirators must do only as much as is necessary to forestall tyranny; going beyond that risks making the conspirators tyrannical themselves. However, Brutus's restraint ends up backfiring, as Antony quickly stirs up popular support and incites civil war in the aftermath of Caesar's murder, leading to his eventual victory and Brutus's own death. So Brutus's moral principles end up undermining the purposes for which Cassius recruited him for the conspiracy. This suggests that it's difficult for morality to withstand political ambitions of any kind.

Because historical plays would be understood to offer comment on contemporary matters, it's reasonable to conclude that Shakespeare was offering a warning to the nobility of his day—not that Queen Elizabeth was a tyrant, but that in the absence of an heir, the aspirations of ambitious nobles were only likely to worsen ongoing trouble. His tragic treatment of Brutus also suggests that, in any political era, those who adhere strictly to principle are likely to be exploited by those who have no such scruples.

FATE

During Caesar's triumphal march into **Rome**, a soothsayer cries out from the crowd, "Beware the ides of March!" Later, on the day of the assassination, the soothsayer positions himself among the crowd once again. Caesar, who'd curtly dismissed him the first time, sees the soothsayer and says rather challengingly, "The ides of March are come." The soothsayer replies, "Aye, Caesar,

but not gone." This ambiguous scene sets the tone for the role of fate throughout the play: does human action prevail in spite of fate, or does fate defy human action? Shakespeare never neatly resolves this question. In fact, by showing how characters often read supernatural signs to confirm their intended courses of action, Shakespeare argues that while supernatural phenomena may be real, human beings are chiefly responsible for their own destinies.

The night before the assassination, Casca observes that the sky is filled with meteors, fiery figures roam the streets, and an owl shrieked in the marketplace at noon. There are so many **omens**, he tells Cicero, that he's convinced "they are portentous things / Unto the climate that the point upon." Cicero agrees that it's all quite strange, but that "men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves." Arguably, Cicero's words end up being more prophetic than the mysterious signs themselves—when Casca talks with Cassius thereafter, Cassius uses the omens to persuade Casca that Caesar has grown "prodigious […] and fearful, as these strange eruptions are" and must therefore be killed. The conspiracy to kill Caesar predates the "strange eruptions," and Cassius reads the omens as a positive sign of imminent success, rather than as a warning, in order to win Casca to his cause. This suggests that, as Cicero has argued, people will see what they choose to see.

This point is further illustrated when Caesar wrestles with the meaning of Calpurnia's prophetic dream. Calpurnia dreams that Caesar's statue spurts **blood**, in which Romans happily bathe themselves. Based on the dream and the other alarming signs, Calpurnia at first convinces Caesar to stay home from the Capitol; but when Decius arrives—dispatched by the other conspirators to ensure the newly superstitious Caesar's attendance at the Senate—he puts a different spin on things: "This dream is all amiss interpreted. / It was a vision fair and fortunate." The people's eagerness for Caesar's blood, claims Decius, signifies not that anyone seeks to kill him, but that Caesar has a reviving impact on Rome. This almost laughable twist on a grisly dream persuades Caesar to leave the house despite Calpurnia's warnings—suggesting that he was determined to do so anyway, and that Decius's words simply provide the justification.

The very fact that Decius was sent to escort Caesar also suggests that the conspirators don't rely too closely on omens, either—various human efforts are put in place to ensure that the conspiracy is accomplished as they intend. This is further seen when, on the threshold of the Capitol, the conspirators take their places in a carefully-orchestrated configuration to ensure that Caesar is killed in the manner and timing they desire. As far as the conspirators are concerned, everything depends upon them; omens are subservient to their own intentions and efforts, and primarily serve to confirm them.

The attitude *Julius Caesar* takes towards free will is paradoxical. On one hand, many of the play's key events are accurately predicted, both by humans with prophetic abilities like the soothsayer, and by the natural world itself. This suggests a world where fate is predetermined, or at least heavily influenced by uncanny forces. Yet, at the same time, the human capacity for reason plays a chief role, as many scenes involve characters going through careful decision-making processes or engaging in complex arguments. This suggests a world where events come about as a result of free will. Shakespeare leaves his audience to puzzle over this apparent paradox much as his characters are forced to do, although hinting through Caesar that "death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come."

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

OMENS

The presence of omens and prophecies in *Julius Caesar* represent the mysterious, underlying forces at work beneath human behavior and historical events, as they lend an air of the supernatural to the cold political machinery of **Rome**. From the soothsayer's warning, to the meteor shower on the eve of Caesar's assassination, to the carrion birds that presage Cassius's defeat in battle, major events in the play seem inevitable, as if decreed by the gods. Then again, things may not be as fixed as they seem—does knowing that the next day is the ides of March help make up Brutus's mind to align with the conspirators? While Shakespeare doesn't make a clear-cut argument about fate, he uses omens to suggest that there are many complex factors at work in history, and that human motivations are more layered and mysterious than they first appear.

BODY, BLOOD, & PAIN

In *Julius Caesar*, the human body echoes the body politic. For example, Caius Ligarius describes the murder of Caesar as "a piece of work that will make sick men whole," or restore an ailing **Rome** to health. Anxious about the conspiracy, the sleepless Brutus describes a rebellion in the "little kingdom" of his body, which echoes both present and coming civil unrest. And Calpurnia's dream about Caesar's bleeding statue is reinterpreted to mean that Rome draws its life from Caesar, as if his health were synonymous with the city's. Later, when the conspirators bathe themselves in Caesar's blood, it's an ambiguous expression of their complicity in Rome's impending power struggle, even as they display the blood as a symbol of Rome's liberty from tyranny.

ROME

In the play, Rome, because of its centrality in the history of Western civilization, often symbolizes the world in microcosm. For example, in Act 1, Cassius appeals to Brutus's sense of honor by urging him to "think of the world," i.e., the well-being of Rome. In fact, Brutus's entire obsession with the good of Rome versus his love for Caesar symbolizes the conflict between social good and individual desire. On an interpersonal level, after Cassius commits suicide, Titinius laments that "the sun of Rome is set" and that the world is darkened by his friend's absence.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the The Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Julius Caesar* published in 1992.

Act 1, scene 2 Quotes

"Beware the ides of March."

Related Characters: Soothsayer (speaker), Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.2.21

Explanation and Analysis

The soothsayer interrupts Antony's running of the course, a public demonstration, by shouting "Caesar!" The soothsayer then delivers this famous prophesy, before he is ignored by Caesar and sent on his way. At first Caesar does not hear the prophesy, but Brutus (his eventual killer) and the Soothsayer both repeat the line. "The ides of March" refers to the middle of the month, March 15.

This quote is the first of many omens that appear, and it introduces the question about Fate that will continue to develop over the course of the play: do human reason and decision-making cause events, or are they governed only by predetermined fate? The soothsayer's ability to accurately predict Caesar's demise suggests the murder was fated, but since Brutus heard the prediction, it could also be said that his actions and decisions were what made the prophesy come true.

The exchange surrounding this quote also gives a glimpse into one of Caesar's ailments (deafness), placing it in contrast with his projected image of invulnerability. Privately, Caesar is superstitious, as is revealed moments before this scene, when he asks Antony to touch Calpurnia for luck. But in public, Caesar projects arrogant manliness, and dismisses the Soothsayer without a second thought.

Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Related Characters: Caius Cassius (speaker), Marcus Brutus, Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.2.146-148

Explanation and Analysis

Talking in private away from the spectacle of "the order of the course," Cassius is carefully convincing Brutus to conspire against Caesar. Displaying skillful use of language, Cassius appeals to Brutus's sense of honor, morality, and love of Rome while belittling Caesar and ironizing his immortality and greatness. In this quote, Cassius suggests that he and Brutus are subservient to Caesar not because of fate or any particular excellence in Caesar, but because of their lack of action.

This quote brings up the question of fate and reinforces the ambiguity that comes with attempting to answer it. Cassius does not say definitively that fate is meaningless. Instead, he insinuates that fate exists, but that people sometimes have the ability to thwart it. In this particular case, he argues, reason, action, and free will determine the outcome instead of fate and the stars. Cassius pairs this suggestion with an appeal to Brutus's sense of honor and duty to Rome in order to persuade Brutus to act and join the conspiracy.

Let me have men about me that are fat;
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights.
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Caius Cassius

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.2.202-205

Explanation and Analysis

The public event has ended, and Caesar and his train have re-entered the stage. While Cassius and Brutus plan to pull aside Casca and get details on "what the matter is," Antony and Caesar speak privately. Caesar notices a suspicious look on Cassius's face, saying that he is "lean and hungry." Here, "lean" is proverbially related to envy, and "hungry" and "fat" are meant figuratively. Caesar wishes that he was surrounded instead by "fat," lazy, well-groomed, predictable men who can sleep at night, because he wouldn't have to fear that such men might be plotting against him. The reference to men who can sleep at night also foreshadows Brutus's sleeplessness as he contemplates assassinating Caesar.

Caesar characterizes Cassius as "dangerous," but Antony quickly responds, "fear him not." This moment shows Caesar's political insight, since Cassius is dangerous to him, and Antony's lack of experience and optimism.

Also note the distinction that Caesar makes between what is rhetorically and politically dangerous, and what Caesar says he actually fears (nothing). Perpetually idealized and manly, Caesar clearly indicates that he is not afraid of Cassius. Rather, Caesar tells Antony what *should* be feared rather than what he *does* fear, explaining that "for always I am Caesar." While Caesar's bravery gives him an appearance of profound nobility, the play also shows how Caesar's public persona as an invulnerable, fearless leader has crossed over into his private life and his opinion of himself, making him blind to the danger actually facing him. He has, in a sense, become trapped inside his public persona, which forces him to continually reject his fears, superstitions, and the warnings and omens he sees and to behave in ways (like going to the Senate on that fateful day) that lead to his death.

❝ But those that understood him smil'd at one another, and shook their heads; but for mine own part, it was Greek to me.

Related Characters: Casca (speaker), Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.2.293-295

Explanation and Analysis

This line is the origin of the common idiom "it's all Greek to me." Caesar and his train have left the stage, leaving only Brutus, Cassius, and Casca, the speaker of this quote. Casca is relating to Brutus and Cassius what happened during the public event while the two were plotting. He explains that the cheers they heard were caused by Antony offering Caesar a crown (three times). A cynic, Casca suggests that it was harder for Caesar to reject the crown each time it was offered. He then describes Caesar's epileptic fit, another infirmity ironically paired with power.

The quote specifically refers to the public speech made in Greek by Cicero, a famous orator. Casca cannot summarize the speech because he doesn't speak Greek. Note that in this scene, Casca speaks in prose, while Brutus and Cassius continue to speak in verse (iambic pentameter), a sign that Casca is less educated and less skilled with language. The cheering people, the language barrier, and Cicero's public speech in Greek emphasize the growing divide in Rome, and the importance of controlling the public opinion. Public oration and persuading the common people to see a certain viewpoint will become extremely important when Brutus and Antony speak after Caesar's assassination.

Act 2, scene 1 Quotes

❝ I grant I am a woman; but withal a woman that Lord Brutus took to wife; I grant I am a woman; but withal a women well reputed, Cato's daughter. Think you I am no stronger than my sex, being so father'd, and so husbanded? Tell me your counsels, I will not disclose'em. I have made a strong proof of my constancy, giving myself a voluntary wound here, in the thigh: can I bear that with patience, and not my husband's secrets?

Related Characters: Portia (speaker), Marcus Brutus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.1.315-325

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Brutus has decided that Caesar must die, and he and the other conspirators have planned to commit the murder at the Capitol the next morning. Portia (Brutus's wife) notices that her husband has been acting strangely, getting up at all hours of the night and seemingly pacing and musing at random. She sees that he is not physically ill, but rather has some "sick offense within [his] mind." She begs him to open up to her, and to share what is causing him and

his many visitors (the other conspirators who have just come and left in the middle of the night) to act so strangely.

Portia tells Brutus that as his wife, she can be trusted with his secrets. In order to prove herself, she gives the men around her as references for her status as a special woman. She concedes the contemporary belief that women are inferior to men, but claims that as the wife to Brutus and daughter to Cato (a famous Roman), she is "stronger than [her] sex." What's more, she stabs herself in the thigh to prove her manliness and her "constancy" (trustworthiness). Through this gesture, it becomes clear that in Ancient Rome, masculinity is associated with self-sacrifice and the endurance of pain, whereas femininity is considered weak. This self-inflicted wound also foreshadows both her suicide and her husband's eventual suicide at the end of the play.

Act 2, scene 2 Quotes

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.2.34-39

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, the audience can see the marriage of Caesar and Calpurnia in contrast with the marriage of Brutus and Portia. Opposing Brutus's secrecy, there is an open dialogue between Caesar and Calpurnia. Calpurnia tries to convince Caesar not to leave the house that day, listing the many omens that have been seen throughout Rome. To that list she adds her own prophetic nightmares in which she foresaw Caesar's death, linking her to the supernatural elements of the play.

In this quote, Caesar says it is far better to die valiantly and honorably than to be a coward, as cowards suffer and "die" constantly. Caesar is trapped by his public persona. He is privately superstitious, and since he believes himself so important, he assumes that the omens are for him—but he cannot act cowardly without bringing about the "death" of the public Caesar and of his self-image.

Caesar also reveals his opinion on fate: death is "a necessary end" that comes to everyone; there is nothing you can do to stop it. For this reason, he argues, death is nothing to be feared. Again, this opinion is paradoxical, because by accepting his death as fated and refusing to act to prevent it (by staying at home, for example), Caesar allows his "fated" death to occur. Ultimately, Caesar ignores Calpurnia's warning to save his public image and his self-image as fearless and infallible.

Act 3, scene 1 Quotes

Caesar: The ides of March are come.
Soothsayer: Aye, Caesar, but not gone.

Related Characters: Soothsayer, Julius Caesar (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.1-2

Explanation and Analysis

The conspiracy is under way. Caesar is now at the Capitol surrounded by conspirators, and will die in this scene. Caesar opens Act 3 by challenging the Soothsayer, suggesting that since it is now March 15 (the ides) and nothing bad has happened, the prophesy must have been wrong. The soothsayer's cryptic response is to remind Caesar that the ides of March are not over yet—there is still time for Caesar to meet his fate.

This exchange reinforces Caesar's superstition. Despite his public dismissal of the soothsayer's prophesy, Caesar remembers and has clearly been thinking about the omen. As the play moves towards his climactic death, it seems more and more Fated. At the same time, the audience still wonders at how Caesar seems to know his death is coming and yet does nothing to stop it. This exchange is the final moment where the living Caesar is tied to the supernatural, foreshadowing his return as a ghost.

Et tu, Bruté? — Then fall, Caesar!

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Marcus Brutus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.85

Explanation and Analysis

The conspirators have surrounded Caesar, each kneeling before him, pretending to plead for the reversal of Publius's banishment. Despite their pleas, Caesar refuses to change his mind, remaining "constant as the Northern Star." Beginning with Casca and ending with Brutus, the conspirators then rise one by one and stab Caesar. Supposedly, Caesar stopped defending himself when he realized that Brutus was in on the plot. Caesar then utters the beginning of this line in Latin, shocked at the betrayal of his dear friend Brutus. The Latin translates to "And you, Brutus?" or "You too, Brutus?" Caesar's final living sentence is the dramatic proclamation of his fall. He dies after speaking this line.

Though Antony will ultimately defend Brutus at the end of the play, this deep betrayal of Caesar is the reason that Dante puts Brutus in the deepest circle of hell in his epic poem *Divine Comedy*. The conspirators justify the murder by reason and logic, seeing it as political necessity for the public good, but Caesar's last line suggests that he felt it instead as a private betrayal. This "rational" murder is also extremely bloody. After the conspirators stab Caesar in excess, they literally bathe in his blood, smearing it all over their arms and their swords to take ownership of the assassination.

The scene is also extremely meta-theatrical, meaning that it shows awareness of itself as theatre. The quote, Caesar's final line, is dramatized by the use of Latin and the climatic final sentence. While the conspirators are bathing in Caesar's blood, Cassius says, "How many ages hence shall this our lofty scene be acted over in states unborn and accents yet unknown!" The line calls out attention to the fact that it is being spoken in a scene in a play. At the same time, it also shows how the characters felt during the historical events, reinforcing the idea that they lived on the public stage of Rome, and that their actions would be recorded and remembered as history.

Finally, note that even though the play is named for Caesar, he dies at around the halfway point. The remainder of the play must work out tragic deaths for the conspirators.

Cry Havoc! and let slip the dogs of war.

Related Characters: Mark Antony (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.299

Explanation and Analysis

Antony has entered and seen Caesar's dead body. He is overcome with emotion, offering his life to the conspirators, but he is also calm and strategic. Antony shakes hands with the (literally) bloody conspirators, pretending to make peace, and asks only to speak at Caesar's funeral. Cassius, who wanted to kill Antony from the beginning, thinks it is a bad idea, but Brutus, who is convinced that the assassination was for the good of Rome, agrees to let Antony speak on the condition that he does not speak badly about the conspirators.

After the conspirators leave, Antony gives a soliloquy revealing his true intentions. He shows that he only acted civil with the "butchers" to allow for revenge. He predicts that war will break out because of the murder, and even suggests that Caesar's spirit will return to "Cry havoc" and unleash war so that his foul murder will be avenged. Antony is ultimately right about the return of Caesar's ghost and the war that will soon begin. He will soon harness his raw emotions in a public oration that will incite the very war he here predicts.

Act 3, scene 2 Quotes

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault;
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest, —
For Brutus is an honorable man;
So are they all, all honorable men, —
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.

Related Characters: Mark Antony (speaker), Marcus Brutus, Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.2.82-96

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is excerpted from one of the most famous speeches in Shakespeare's body of work. Brutus has already spoken to the public, beginning with "Romans, countrymen, and lovers." Brutus says that he loved and honored Caesar, but killed him because he loved Rome more. The public responds well, even to the point of wanting to crown Brutus. But Brutus makes the crucial mistake of leaving before Antony speaks. Antony, a powerful orator, makes an incredibly skillful speech in which he appeals to emotion, and turns the public against Brutus and the conspirators.

He begins by referring to the public as his friends, stressing immediately his difference from Brutus. Antony then goes on to "bury Caesar," seeming to respect the wishes of the conspirators but actually reminding the public of their love for Caesar while simultaneously casting doubt on "Brutus and the rest." Antony repeats Brutus's name many times, and ironically suggests that Brutus is "honorable." By using his skill with language and making public displays of his private emotions—at one point he pauses in his speech theatrically because he is overcome with emotion and tears—Antony is able to refute Brutus and turn the populace against him, beginning the civil war he predicted in his soliloquy. He carefully reveals Caesar's will and describes the murder with gruesome detail, even displaying Caesar's bloodied body, until the people are so riled up that they begin to riot. All the while, Antony maintains a show of innocence, claiming that he is a bad speaker and doesn't want to cause a commotion.

Act 4, scene 3 Quotes

❝ Remember March, the ides of March remember:
Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?
What villain touch'd his body, that did stab,
And not for justice? What, shall one of us
That struck the foremost man of all this world
But for supporting robbers, shall we now
Contaminate our fingers with base bribes,
And sell the mighty space of our large honours
For so much trash as may be grasped thus?
I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon,
Than such a Roman.

Related Characters: Marcus Brutus (speaker), Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.3.19-29

Explanation and Analysis

The two sides are preparing their armies: Octavius and Antony against Brutus and Cassius. But Cassius and Brutus are losing trust and getting frustrated with each other. In this quote, Brutus and Cassius are speaking in private: Cassius is mad at Brutus for punishing one of their officers for a small offense, and Brutus is accusing Cassius of taking bribes. Here he evokes the prophesy of the ides of March and the ideals for which they murdered Caesar: justice, honor, and the good of Rome. Brutus claims that they assassinated Caesar for being corrupt, and that it would be extremely hypocritical for them to be corrupt in turn. A man of honor and principles, especially Roman principles, Brutus claims he would rather be a dog than a hypocritical man.

Like Caesar, who died in part because of his unwillingness to change his principles or sacrifice his self-image of invulnerability, Brutus begins to hurt himself by sticking so firmly to his principles. His insistence on being honorable and his firm belief that the killing was purely logical and justifiable is the reason that Antony was allowed to live, despite Cassius's objections. Now Antony has turned the people against the conspirators, and Brutus and Cassius are fighting amongst themselves because of Brutus's stubborn honor.

❝ There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

Related Characters: Marcus Brutus (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.3.249-255

Explanation and Analysis

Brutus and Cassius have both apologized to one another, and Brutus reveals that Portia, afraid that he would lose,

committed suicide. Brutus is reminded of her death, but acts unaffected. In this quote, Brutus and Cassius are arguing again, this time about military tactics. Brutus thinks that they should strike now, while Cassius thinks they should allow the enemy to come to them.

Here, Brutus makes an extended metaphor about Fate, comparing it to the tides and a swelling ocean. He suggests that human lives are governed by Fate, and that without good fortune men would live only in misery. Since fate is now in their favor, they need to strike now, before the tide turns on them. He also argues that waiting will allow Antony and Octavius to recruit more troops and grow their armies.

Though he claims that he is unaffected by his wife's suicide, Brutus seems to be changed. Instead of arguing for the idealized, moral side, he is now using pragmatism (Cassius's usual domain). Brutus also now speaks of Fate as if events are predetermined, even though he was previously focused on reason and his own actions as he decided whether or not to kill Caesar. Ironically, though he turns towards Fate and suggests that fortune is on his side, Brutus will ultimately lose the war and commit suicide.

Act 5, scene 1 Quotes

But this same day
Must end that work the ides of March begun;
And whether we shall meet again I know not.
Therefore our everlasting farewell take:
For ever, and for ever, farewell, Cassius!
If we do meet again, why, we shall smile;
If not, why, then, this parting was well made.

Related Characters: Marcus Brutus (speaker), Caius Cassius

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.1.123-129

Explanation and Analysis

Brutus has been haunted by the ghost of Caesar, and the opposing armies are about to meet. Brutus and Cassius and Antony and Octavius have exchanged taunts; the battle is about to begin. In private, Cassius says that though he has never before believed in omens, he now believes that the crows circling above are a bad sign. In this line, Brutus is saying his goodbye to Cassius in case they never meet again. Brutus once more evokes the soothsayer's prophesy and the assassination of Caesar. The two are afraid, fearing bad omens and fate, but are at peace with one another. Brutus acknowledges his uncertainty, not knowing how fate and his own actions will impact the results of the day. This is also their final interaction, as both of them die in the war that follows.

Act 5, scene 5 Quotes

This was the noblest Roman of all
All the conspirators, save only he,
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
He only, in a general honest thought,
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle; and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, "This was a man."

Related Characters: Mark Antony (speaker), Marcus Brutus, Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.5.74-81

Explanation and Analysis

Cassius is dead, and the conspirators' armies are defeated. Believing that he deserves to die, Brutus runs on his sword and commits suicide. He justifies his death, saying that it is not to avoid capture, but is rather honorable and a just punishment for his crimes. In the quote, Antony speaks after having discovered Brutus's corpse. Antony claims that Brutus was the only conspirator who truly believed he was acting with honor and for the good of Rome, saying that the others only envied Caesar.

While he previously referred to Brutus as honorable ironically, here Antony is being genuine, and Brutus is given an honorable death rite. These lines make a good case that this play can be seen not as the tragedy of Julius Caesar, but rather as the tragedy of Brutus, as his death and failure are in ironic contrast to his virtuous character. Antony praises Brutus, saying that the elements were mixed in him especially well. By elements, Antony refers to the Renaissance belief in bodily "humors"—substances that governed one's temperament and character. His final sentence, attributed to nature, is enigmatic: "This is a man." Brutus is not a great man, or a much beloved one like Caesar, but neither is he described as evil. In the end, Brutus

is characterized as simply a man. Recalling his desire to be a dog over a dishonorable Roman, Antony's characterization of Brutus as an honest man leaves Brutus's virtue and philosophy intact, though his army has fallen and his life is over.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Flavius and Murellus, two tribunes, talk with some commoners, including a carpenter and a cobbler, to find out why crowds of people are flooding the streets of **Rome**. After a pun-filled exchange, the cobbler reveals that they are celebrating Caesar's triumphal return.

Before delving into political intrigue, the play opens with the perspective of working-class Romans, who are happy to join in public celebrations even if they aren't primarily interested in politics. Their wordplay sets the tone for Shakespeare's clever use of language throughout the play.

Murellus asks why they celebrate Caesar—do they not remember Pompey? Didn't they once anticipate Pompey's triumphal procession with equal joy, yet now they celebrate Pompey's death at Caesar's hands? Murellus tells the commoners to beg the gods' forgiveness for their ingratitude.

Pompey had previously co-ruled with Caesar, but then they became enemies; Caesar has just defeated Pompey's faction. The general public is fickle in their attitudes toward their leaders, suggesting that the coming drama surrounding Caesar will be more like distant entertainment that doesn't touch commoners' daily lives.

As the commoners leave and Flavius and Murellus part ways, Flavius encourages his friend to remove any decorations he finds on images of Caesar. Murellus hesitates, given that it's the feast of Lupercal, but Flavius tells him that doesn't matter. They agree to drive other commoners off the streets so the popular enthusiasm won't go to Caesar's head.

Lupercal was an ancient Roman feast of purification and fertility, so Murellus fears offending the gods. But for Flavius, the bigger concern is that Caesar might become arrogant, using the support as an excuse for seizing greater power.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Caesar, Antony, Brutus, Cassius, and others enter. Caesar tells his wife, Calpurnia, to stand in Antony's path when he runs his race. He tells Antony to touch Calpurnia as he runs by, since this is believed to cure a woman's infertility. Antony agrees.

Caesar believes in superstitions associated with the Lupercalia race, and hopes that adherence to this one will result in an heir—showing that he's concerned for his succession as emperor.

Caesar hears someone calling shrilly in the crowd—it's a soothsayer, telling him, "Beware the ides of March." Caesar summons the soothsayer before him, but then dismisses him, saying that the man is a "dreamer."

Caesar is superstitious enough to give the soothsayer a hearing, yet also believes himself invulnerable to harm. The question of fate's role in Caesar's future will recur throughout the play.

Despite Cassius's urging, Brutus declines to watch the race. Cassius observes that Brutus has seemed aloof lately. Brutus assures Cassius that he shouldn't take this personally; he is distracted by his own thoughts, "with himself at war." Cassius replies that he wishes Brutus could see his own "hidden worthiness," which so many prominent Romans recognize. Brutus fears that Cassius is trying to lead him astray, but Cassius assures him that he's no flatterer, and Brutus should trust his perspective.

Brutus has a self-reflective, principle-driven personality. Cassius, on the other hand seems to be motivated solely by self-interest, and he knows how to subtly manipulate a conversation. Here, rather than blatantly flattering Brutus, he appeals to Brutus's sense of responsibility for the welfare of Rome as a whole.

They hear shouting, and Brutus fears that the people have hailed Caesar as king. When Cassius says that it sounds as if Brutus is against that possibility, Brutus admits that this is true, although he loves Caesar. Brutus urges Cassius to tell him what's on his mind—whatever it is. If it's for the good of **Rome**, he'll accept it, since he loves honor more than he fears death.

Cassius is attuned to Brutus's moods and uses that awareness to put words in Brutus's mouth, steering the conversation in the direction he wants. The exchange also highlights Brutus's internal conflict between his affection for Caesar and his political ideals. His loyalty to Rome is his greatest motivation.

Cassius says that honor is just what he wants to discuss with Brutus. Both he and Brutus, he argues, were born just as free as Caesar. He recalls a story about racing Caesar across the Tiber River and having to rescue an exhausted Caesar from drowning. Now, Caesar is "become a god, and Cassius is / A wretched creature" who must submit to Caesar's will. He describes other instances of weakness he's observed in Caesar.

Again, Cassius steers the conversation in a direction—namely toward honor—that he believes will be effective in swaying Brutus to his side. He argues that he and Brutus are no different from Caesar—and that, in particular, the "godlike" Caesar is no less human than they are.

They hear another burst of applause. Cassius tells Brutus that "the fault [...] is not in our stars, / But in ourselves"; that, in other words, it's their fault if they are beneath Caesar. He argues that the people of **Rome** should be ashamed if they only have enough room for one great man. Brutus replies that he understands what Cassius is getting at and that they'll discuss it later. He adds that he would rather be a mere villager than be ruled by a king.

Cassius continues to try to subtly influence Brutus, arguing that it's their own fault, not fate's, if they allow Caesar to triumph as king. Brutus seems conflicted, granting some of Cassius's argument, yet uncomfortable with his insinuations—namely, that they should move against Caesar's supposed ambition.

The Lupercalia race has ended. Brutus points out to Cassius that Caesar, Calpurnia, and Cicero look angry and distraught. Meanwhile, Caesar tells Antony that he wishes he were surrounded by "fat," satisfied men, unlike Cassius, who has a "lean and hungry" look—that is, he's dangerous. Nevertheless, Caesar doesn't fear him, "for always I am Caesar."

Caesar perceives Cassius's ambition, showing that he is politically savvy and perhaps ambitious himself. But Caesar also believes he's invulnerable to Cassius's schemes, suggesting that Caesar is arrogant.

Caesar and his train exit, but Brutus tugs on Casca's cloak, detaining him. He asks Casca why Caesar looked so sad. Casca explains that Caesar was offered a crown by Antony three times; each time, Caesar refused it, but he appeared less reluctant to accept it each time. After the third refusal, Caesar swooned from "the falling sickness." Casca observes that the rabble responded to Caesar as they would to "the players in the theater."

Unlike the other characters, Casca speaks in prose instead of in verse, an indication that he adheres to Cynic philosophy, in contrast to Brutus's Stoicism and Cassius's Epicureanism. In keeping with that outlook, he interprets Caesar's behavior as only reluctantly declining the honor of kingship. Like his deafness, Caesar's epilepsy contrasts with his self-perception as invulnerably powerful. The people respond to Caesar's behavior as to a celebrity's, without awareness of the moment's political gravity.

Casca says that when Caesar perceived that the people were glad he'd refused the crown, he asked Casca to cut his throat. When he recovered from his swoon, he said that his words should be attributed to his illness. Cicero also made a speech in Greek, which Casca was unable to understand, and Murellus and Flavius were executed for defacing Caesar's statues. Casca categorizes all of this as "foolery."

Cicero's speech highlights the importance of language and rhetoric in influencing public opinion. It's suggested, though, that most people are unable to understand him, and that public opinion is in fact divided—with rebellion like Murellus's and Flavius's being firmly suppressed.

Brutus and Cassius agree to meet tomorrow to talk further. Cassius urges him to "think of the world" until then. After Brutus leaves, Cassius muses that Brutus is noble, but that even the noblest can be seduced. Tonight, Cassius will leave a few letters for Brutus, as if written by different citizens, praising Brutus's reputation and hinting at Caesar's ambition. Cassius this thinks this will surely help cause against Caesar.

Cassius continues to appeal to Brutus's sense of duty toward Rome, which he symbolically equates with "the world" as a whole. Privately, he believes that the success of his cause depends on "seducing" and tricking Brutus, whose integrity far surpasses his own.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

There's thunder and lightning as Casca and Cicero enter. Casca is disturbed by the earth's shaking and the fire dropping from the heavens. He speculates that it's either civil war among the gods, or else humans have provoked the gods to destroy them. He also saw a slave's hand burn unharmed, a lion strolling down the street, and an owl hooting at noon. Casca concludes that this collection of **omens** can be no natural coincidence. Cicero agrees that it's all quite strange, but that people are prone to misconstrue signs.

The confluence of supernatural events foretells the historical significance of Caesar's murder, and it also raises the question of fate's role—do these omens predict inevitable events, or will the omens create an expectation of consequential events in people's minds?

Cicero exits, and Cassius comes to see Casca. Cassius says that he has been walking fearlessly through the stormy night, and that Casca wouldn't be afraid, either, if he understood the meaning behind these "instruments of fear and warning"—namely, that there's "a man no mightier than thyself or me [...] yet prodigious grown." Romans' willingness to put up with such a man shows that they have grown "womanish."

Cassius's approach here is similar to his conversation with Brutus earlier—he doesn't name Caesar directly, but insinuates that Caesar is a threat to Rome. He also categorizes strength and resistance to tyranny as inherently masculine traits and passivity as "womanish" or feminine.

Casca mentions the rumor that the Senators are going to crown Caesar as king tomorrow. Cassius says that, in that case, he will commit suicide sooner than submit to tyranny. He adds that maybe he shouldn't speak like this in front of Casca, if Casca doesn't mind such "bondage." But Casca says that if there's a faction that's preparing to overthrow tyranny, he's willing to follow them all the way. Then Cassius tells him about the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar.

Again, as he did with Brutus earlier, Cassius sounds out Casca's leanings before telling him about the plot, casting Caesar as a tyrant and resistance to Caesar as a moral duty. Cassius is a master of manipulation.

They're interrupted by Cinna, a member of the conspiracy. Cassius gives Cinna some fake letters to leave where Brutus will find them. Then Cassius and Casca agree to confront Brutus at his house and win him over to the conspiracy, confident that he's nearly persuaded already.

The conspirators move forward in their plans to trick Brutus over to their side. The element of trickery shows that they know their plans are dishonorable, yet winning Brutus's honorable nature is vital to the success of their plot.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

Brutus, unable to sleep, paces in his orchard. He talks to himself, reasoning that he has nothing against Caesar personally. However, kingship might change Caesar, leading him to abuse his power. Caesar, then, should be regarded as a "serpent's egg" that must be crushed before it has the chance to hatch.

Ironically, Brutus is the first character in the play to explicitly state that Caesar must be killed. Unlike the other conspirators, he isn't concerned about the personal repercussions of the act, but about whether killing Caesar is the right thing to do for Rome.

Lucius, a servant, brings Brutus a letter he found on the windowsill. Brutus reads the letter by the light of whizzing meteors. It says, "Awake, and see thyself! Shall **Rome**, etc. Speak, strike, redress!" Brutus interprets this to mean that he, like his ancestors who drove out the Tarquin, should act to prevent Rome from falling under the sway of a king.

Meteors, even in Shakespeare's time, were believed to herald important events. By Cassius's design, the letter contains gaps which Brutus fills in—without his supplied interpretation, it would be meaningless. The "Tarquin" refers to Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the final king of Rome, whose overthrow in 509 B.C.E. led to the establishment of the Republic.

Brutus has asked Lucius to confirm the date; Lucius checks the calendar and says that it is indeed the 15th of March. As Lucius answers a knock at the door, Brutus reflects that he hasn't slept since Cassius spoke to him of the conspiracy. While anticipating the assassination, Brutus feels as though there is a rebellion in the "little kingdom" of his **body**.

The "ides of March," the day that the soothsayer warned Caesar about, has come. The unsettled state of Brutus's body and mind, brought on by a crisis of conscience, symbolizes the restless state of Rome at large.

Cassius has arrived, and Lucius reports that he is accompanied by others who are concealed in their cloaks. As Lucius lets the group in, Brutus reflects on the "monstrous" nature of conspiracy. When Cassius comes in, he introduces the other conspirators: Trebonius, Decius, Casca, Cinna, and Metellus. Brutus shakes hands with them, but when Cassius proposes an oath, Brutus objects that the corruption of the times should be motivation enough to follow through on their plot, and that Romans should be able to trust one another's word.

Brutus's commitment to killing Caesar is motivated by his sense of moral duty, so he is disturbed by the secretive, underhanded behavior of his co-conspirators—hence his rejection of an oath.

Cassius suggests that Cicero be included in the plot, and the others agree, Metellus pointing out that Cicero's age and rhetorical skill will win others to the cause. Brutus rejects this idea, saying that Cicero isn't a follower.

Cicero was one of the most revered, eloquent orators in the history of Rome, so the conspirators' desire to use his influence makes sense. However, Brutus's objection, along with his previous rejection of an oath, shows that he's emerging as a leader of the conspirators. It also further illustrates his commitment to principle rather than mere populism.

Cassius suggests that Mark Antony be killed as well, since he's so close to Caesar. Again, Brutus objects, arguing that they must be "sacrificers, but not butchers." They must kill Caesar "boldly, but not wrathfully." Anyway, he concludes, Antony will be powerless—like a limb without a head—once Caesar is dead.

In a heavily consequential decision, Brutus rejects the idea of murdering Mark Antony on the grounds that it's motivated not by duty to Rome (like their murder of Caesar), but by blind wrath and bloodthirst. Ironically, his insistence on moral restraint will lead to his own death.

The clock strikes three. Cassius says that it's doubtful whether Caesar will go to the Capitol today—he's grown so superstitious lately. Decius offers to make sure Caesar goes. They discuss bringing Caius Ligarius into the conspiracy, and Brutus says he will take care of this. The conspirators part for the night.

The striking of a mechanical clock is an anachronism, as such clocks didn't exist in ancient Rome. Shakespeare likely included this detail not only to give the audience a sense of pacing and immediacy, but to make the action seem more in sync with to the contemporary time period when the play was performed. The conspirators' plans go forward, albeit amid much uncertainty—will Decius's and Brutus's errands succeed? The outcome seems to rest on more than abstract Fate.

Portia enters, asking Brutus about his strange behavior lately—he's been so restless and distracted. She pleads with Brutus to tell her what is bothering him and who the visitors were. She says that although she is a woman, she is Cato's daughter and Brutus's wife, and therefore she is stronger than women in general. In fact, she has wounded herself in the thigh to prove her strength and loyalty. There is a knock at the door, so Brutus promises he will unburden his thoughts to her later.

Portia's speech uses logic to prove her trustworthiness. She uses her relationships to noblemen—her father (the Roman statesman Cato) and Brutus himself—to demonstrate her strength, taking for granted the contemporary belief in women's weakness. Her self-injury shows that "masculine" strength was associated with self-sacrifice and the ability to withstand violence and pain.

Caius Ligarius enters. He is sick but eager to be involved in the plot—"a piece of work that will make sick men whole." He and Brutus set off together in Caesar's direction, the sound of thunder in the background.

The metaphor of bodily sickness symbolizes the illness of Rome itself; killing Caesar will "heal" the body politic. Thunder continues to be a portent of the ominous deed to come.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

There's more thunder and lightning. Julius Caesar enters in his nightgown, unable to sleep. Calpurnia has been talking in her sleep, dreaming of his murder. Caesar sends a servant to order the priests to do sacrifices and report back to him the results of their auguries.

Omens continue to fill the sky. Calpurnia's apparent gift for prophecy aligns her with the supernatural elements of the play and contrasts her with the logical Portia. Caesar's superstition is on display; in light of the soothsayer's warning, the portents, and his wife's dream, he appears to be uneasy about what the day will bring.

Calpurnia enters and tells Caesar that he mustn't leave the house today. Although she has "never stood on ceremonies," she's frightened by reports of a lioness birthing in the streets, blood drizzling from the sky, and ghosts roaming about. Caesar replies that the gods' purposes can't be avoided; he will leave anyway, because these **omens** aren't just signs for him, but for the world in general. Death is inevitable and comes to everyone when it's fated to come.

Caesar suspects that the omens are for him and that Calpurnia is right, but his ego wins out—he wants to appear invincible, so he has to venture out of the house anyway. He is trapped by his invulnerable self-image. He justifies his behavior by claiming that fate is inevitable, and that the signs don't necessarily apply to him.

The servant returns with a worrying **omen**—the sacrificed animal was found to contain no heart, indicating that Caesar shouldn't leave the house. Caesar rebuffs this interpretation, saying the heartless sacrifice is a warning against cowardice. He is "more dangerous than [danger] itself" and will go forth. Calpurnia replies that Caesar's wisdom is being outweighed by his confidence. She begs him to stay home, saying Caesar can use her fear as an excuse, and he relents.

Though the supernatural warnings are mounting, Caesar twists their interpretation in his favor, needing to project invulnerability. Calpurnia sees through this façade and offers him a way out. The fact that Caesar gives in to Calpurnia's worries suggests that he is not as confident as his outward arrogance would suggest.

Decius arrives to accompany Caesar to the Senate House. Caesar tells Decius to inform the Senate that he chooses not to come. Decius insists on being given a reason for Caesar's absence—otherwise he'll be laughed at when he delivers the message. Caesar replies that his will is reason enough. However, he privately admits that Calpurnia has asked him to stay home because of her dream of Caesar's statue spurting blood. Decius replies that this dream is actually fortunate—it signifies that Caesar's blood will revive **Rome**. Besides, the Senate is planning to give Caesar a crown today, and if Caesar stays away, they might change their minds. Caesar quickly decides to go after all.

Caesar keeps trying to balance between his superstition and his ego—he asserts his will to redirect attention from his apparent weakness. In keeping with his mission, Decius picks up on Caesar's superstition and fear by offering a flattering interpretation of the dream that will compel Caesar to go anyway. The flattery works, suggesting that Caesar does harbor ambition and will ignore his own instincts in order to further his political agenda.

The rest of the conspirators enter, followed by Antony. Caesar greets them all and teases Antony about his late-night partying. Then he invites them all inside for a drink of wine before they depart for the Senate together. Privately, Brutus laments what he and his fellow conspirators are about to do.

Antony's late appearance after a night of partying reinforces the other men's perception that he is harmless. Caesar's jovial greetings heighten the dramatic irony, while the audience is aware of what's about to happen and witnesses Brutus's anguish over it.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Artemidorus enters, reading a paper. He's written a letter to Caesar, warning him to beware of Brutus and the other conspirators. He will offer the paper to Caesar when he passes by. If Caesar doesn't read the note and live, he thinks, then "the Fates with traitors do contrive."

It's not clear how Artemidorus learned about the plot, but his willingness to intervene shows that Roman attitudes toward Caesar are not united. At the same time, there's an ambivalent attitude toward "the Fates," which Caesar believes can still override human initiative.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Portia sends Lucius to the Capitol to learn whether the conspirators have been successful. Nervous, she struggles to direct Lucius without giving away what she knows of the conspiracy. Aside, she complains that it's hard to have "a man's mind but a woman's might."

Portia's anxiety contrasts with her earlier steadiness and strength. As before, she describes mental resolve and physical weakness in terms of masculinity and femininity.

The soothsayer passes by. He tells Portia that he fears harm to Caesar, though he doesn't know for sure that it will come to pass. He goes on to find a position outside of the pressing throng from which he can speak to Caesar. Feeling faint, Portia urges Lucius on to the Capitol.

The press of the crowd, and Portia's mounting panic, build up urgency and tension in the play. The soothsayer's efforts to warn Caesar suggest that his death isn't inevitable, since if it were, there would be no point in warning him. Thus fate remains an ambivalent force in the play, as it is unclear whether falling into the plot is Caesar's own fault or his predetermined destiny.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

With a flourish of trumpets, Caesar, Antony, the conspirators, the soothsayer, senators, and petitioners enter. Caesar observes that "the ides of March are come," and the soothsayer replies that, nevertheless, they are not yet gone. Artemidorus urges Caesar to read his letter first, but Caesar says that a suit concerning himself should be read last. Cassius urges Caesar to enter the Capitol rather than receiving petitions in the street.

The chaos outside the Capital continues to build tension. Caesar's words sound triumphant, as if the soothsayer has been proven wrong, but the soothsayer gives a more ambiguous response, suggesting that Fate might yet prevail. Ironically, Caesar's seemingly noble refusal to prioritize his own welfare over that of others helps seal his fate.

Popilius wishes Cassius well in his "enterprise," prompting fears that the conspirators have been found out. Brutus urges Cassius to stay calm. Trebonius pulls Mark Antony out of the way, and Decius and Metellus Cimber press close to Caesar. Cinna tells Casca to prepare to strike first.

The various conspirators get into position. The several moving parts, as well as the possibility that the plot has been discovered and could yet be undermined, adds to the dramatic tension and suggests that human action might be an even more important factor than fate.

Caesar asks what business he and the Senate must address. Metellus Cimber kneels before Caesar to present the case of his banished brother, Publius Cimber. Caesar tells him that "base spaniel fawning" will do nothing to change his mind about the situation. Then, Brutus and Cassius kneel, too. Caesar tells them all that he is "constant as the North Star," and Cimber will remain banished.

Caesar presents himself as immoveable, which brings out his arrogance, but also sets up a sharp contrast with his imminent removal. It also contrasts with Brutus's belief that Caesar is changeable and bound to become tyrannical, which was his entire justification for killing Caesar.

The rest of the conspirators kneel, and Casca strikes first, stabbing Caesar. As the rest of the conspirators stab him, too, Caesar addresses Brutus—"Et tu, Bruté?"—and dies.

When Caesar sees his friend Brutus joining the attack, he seems to give up any resistance, shocked by the betrayal. Though Brutus's justification for the killing was coldly logical, the effects are felt as unavoidably personal.

The conspirators proclaim liberty from tyranny as the Capitol descends into a panic. They send Publius to reassure the people that no harm will befall anyone else. Brutus suggests that the conspirators bathe their hands and weapons in Caesar's blood and walk through the marketplace proclaiming "peace, freedom, liberty!" As they wash themselves with blood, Cassius remarks that this "lofty scene" will be replayed many times in the future.

The killers' proclamations of "liberty" are ironically unpersuasive, as it's not made clear from what, exactly, they've liberated the people. The literal bloodbath also contrasts grimly with the celebratory tone of Caesar's last public appearance. Cassius's words show that the conspirators conceive of their act as having great historical significance (as well as being an ironic reference to the play itself).

Antony's servant enters with a passionately-worded appeal, saying that Antony will support Brutus if he is allowed to safely approach and be given a satisfactory explanation for Caesar's death. Brutus readily grants this, although Cassius doesn't entirely trust Antony.

Even before Antony appears, the contrast between his more passionate rhetoric and Brutus's cooler logic is evident. Antony's ability to persuade Brutus even without being present foreshadows his further manipulation of Brutus as the play goes on.

Antony enters and is moved by the sight of Caesar's body. He tells the conspirators that if they intend his death as well, there's no better moment than now, at the site of Caesar's death. Brutus replies that they desire no such thing, and that if Antony could see their hearts, he'd know that they've acted out of pity for **Rome** in general and that they receive him with love. He adds that they will explain their reasoning to Antony after they have appeased the fearful crowds.

Antony's flair for the dramatic comes through in his passionate appeal to the conspirators. Brutus remains confident that a logical explanation will smooth over lingering mistrust and establish unity. He doesn't account for the possibility that Antony will succeed in swaying the people in a different direction.

Antony shakes hands with the conspirators, while apologizing to Caesar's spirit for making peace with his murderers. Cassius interjects to ask whether they can rely on Antony as a friend. Antony assures them that they can, if indeed they can convince him that Caesar was dangerous and thus that his death was justified. Moreover, he asks if he might speak at Caesar's funeral. Brutus grants this request immediately.

Ever more suspicious than Brutus, Cassius questions Antony's loyalty in light of his continued outspoken devotion to Caesar. By contrast, Brutus readily grants Antony a public platform. Because he's so logic-driven, Brutus doesn't consider other's more emotional motives. He therefore doesn't recognize the potential risks of this move, or indeed that a mere explanation of his reasoning will truly suffice to satisfy Antony.

Cassius takes Brutus aside, warning him that he doesn't know what he's doing—the people will be moved against them by Antony's funeral speech. Brutus replies that, by speaking first, he'll explain the reason for Caesar's death and also that Antony only speaks by permission—thus Antony's speech will turn out to the conspirators' advantage after all. Cassius doesn't like this plan, but when Brutus tells Antony that he must only praise Caesar and not blame the conspirators, Antony agrees.

Cassius, adept at using speech to manipulate others (as he did with Brutus), is more perceptive regarding the persuasive power of Antony's passionate rhetoric. Brutus, on the other hand, is naïve—he thinks that cold logic will suffice to win the people, and he underestimates the emotional power Antony's words will have.

After the others leave, Antony speaks over Caesar's corpse, prophesying that brutal civil war will break out across Italy, urged on by Caesar's vengeful spirit. Then a servant of Octavius Caesar enters, telling Antony that Octavius is on his way to **Rome**. Antony tells the servant that after his funeral speech, they'll have a better sense of the people's reaction, and then the servant can tell Octavius whether he can safely enter Rome or not. They carry out Caesar's body.

Octavius Caesar is Caesar's nephew and adopted heir, but he's politically inexperienced. Antony, on the other hand, has a perceptive read of what's at stake—he knows that Rome's future depends on whomever manages to win the hearts of the people at Caesar's funeral.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

A crowd of plebeians follows Brutus and Cassius, demanding satisfaction. Half of them follow Cassius to hear his explanation, and half follow Brutus. Brutus begins to speak, asking his countrymen to believe him out of respect for his honor, and to use their wisdom to judge him. He explains that he rose against Caesar not because he loved Caesar less than anyone present, but because he loved **Rome** above all. Insofar as Caesar was good, Brutus honors him, but insofar as he was ambitious, Brutus slew him. He, too, should be slain for the good of Rome, should the day come when that's necessary. The people shout their approval of Brutus. As Mark Antony enters with Caesar's **body**, Brutus departs, charging the crowds to hear what they've given Antony permission to say.

Brutus appeals to the people's reason—they should believe him on the basis of his honor, and judge him intellectually. This says much about Brutus's outlook—he's primarily driven by logic, so he assumes that this will prove most effective with his audience, too. He lays out a clear-cut, logical case for Caesar's assassination for the sake of Rome. Notably, in response, the people praise Brutus himself instead of responding primarily to Brutus's reasoning. This suggests that people tend to respond to superficial appearances more readily than to logic. Finally, Brutus's arrogance is apparent in that he takes for granted that Antony's speech will post no threat to him.

As Antony ascends the pulpit, the plebeians talk among themselves, saying that Antony had better not speak ill of Brutus, and that Rome is blessed to be rid of Caesar. Antony begins, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. / I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him." He restates Brutus's charge that Caesar was ambitious, observing that "Brutus is an honorable man," a line he repeats several times. He also makes several observations about Caesar's so-called "ambition"—that he wept for the poor, for example, and that he refused the crown. At one point, he weeps himself, prompting several plebeians to remark that "there is much reason in his sayings," that Caesar was wronged indeed, and that no man is nobler than Antony.

The first part of Antony's speech demonstrates how easily the public is swayed. At first, they appear to be convinced of Caesar's ambition and Brutus's honor. Ironically, Antony claims not to be praising Caesar and, in fact, to be praising Brutus instead—showing his giftedness at subtly moving others' opinions through his use of language—and tears. By the time he pauses to weep, the crowd's opinion has effectively been reversed; they even praise Antony as "rational," despite his appeal to emotions over logic, and shift their loyalty from Brutus to him.

When Antony resumes his speech, he says that he would sooner wrong the dead than wrong the "honorable" Brutus and Cassius by stirring the public to mutiny. Then he shows them Caesar's will, but declines to read it aloud, claiming that Caesar's love for them would inflame the people too much. However, the people shout to hear the will read, denouncing the conspirators as traitors and murderers. They beg Antony to descend from the pulpit, and they all gather in a ring around Caesar's **body**.

It's clear that, no matter how much he protests otherwise, Antony is using rhetorical tricks—crying, making suggestive asides, "suddenly" remembering to pull out Caesar's will—to stir the people's passions and eventually provoke a riot. Gathering around Caesar's corpse is also a powerful way of embodying opposition to the "traitors."

Antony tells the people to get ready to cry. He points out Caesar's mantle and recalls the first time Caesar ever wore it, pointing out the rips in the fabric caused by various conspirators—"the unkindest cut of all" having been given by Brutus. As the people weep, Antony lifts the mantle so they can see Caesar's **body** itself. The people cry out for revenge, swearing to follow Antony to the death.

Antony's masterful oratory performance continues, as he appeals to the people's love of Caesar while simultaneously stoking feelings of vengeance against the men who killed him and manipulating them to transfer their loyalty to Antony. The sight of Caesar's marred body is symbolic of an attack on Rome itself, which pushes the people to mutiny.

Antony reminds the people that they haven't heard the will yet. He reads it: Caesar has left each man some money, as well as all of his property, to be used as recreational parks. The people are pleased, preparing to take Caesar's body and also burn down the traitors' houses. As they go, Antony remarks, "Mischief, thou art afoot; / Take thou what course thou wilt." Meanwhile, the servant returns and reports that Octavius is now in Rome, and that Brutus and Cassius have fled the city. Antony attributes their flight to his success in stirring up the people against them.

Antony has cleverly kept back the reading of the will until the people have already been incited to a fever pitch. Now, persuaded of Caesar's love for them, they head off in pursuit of the conspirators—and Antony's triumphant words confirm that this was his intention all along. Octavius apparently ignored Antony's instructions, coming to Rome before word was sent. It's also worth noting that Shakespeare manipulates time here—in history, Brutus and Cassius remained in Rome for a year after Caesar's murder. By condensing the span of events, Shakespeare again adds a sense of dramatic immediacy to the play's action.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

Cinna the poet enters, on his way to Caesar's funeral, followed by the plebeians. The plebeians interrogate Cinna, and when they learn his identity, they egg each other on to "tear him." When Cinna tells them that he is Cinna the poet, not Cinna the conspirator, they attack him anyway, for being a bad poet.

This is the first (and last) comic scene since the punning exchange that began the play. It breaks the tension before Act 4 and bolsters the image of the plebeians as a mindless herd.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus enter. They are discussing which members of the conspiracy ought to be executed. When they send Lepidus on an errand to fetch Caesar's will—they're planning to change some of the provisions it contains—Antony explains to Octavius that Lepidus is only there to be "led or driven, as we point the way."

This is a very different image of Antony from two scenes ago. Rather than Caesar's passionate friend, he is now a cold and sly politician, willing to use others as he sees fit. Octavius, by the way, is paying attention—he will eventually betray Antony and take sole power in Rome, as shown in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra.

ACT 4, SCENE 2

In an army camp near Sardis, Brutus, Lucius, Lucilius, and other soldiers meet Titinius and Pindarus. Brutus talks with the others about a disagreement with Cassius. Aside, Brutus tells Lucilius that Cassius is starting to seem fake and overly courteous, and that he doesn't trust him like he used to.

Suspicion is growing between Brutus and Cassius. Whereas in their earlier exchange, Cassius accused Brutus of being aloof and distant, now Brutus suspects Cassius's excessive politeness as a front for his underlying disloyalty.

Cassius arrives and accuses Brutus of having done him wrong. Brutus, surprised, says that he doesn't even wrong his enemies, so how could he wrong a "brother"? Cassius reacts impatiently. They withdraw to Brutus's tent so that the army won't overhear their argument. Lucilius and Titinius stand guard.

Cassius seems annoyed by Brutus's outward show of innocence and nobility, a further sign of deteriorating trust between the men. They try to keep their conflict out of public sight.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

Cassius explains that Brutus has wronged him by condemning Lucius Pella for taking bribes, whereas Cassius's letters in Lucius's defense were ignored. Brutus accuses Cassius of letting people off for offenses in exchange for bribes. He says that since they killed Caesar for justice's sake, they shouldn't "contaminate" their cause by accepting bribes now—Brutus would "rather be a dog [...] than such a Roman."

Earlier, when Cassius and Brutus disagreed over whether to assassinate Antony, a rift appeared; it reasserts itself here. The conflict is between Brutus's stubborn sense of honor and Cassius's cold pragmatism.

Cassius is insulted and says that he's an abler soldier than Brutus. Brutus disagrees, saying he is not afraid of Cassius. Cassius says that even Caesar never insulted him this way, and Brutus says that Cassius was too afraid of Caesar to give him reason. Brutus continues, saying that Cassius denied him money for his army, even though Cassius is richer than he, because of his corruption. Cassius says that Brutus is being unfair. Brutus accuses Cassius of loving flattery. Cassius makes a show of asking Brutus to kill him, if he really thinks him so dishonorable.

As the two men argue about Caesar, they begin to mirror him. Cassius's dramatic gesture of baring his chest and asking for death is similar to Caesar's gesture when he thought the crowd was glad he'd refused the crown. Brutus's refusal to repeal the officer's punishment is identical to the argument Caesar made just before his murder (that he was as fixed in his judgments as the North Star). Caesar, then, was a successful politician because he combined elements of both Brutus and Cassius.

Brutus tells Cassius to sheathe his dagger, explaining that his quick temper is just as quickly expired. Cassius apologizes for his hasty temper, too, and they shake hands. Outside, a poet speaks to the guards, saying that in light of their mutual grudge, it's not wise for the two to be left alone. Brutus and Cassius emerge and mock the poet's poor rhymes, sending him away.

Like the last comic scene with Cinna the poet, this brief interlude breaks tension before the focus changes. The original actor may have impersonated one of Shakespeare's rivals.

Brutus and Cassius dismiss their guards and servant. Brutus explains that his temper stems from grief—Portia is dead. She killed herself by swallowing coals when she feared that Antony and Octavius would defeat Brutus. Cassius is horrified; Brutus doesn't want to discuss it further. They drink wine in honor of their reconciliation.

Portia's suicide refreshes the audience's sympathy for Brutus, and helps explain the argument that just occurred, since losing his temper is so uncharacteristic of Brutus. Like the time she stabbed herself in the thigh, Portia's manner of death is gruesome, as if intended as final proof of her "unfeminine" toughness.

Titinius and Messala enter, and the men compare notes regarding the advance of Octavius and Mark Antony. Messala reports that Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus are reported to have executed a large number of senators, including Cicero. Messala also reports Portia's death, and Brutus stoically accepts the news, not revealing that he already knew. Brutus and Cassius debate whether it's best to march to Philippi to confront Antony and Octavius. Cassius thinks it's best for them to remain well-rested, in a defensive position, while Brutus argues that if Antony's army marches to meet them, they'll collect allies along the way, arriving in strengthened numbers. Cassius concedes to Brutus's reasoning, and they bid one another goodnight.

By implication, Antony governs in a far more tyrannical manner than Caesar was accused of doing. Brutus, not normally given to acting, puts on a show of stoicism regarding Portia's death, suggesting that he's more deeply affected by the event than he dares let on. Brutus also employs his superior logic to successfully argue for the army's next movements.

Two servants, Varrus and Claudio, and Lucius enter Brutus's tent. Lucius plays a song, and everyone but Brutus is soon asleep. Brutus settles down to read, but the Ghost of Caesar suddenly appears, calling himself "Thy evil spirit, Brutus." The ghost tells Brutus that they will meet again at Philippi; then he vanishes. Brutus wakes the others, who deny having seen anything. Then Brutus sends word to Cassius that they should prepare to march.

Caesar's ghost implies that by killing him, Brutus has done something wicked, and his appearance seems like an omen of Brutus's death. Here, however, Brutus does not seem much affected by the warning.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

Octavius, Antony, and their army are waiting on the battlefield. Antony thinks that Brutus and Cassius are attacking them in order to make themselves look braver than they are. A messenger alerts them that the opposing army is approaching. Antony gives Octavius an order about how to advance his troops, which Octavius disputes. When Antony asks why Octavius is arguing with him, he replies, "I do not cross you, but I will do so."

Just as omens can have ambiguous meanings for the characters, but definite ones for the audience, characters' speech can work the same way. Octavius's remark has a double meaning, since he will eventually betray Antony and rule alone as Augustus Caesar.

Brutus's and Cassius's army meets Antony's and Octavius's army on the battlefield, and they exchange taunts. Brutus and Cassius mock Antony as an untested soldier, a bee who is all "buzz" and no sting. Antony and Octavius call Brutus and Cassius hypocrites and traitors. Antony and Octavius exit in disgust.

At this point, the conflict between the two sides is a power struggle, not primarily a matter of ideological disagreement. In contrast to his earlier high-minded principles, Brutus seems to be no longer fighting for the good of Rome, but mainly for self-preservation.

As Brutus steps aside with Lucilius, Cassius talks with Messala. Cassius says that, although he's an Epicurean and previously gave little credit to **omens**, he has changed his mind—carrion birds have been flying above the army and looking down at them as if they're prey. When Brutus returns, Cassius says that, although he's hopeful about the battle, in the event that they lose, this will be the last time he and Brutus speak together. Brutus says that if they lose, his Stoic outlook will prevent him from committing suicide. However, neither will he be content to be led as a defeated captive through the streets of **Rome**. The two say farewell to each another.

This exchange highlights the different philosophical schools to which Brutus and Cassius belong. Cassius, as an adherent of Epicureanism (which rejected the idea of divine intervention in human events), never previously believed in omens. However, the events of this momentous day make him rethink his stance. Brutus, as a Stoic, does not believe in suicide, but holds that people should calmly accept whatever life brings. To some extent, his remark here belies the manner of his eventual death.

ACT 5, SCENE 2

In the midst of the battle, Brutus sends Messala in haste with orders for Cassius's forces. Octavius's forces appear to be vulnerable, so now is the time to pour all of Cassius's forces into the attack.

While this maneuver successfully overcomes Octavius's troops, it also leaves Cassius vulnerable to Antony's troops. This illustrates the shifting fortunes of the battlefield and supports the larger theme that human choices often yield unforeseen, fateful consequences.

ACT 5, SCENE 3

Cassius and Titinius enter, with Cassius carrying a battle flag. Cassius tells Titinius that when his own flag-bearer started running away, Cassius killed him for his cowardice. Titinius says that Brutus gave his orders too soon, giving Antony's men an opportunity to surround them. Pindarus enters, urging Cassius to quickly retreat—Antony's forces are overrunning them. As Titinius rides off to scout out the situation further, Cassius reflects that on this, his birthday, his life has run its full course. Pindarus reports that Titinius has been taken captive by the enemy. Appealing to Pindarus's personal loyalty to him, Cassius orders Pindarus to stab him to death. Pindarus does so, with the same sword Cassius used to stab Caesar. Then, in grief, he flees Rome forever.

Cassius's army is being weakened both by cowardly deserters and by his overly-hasty actions against Octavius's forces; now, Antony's forces are surrounding them. Cassius also interprets the situation with undue haste, concluding that the battle is lost and accordingly committing suicide. While suicide is not out of line with Cassius's Epicurean beliefs, faith in omens is, and Cassius's hasty assessment of the battle's outcome is apparently influenced by his interpretation of the carrion birds he saw earlier.

Titinius and Messala enter. Messala tells Titinius that Octavius has been overthrown by Brutus, just as Cassius has been overthrown by Antony. Then they discover Cassius's body on the ground. Titinius grieves his friend's death: "the sun of **Rome** is set" because Cassius didn't trust that Titinius would be successful in his scouting errand. Messala shares his grief, lamenting that despair moves people to irreparable error. Messala goes to give Brutus the sorrowful news while Titinius searches for Pindarus. However, alone with Cassius's body, Titinius lays his victory garland on Cassius's brow and then kills himself with Cassius's sword.

The outcome of the battle is a draw—half of each army has been defeated. The omen Cassius saw was paradoxical. It influences him to believe the battle was completely lost when in fact it wasn't, so he kills himself, which causes his forces to lose the battle. Cassius would have been victorious if he hadn't misconstrued the signs and despaired prematurely, setting off a chain of disasters.

Brutus, Messala, and several others enter. When they discover both Cassius's and Titinius's slain bodies, Brutus laments that Caesar's ghost "walks abroad and turns our swords / In our own proper entrails," and that **Rome** will never produce an equal to Cassius. He sends Cassius's body outside the camp for burial and leads the others off for a second fight.

Brutus's comment reflects not so much a superstitious fear of Caesar's ghost as a growing belief that the conspirators' deaths are deserved. In keeping with Brutus's adherence to principle throughout the play, here he demonstrates his belief that situations that originate in wrong action can never be righted. Nevertheless, he plans to see the battle through beyond its present standstill.

ACT 5, SCENE 4

Brutus, Messala, Cato, and other soldiers enter the field. Brutus urges his men to be courageous. Cato fights boldly and is killed, and Lucilius, pretending to be Brutus, is taken captive. Then Antony enters and, recognizing Lucilius, spares his life and orders that he be treated kindly, in hopes that he will become an ally.

This scene contrasts Brutus's principled nature with Antony's calculating one. Just as Brutus once spared Antony, Antony now spares Lucilius. But while Brutus spared Antony because he believed he was as noble as Brutus himself, Antony spares Lucilius for pragmatic reasons: he thinks he can turn him into an ally.

ACT 5, SCENE 5

Brutus enters with several friends; battle-weary, they sit down together to rest. Tearfully, Brutus speaks to three different companions—Clitus, Dardanius, and Volumnius—asking each of them in turn to kill him. To Volumnius, Brutus explains that Caesar's ghost has appeared to him again, and that he knows his hour has come. They each refuse his request, urging him to keep running from the enemy. Brutus declines and bids each of them farewell, explaining that now he only desires rest. Finally, he asks Strato to hold Brutus's sword while Brutus runs upon it. Strato agrees, and Brutus kills himself, saying, "Caesar, now rest. I killed you half as willingly as I kill myself."

Unlike Pindarus when he assisted Cassius's suicide, Brutus's men are reluctant to participate in his death, showing their esteem for him. Brutus's dying words indicate that, unlike Cassius, he kills himself not to avoid the humiliation of capture, but because he believes his actions deserve death. If his suicide is a just punishment rather than an avoidance of future events, then it could be argued that Brutus does not exactly violate his Stoic belief that suicide is improper. Rather, it's in keeping with Brutus's honorable principles.

Octavius enters with Antony, Messala, Lucilius (both captives), and other soldiers. They see Strato with Brutus's body, and Strato explains to them the circumstances of Brutus's suicide. Antony declares that Brutus was "the noblest Roman of them all," since he was the only conspirator who did not act out of envy of Caesar; instead, he acted from lofty ideals. Octavius agrees, making plans for Brutus's honorable burial. They all leave to celebrate their victory in battle.

Even Brutus's enemies affirm the difference between Brutus and the other conspirators. The closing focus on the ironic difference between Brutus's great virtue and his disastrous end provides a good argument for seeing the play as the tragedy of Brutus, rather than that of Caesar. Octavius, now the highest-ranking character, speaks the closing lines—he will go on to be the first emperor of the Roman Empire.

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