

## Notes on *Julius Caesar*

### Act 1, Scene 2

No clear protagonist: politicians and public figures are mere mortals, with human weaknesses and problems:

- Ailments
- Torments
- Misjudgments
- Delusions

Stage directions indicate that Flavius and Marullus were in the crowd, possibly in chains, which would visually suggest that they were punished for opposing Caesar's power. Casca later comments that Marullus and Flavius have been put to death ("silence").

Marc Antony (Marcus Antonius) becomes part of the force against the conspiracy. Antony is:

- Related to Caesar on his mother's side
- A supporter of Caesar during conflict with Pompey
- An officer who has served with Caesar's army in Gaul
- A priest of the Luperci (It is the Feast of Lupercal)
- A loyal, dedicated follower of Caesar

Calpurnia is Caesar's 3<sup>rd</sup> wife, younger than the movie suggests.

- Theirs was a political marriage, as Calpurnia was the daughter of a friend of Pompey.
- Caesar's suggestion that the "sterile curse" is hers (they are childless) suggests his insensitivity and concern with his own public image.
- Caesar has no male heir. (Octavius is his nephew).

Caesar's acceptance of superstition in the fertility festival and rejection of it in the soothsayer's warning are inconsistent, but together they indicate his concern with his public image.

To an Elizabethan audience, Caesar's rejection of the soothsayer's warning would show his arrogance (hubris?). Also, referring to himself in the third person suggests that he has an exalted sense of his own image.

The historian Plutarch, Shakespeare's main source for the play, wrote "the chiefest cause that made [Caesar] mortally hated was the covetous desire he had to be called king."

### Brutus

- Marcus Junius Brutus, born 65 B.C.
- Nephew of Cato, one of Caesar's strict adversaries, so considered an enemy of Caesar
- Fought with Pompey in Greece, and taken prisoner when Pompey was defeated.
- Pardoned and set free by Caesar during mass amnesty intended to heal the divisions and wounds of the civil war
- Became a lieutenant in Caesar's army and served him loyally
- His mother Servilia had had an affair with Caesar, and Brutus was born during this relationship. Many Elizabethans knew this background, which suggested that Brutus was Caesar's illegitimate son.
- Brutus was a stoic.
- Stoicism maintains that the universe is completely rational and guided by fate. One must accept whatever happens with a strong and tranquil main.
- Virtue (valor, moral excellence and righteousness) is the only key to a happy life and is the ultimate goal of the stoic.
- Vice is evil and only leads to unhappiness.
- Man should suppress his feelings and focus on his intellect.

### Cassius

- Caius Cassius Longinus was an ally of Pompey who switched sides when he saw that Caesar would win. He join Caesar's army.
- Married to Brutus' sister Junia, Cassius was Brutus' brother-in-law.
- Cassius was an Epicurean.
- Epicureanism philosophy felt that knowledge was derived from the senses. Freedom from physical pain and mental trouble was the goal of a happy life. While virtue, courage and justice were useful attributes, they were not as important as emotion.

### Julius Caesar

- Much of the information used in the play comes from Plutarch, who wrote a lot of secondhand gossip that came from Caesar's enemies. They saw him as vain, arrogant, weak and unyielding.
- Historically, Julius Caesar was recorded to be an intelligent, witty and charming man.
- Also an excellent orator and brilliant writer, Caesar brought about much needed reforms in the Roman Senate.
- Instituted the first public library
- Improved the system of taxation
- Rebuilt cities
- Sought to have laws passed that would strengthen the moral fabric of society.
- Had epilepsy but was not (as Shakespeare presents him) partially deaf

## Images

### The mirror

- The mirror as a reflection of the moral nature of a man. Usually, in Elizabethan theater, it shows man's discord and sinful nature.
- Brutus admits that he is at war with himself—he says he loves Caesar, but fears that he wants to be king.

### Fire

- Lines 176-77 suggests that Cassius wants to strike a fire to kindle the conspiracy. Fire, like blood, can be either a destructive or purifying force, and represents passion in this play.

### Disease

- Caesar's seizures and (invented) deafness serve a dramatic function to suggest disease in the body politic. This image of the body politic (the head is the leader, the people the limbs) was interpreted to mean that political discord or civil disorder weaken the body politic and therefore the society as a whole.

## Argumentation

- What are Cassius' methods of convincing Brutus to join the conspiracy?
  - Flattery
  - Envy and contempt for Caesar--Caesar is no better than Cassius or Brutus—Caesar is weak and physically imperfect (epilepsy)

- Appeal to Brutus' sense of honor: Brutus' patriotic ancestor who overthrew King Tarquin is a model Brutus would be honored to follow.

### Irony in 1.2

- Cassius, who repeats the soothsayer's warning to "Beware the Ides of March" to Caesar, will help make the prophecy come true.
- Cassius lives in his heart, Brutus in his head. Their inability to balance these qualities leads to their downfall.
- When Cassius says "[the name of] 'Brutus' will start a spirit as soon as [the name of] 'Caesar,'" he set doesn't know that the name of Caesar, his "spirit," will have more power in death than he could have had in life.