



Julius Caesar

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The first scene of the play contains hints that Caesar's ambition and growing individual power may be suppressing the liberty of the people. Out of jealousy and fear of dictatorship, Cassius begins to conspire against Caesar, making every effort to gain the support of Brutus, one of Rome's most respected citizens.

Swayed by false documents prepared by Cassius and motivated by his love of Rome, Brutus joins the conspiracy against Caesar. While he agrees that Rome must be saved from Caesar, he opposes killing Caesar's supporters.

After murdering Caesar, the conspirators, Brutus insists, should bathe their hands in Caesar's blood to affirm symbolically that they are sacrificers, not murderers. His idealism eventually leads to the failure of the conspiracy.

Following the assassination, Brutus speaks to the mob and explains his complicity, winning their support. However, Mark Antony then speaks and turns the crowd against the conspirators.

Rome is then divided in two camps. Mark Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus pursue the conspirators to Philippi. In the ensuing battle, Antony and Octavius are victorious; Cassius and Brutus commit suicide. Unlike Caesar, Brutus, the man of ideals and words, ultimately has too little ambition to succeed in the corridors of power.

Bibliography:

Bloom, Harold, ed. *William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar."* New York: Chelsea House, 1988. Nine essays on various aspects of the play by distinguished Shakespeare critics of the 1970's and 1980's, Marjorie Garber's essay on the significance of dreams and Michael Long's on the social order are particularly worthwhile.

Bonjour, Adrien. *The Structure of "Julius Caesar."* Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 1958. Sensitive, illuminating monographic study that sees *Julius Caesar* as a drama of divided sympathies. Brutus and Caesar are both heroic, both wrong; opposing motives and antithetical themes from the texture of the play as well as a balanced inner structure.

Dean, Leonard F., ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Julius Caesar."* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968. Informative collection of short articles by leading mid-twentieth century Shakespeare critics. Dean's introduction gives an overview of earlier criticism. Various articles provide character studies, analyze language, and supply literary-historical background.

Thomas, Vivian. *"Julius Caesar."* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992. Concise study of *Julius Caesar* that reflects various postmodernist approaches to Shakespeare while also providing a thorough analysis of the play's stage history, style, and relationship to its principal source, Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Includes an extensive bibliography.

Traversi, Derek. *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1963. Chapter two of this classic study focuses on the moral and political themes of *Julius Caesar*. Following the text closely

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and in detail, Traversi probes the interplay of contrasting personalities and motives that generated a political tragedy with universal significance.

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