

Julius Caesar



BACKGROUND INFO

AUTHOR BIO

Full Name: William Shakespeare

Date of Birth: 1564

Place of Birth: Stratford-upon-Avon, England

Date of Death: 1616

Brief Life Story: Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but 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, and died three years later.

KEY FACTS

Full Title: *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*

Genre: Tragic drama

Setting: Rome and environs, 44 BCE

Climax: Brutus's suicide

Protagonist: Julius Caesar

Antagonists: Cassius

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

When Written: 1599

Where Written: England

When Published: 1623

Literary Period: The Renaissance (1500 - 1660)

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 was Thomas North's translation of *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, by the famous historian Plutarch.

Related Historical Events: Because of strict government censorship, writers in Shakespeare's time 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.

EXTRA CREDIT

A global first? Many scholars believe *Julius Caesar* was the first play acted in Shakespeare's Globe theater, which opened in 1599. The play was written around that time, and Shakespeare may have seen Rome's far-reaching conquests, and the influence of Caesar's death on history, as symbolically related to the playhouse's name.

Playing with time. 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. Historically, the time between Caesar's triumphal march with Pompey's sons and the defeat of Cassius and Brutus is around two years, but Shakespeare compresses it into two months. Additionally,

references the characters make to their clothes reveal that they are dressed as people in Shakespeare's day would have been, not as Romans. Also, at one point a mechanical clock strikes the time—such clocks weren't be invented for over a thousand years!

The tragedy of Brutus. Despite the title, you could make a good argument that this play should actually be titled the *Tragedy of Brutus*. Caesar's tragic flaw is supposedly his ambition, but as Antony points out in his eulogy, we see few examples of Caesar's ambition in the play. Additionally, Caesar dies less than halfway through, and has fewer lines than several other characters. The story of the noble Brutus being undone by his dispassionate logic and his trust in Cassius conforms much more closely to the model of tragedy.



PLOT SUMMARY

Rome is in a state of political upheaval. It has long been a limited democracy, but **Julius Caesar** has just defeated his co-ruler Pompey in a civil war, and assumed sole control. It is unclear whether he plans to preserve democracy, or dissolve the republic and rule as a king.

As Caesar goes to appear before the people, a **Soothsayer** warns him to "beware the ides of March," but he disregards the prophecy. After Caesar's procession moves on, **Cassius** draws aside **Brutus** to discuss Caesar's growing power. Cassius thinks it's unfair that Caesar should rule, since he's no better than they. Brutus admires Caesar, but is strongly opposed to Rome having a king. **Casca** arrives, and tells them that **Antony** has just attempted to crown Caesar, and that Caesar refused, but reluctantly. The three men agree to discuss this further. They have been hinting that it may be necessary to assassinate Caesar, but no-one has said this openly. Cassius plans to forge letters to convince Brutus that many Romans fear Caesar, and depend on Brutus to do something.

That night, there is a storm and many people witness supernatural occurrences taken to be bad omens. Cassius and Casca meet others who oppose Caesar, and go to Brutus's house to convince him to join them. Brutus has been awake all night, fearing what Caesar might become. Influenced by Cassius's letters, he decides that Caesar must die. The others arrive, and they all agree to stab Caesar the next morning as he enters the Capitol. Cassius wants to kill Antony too, but Brutus refuses. It now appears that Brutus, not Cassius, is in charge of the plan. When the others leave, Brutus's wife **Portia** begs him to reveal what's on his mind, saying that he dishonors her by keeping secrets. She has stabbed herself in the thigh to prove herself stronger than other women, and worthy of his trust. Brutus agrees to tell her everything.

The next morning, Caesar is urged to stay at home by his wife **Calpurnia**, who has seen bad omens and dreamt about his statue spurting blood. Caesar laughs off her concerns, thinking himself invincible, even godlike. When Calpurnia begs him on her knees to stay, he consents, but is convinced again to go when **Decius**, one of the conspirators, says that the senators will laugh at Caesar for listening to his wife. At the Capitol, the conspirators stab Caesar. When Caesar sees that even Brutus, whom he loved, attacks him, he says "Et tu Bruté?—Then fall Caesar," and dies. There is a panic, and the conspirators don't know whether the people will support or oppose them. Antony arrives, and pretends to make peace with the conspirators, who agree to let him address the people after Brutus. Brutus gives a short speech explaining his reasons for killing Caesar, which satisfies the people, and then leaves. Antony, although claiming he has "come to bury Caesar, not to praise him," stirs up the people by reminding them of Caesar's greatness. A mob forms to hunt down the conspirators, and Brutus and Cassius flee Rome.

Two armies now battle for supremacy—that of Brutus and Cassius on one side, and that of Antony and **Octavius**, Caesar's nephew, on the other. Brutus and Cassius have begun to argue with each other: Brutus sees Cassius as devious and corrupt, and Cassius sees Brutus as high-minded and overly critical. They make up when Brutus reveals that Portia has killed herself, fearing his defeat. The night before the two armies engage, Brutus sees Caesar's **Ghost**, who

tells him that he will appear again at Philippi, the site of the battle. The battle is essentially a tie, with Brutus's troops defeating Octavius's, and Antony's defeating Cassius's, but Cassius thinks all has been lost and kills himself rather than be captured. When fighting resumes, Brutus's army is finally defeated and he too commits suicide. The victorious Antony expresses admiration over the body of Brutus, who killed Caesar for the good of Rome rather than out of jealousy, calling him "the noblest Roman of them all."



CHARACTERS

Julius Caesar – A famous general, and husband to **Calpurnia**. His followers wish to make him king, causing **Brutus**, **Cassius**, and the other conspirators to kill him before that can happen. Though Caesar's ambition is supposedly the reason he is killed (according to both his murderers and to the rules of tragedy), we don't see much of this ambition in the play. The Caesar we see is certainly vain, even to the point of self-delusion, but also displays firm adherence to his principles and proves himself a perceptive judge of character. Caesar's greatness is evident not so much in himself as in the love he inspires in **Antony** and the bitter jealousy he inspires in **Cassius**. At times, Caesar seems to suspect his own imminent murder, but goes toward it anyway, almost as if he seeks martyrdom.

Marcus Brutus – A high-ranking and well-respected Roman, husband to **Portia**, and one of **Caesar's** murderers. An intelligent and self-possessed stoic, Brutus is respected by friend and enemy alike, and even by Caesar as Brutus kills him. Ironically, it is Brutus's admirable qualities—patriotism, reason, self-control—that cause him to participate in Caesar's murder, once these qualities are abused 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 refuses to kill **Antony**, as the more Machiavellian **Cassius** suggests they should.

Caius Cassius – Instigator of the conspiracy against **Caesar**. Cassius had served beside Caesar in many wars, and even once saved his life. Unlike **Brutus**, who loves Caesar but is opposed to the idea of a monarchy, Cassius seems more motivated by jealousy, even hatred, of Caesar than by any political ideology, as he first professes. Indeed, Cassius begins to exhibit many of the bad qualities for which he initially argued Caesar must die, like ambition, dishonesty, and greed.

Mark Antony – **Caesar's** friend. He desires to make Caesar king, and virtually single-handedly brings about the undoing of the conspirators after Caesar's murder. Described as a passionate man who loves art and music, and teased even by Caesar for staying out late at parties, Antony is the opposite of the coldly logical **Brutus**. He was not sharp enough to suspect the plot against Caesar, but it is Antony's masterful speech to the **plebeians** that stirs them up against his killers. Antony can also 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**.

Portia – Wife of **Brutus**, daughter of the famous Roman statesman Cato. She is proud of her identity as a member of two famous Roman families, and takes her role as wife seriously, demanding that Brutus keep no secrets from her, or exclude her from any aspect of his life. Despite this pride, she still respects Roman gender roles enough to subordinate herself to her husband. Portia seems ashamed of being a woman, and identifies more with the ideal of the fearless Roman man, stabbing herself in the thigh to prove she can keep secrets, and eventually killing herself in an unnecessarily painful way, by swallowing hot coals.

Calpurnia – Wife of **Caesar**. She has prophetic dreams about Caesar's murder, and unsuccessfully tries to persuade him to stay home.

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

Casca – One of the conspirators. Casca is a cynic—a personality type Shakespeare contrasts with the stoicism of **Brutus** and the Epicureanism of **Cassius**—and is therefore sarcastic and rude. He seems to want to kill **Caesar** not out of jealousy like Cassius, or out of concern for Rome like Brutus, but because he thinks Caesar is a phony. Casca is the first one to stab Caesar.

Decius Brutus – One of the conspirators. He is adept at flattery and persuasion, and goes to **Caesar's** house the morning of the murder to persuade Caesar to come to the Capitol by playing on his vanity and pride.

Metellus Cimber – One of the conspirators, who had a brother banished by Caesar.

Caius Ligarius – One of the conspirators, convinced to join merely by the fact that **Brutus** was involved.

Cinna – One of the conspirators.

Trebonius – One of the conspirators.

Lucius – Servant to **Brutus**.

Lepidus – A weak leader, part of the Second Triumvirate with **Antony** and **Octavius**.

Flavius – A tribune who, along with **Murellus**, is punished for removing wreaths from Caesar's statues.

Murellus – A tribune who defaces **Caesar's** statues with **Flavius**.

Cicero – A Roman senator famous for his wisdom and pride.

Publius – A Senator sympathetic to the conspirators.

Popillius Laena – A Senator sympathetic to the conspirators.

Soothsayer – Has a premonition of the danger facing **Caesar**, but is ignored.

Artemidorus – Attempts to warn **Caesar**.

Cinna the Poet – A poet attacked by the plebeians for having the same name as one of the conspirators.

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

Titinius – One of **Cassius's** officers.

Lucillius – 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 – An in-law of **Brutus**, and one of his officers.

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

Volumnius – One of **Brutus's** officers.

Dardanius – One of **Brutus's** officers.

Clitus – One of **Brutus's** officers.

Poet – Interrupts an argument between **Brutus** and **Cassius**.

Caesar's Ghost – Appears before **Brutus**.

Cobbler – A plebeian accosted in the street by **Flavius** and **Murellus**.

Carpenter – Accompanies the **Cobbler**.

Plebeians – Common people, first pacified by **Brutus**, then stirred up by **Antony**, after the murder of Caesar.

Messenger – Brings news to Antony at Philippi.



THEMES

MANHOOD AND HONOR

Julius Caesar is quite a macho play, with characters constantly examining their actions in light of their relationship to accepted ideas of manly virtue and strength. Rome is an Empire (though it is not yet ruled by an Emperor), militaristically maintained, and the model of the "good soldier" extends to the citizen and politician as well. Although there's lots of violence in the play, it's not only physical strength and fighting ability that constitute manliness: many characters feel compelled to mask any traditionally "weak" emotions, like fear

and sadness, as well as their personal desires and, to an extent, free will. **Brutus**, for instance, feels compelled to give way to the logic that demands **Caesar's** death, even though he loves Caesar and is repelled by the idea emotionally. Caesar himself must go to the Capitol even though he suspects his approaching murder, because Caesar feels he must be unwavering, and because death "will come when it will come."

The willingness to abandon self-interest, to brave pain and death for the good of Rome, or to avoid dishonor, is essential to gaining respect. This "virtue" is what demands Brutus's initial complicity in the plot, and his eventual suicide. **Portia**, as well, ashamed of her female identity, stabs herself in the thigh to prove she can be trusted, and eventually kills herself in the most painful way she can imagine. Ironically, it is the least "manly" of the major characters—**Antony**, who loves art and parties, weeps openly during his eulogy for Caesar, and symbolically appears naked in his first scene—who emerges victorious at the play's end (though his emotional nature will be his undoing in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare's "sequel" to *Julius Caesar*).

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. But unlike the arguments we are used to, those in *Caesar* focus primarily on discerning what is right—what should or must be done—rather than on characters trying to get their way. In Rome, accusing someone of acting in his self-interest, rather than for the good of Rome, is a serious insult. Though ideally this process should involve logic alone, certain characters in *Caesar*—just as in life—are skilled at manipulating language to make something seem logical when it is not.

This difference materializes most clearly in the arguments between **Brutus** and **Cassius**. Brutus—who reluctantly concludes that he must kill Caesar—thinks that his course is dictated by logic, but Cassius—who wants to kill Caesar because he is jealous—has used cunning to convince Brutus. Cassius suggests no direct actions at first, only drops hints, and even the notes he has **Cinna** throw into Brutus's window contain strategic blank spaces. Though it is Cassius's plan from the beginning, Brutus becomes the first character to explicitly state that Caesar must be killed. Though Brutus is probably the most intelligent character in the play, he is better at using this intelligence to govern his own actions than to control others; the speech he makes to the **plebians** after the murder is brief and spare, drawing only on logic. **Antony**, however—who combines the skills of Brutus and Cassius—turns the crowd around with a much more effective speech, involving both logic, emotion, and skillful speaking "tricks" such as visual aids, audience participation, and suspense.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

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. They are also careful about the personae they project in front of one another. **Caesar** is careful to always present himself as fearless and steadfast, even in front of trusted friends like **Antony**, and walks half-knowingly into his murder because death would not be as bad for his image as making an effort to avoid death. Though privately he is ailing and superstitious, Caesar would not be Caesar if he did not make himself out to be invincible. **Cassius** makes a show of being honorable, but is privately hypocritical and corrupt. 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, and to betray his partner **Lepidus**. And **Brutus**, who would otherwise be straightforward and consistent throughout the play, pretends in front of his troops to be unaffected by his wife's suicide.

POLITICS AND MORALITY

Since the Rome of the play is the pinnacle of civilization, arguments about how it should be run are also arguments about what constitutes an ideal government. The entire play centers around **Brutus** accepting the truth of two moral statements: First, that Rome must not become a monarchy; and secondly, that killing 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 flatly rejects **Cassius's**

suggestion that they also kill **Antony**, and even allows Antony to address the **plebians**. Giving in to Cassius on either of these points would have prevented Brutus's ruin, but violated his principles.

FATE

The attitude *Julius Caesar* takes towards free will is paradoxical. On the one hand, 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 human free will. On the other, many of the play's key events are successfully predicted, both by humans with prophetic abilities, and by the natural world itself, which makes signs out of weather, animal behavior, and even the reversal of life and death—this suggests a world where fate is predetermined, or at least heavily influenced by an unseen force, possibly the Gods.



SYMBOLS

OMENS

The presence of omens and prophecies in *Julius Caesar* lends an air of the supernatural to the cold political machinery of Rome. From the **Soothsayer's** warning, to the storm, to the birds that presage **Cassius's** defeat, 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? And Cassius bases his suicide on a mistake—the bad omen was not accurate until he made it so by killing himself.

BODY, BLOOD, & PAIN

In *Julius Caesar*, the human body echoes the body politic: the conspirators call **Caesar's** autocracy a sickness that must be cured; the sleepless **Brutus** speaks of a rebellion in his body mirroring the rebellion he plans; 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. Physical strength and weakness is important too. **Portia** courts pain as a means of proving her worth, and Caesar's great power is contrasted by infirmity—he's epileptic and partially deaf.

ROME

Because of its advanced culture and military might, Rome represented the world in microcosm. The lives of its most prominent citizens represented all human actions, and had far-reaching consequences for all of Western Civilization. In *Julius Caesar*, the principal characters seem conscious of this, scrutinizing their own actions as if the balance of history upon them were palpable. At times, they seem deliberately to make their speech or actions overly dramatic—even *hammy*—as if they were aware of their presence on a stage that the whole world would turn to for all time.



QUOTES

ACT 1 QUOTES

Beware the *ides of March*. (20)



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. (140)



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. (192)



But those that understood him smil'd at one another, and shook their heads; but for mine own part, it was Greek to me. (279)



ACT 2 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 woman 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? (292)



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. (32)



ACT 3 QUOTES

Caesar: The ides of March are come. Soothsayer: Aye, Caesar, but not gone. (1)



Et tu, Bruté? — Then fall, Caesar! (77)



Cry Havoc! and let slip the dogs of war. (290)



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. (72)



ACT 4 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. (18)



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. (225)



ACT 5 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. (114)



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." (74)



SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Two tribunes, **Flavius** and **Murellus**, encounter a **Carpenter**, **Cobbler**, and other **plebeians**, and ask them why they are dressed up in the streets instead of at work. The plebeians say they have come to cheer the great general **Caesar's** triumph over the sons of his rival Pompey.

The commoners' language is full of puns about their professions, indicating that they are solely concerned with personal tasks, rather than the worldly business of politics.



Murellus angrily reminds them that they once cheered Pompey the same way, and says the gods must be offended by their short memories.

The common people are easily persuaded, but their support is crucial for those in power..



Flavius and **Murellus** decide to split up and disperse more crowds, and to remove the laurel crowns from **Caesar's** statues.

Establishes that many officials are concerned with Caesar getting too powerful.



ACT 1, SCENE 2

Caesar enters with **Antony**, **Calpurnia**, **Portia**, **Decius**, **Cicero**, **Brutus**, **Cassius**, and **Casca**, followed by a **Soothsayer** and many **Plebeians**, and **Murellus** and **Flavius**. Caesar instructs his friend Antony, who is naked in accordance with his duty of "running the course" in a holiday ceremony, to touch Calpurnia as he runs, because tradition holds that infertile women may be cured this way.

Antony's nakedness symbolizes his emotional nature. Caesar's request of him establishes that Caesar is superstitious, and also hints at his ambition to become king, since he's concerned with having an heir.



The **Soothsayer** warns **Caesar** to "Beware the ides of March" (1.2.19), but Caesar ignores his warning.

Although Caesar is superstitious, he thinks himself invulnerable.



The procession passes, except for **Brutus** and **Cassius**, two high-ranking Romans. Brutus has no interest in watching the festivities, and says Cassius should go on without him.

Establishes Brutus as thoughtful and deferent, but also stoic and humorless, immediately contrasting him with the vibrant Antony.



Cassius remarks that **Brutus** has acted strangely lately, and wonders whether they are still friends. Brutus says that he's been worried by personal problems, and apologizes for being unsociable.

Brutus is introverted and oblivious to other peoples' impressions. Cassius has a knack for manipulating people and controlling conversation.



Cassius says that **Brutus** is greatly admired by all of Rome, and that everyone—"except immortal **Caesar**" (1.2.62)—wishes Brutus knew this. Brutus wonders why Cassius is trying to make him proud, since he knows vanity would be uncharacteristic of him. Cassius says he'll make Brutus realize just how admired he is, and that Brutus can trust him because he's respected and honest.

Cassius is not appealing to Brutus's vanity—Brutus has none—but to Brutus' great sense of responsibility towards Rome. Cassius is trying to insinuate that Caesar means to become all-powerful by sarcastically calling him "immortal."



They hear cheering, and **Brutus** says he fears that **Caesar** is being crowned king. **Cassius** says that this possibility must displease Brutus, if he fears it.

Cassius puts words in Brutus's mouth, but makes them seem like Brutus' own ideas.



Brutus admits he is against the idea, although he loves **Caesar**, and asks **Cassius** to get to the point, saying that if it involves honor and the good of Rome, he'll face death to achieve it.

Establishes Brutus's conflict (his affection for Caesar versus his political ideals), and character (he always puts Rome ahead of himself).



Cassius says that he would rather be dead than bow to **Caesar**, since Caesar is no better than they. He tells **Brutus** about the time he saved Caesar's life while swimming, and about how Caesar once fell ill on a campaign in Spain. Cassius adds that he thinks that it is ironic that Caesar should seem so all-powerful now.

Cassius claims to speak for himself, but intends to persuade. He also changes tactics, having previously called Caesar "immortal," then saying Caesar is equal to them, and finally painting him as inferior, even feminine.



They hear more cheering. **Cassius** says that they cannot blame fate for their subservient positions: "The fault, dear **Brutus**, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (1.2.141-2). He then asks why **Caesar** should be more honored than Brutus, and brings up Brutus's famous ancestor who drove the Tarquin kings out of Rome and helped establish the Republic.

After belittling Caesar, Cassius returns to describing his greatness, which now seems ironic. He then touches three themes he knows will affect Brutus: Roman tradition, the image of Rome to other nations, and the honor of Brutus's family.



Brutus says he understands what **Cassius** is getting at, and that it's been troubling him too, but that he'd rather talk about it later, adding that he'd rather not be Roman at all than be ruled by a king.

We never find out what Brutus was thinking before this, or what he might have done on his own, without Cassius's influence.



Cassius is glad his "weak words" (1.2.177) were effective, and suggests they ask **Casca** what they missed, as **Caesar**'s procession returns. **Brutus** says Caesar looks angry, and the others look like they've been scolded.

Cassius claims he's ineloquent when he's obviously persuasive. The attention paid to Caesar's expressions confirms the imposing greatness Cassius has been denying.



As he passes in the procession, **Caesar** tells **Antony** that **Cassius** looks too "lean and hungry" (1.2.195) to be trusted, saying it's safer to be surrounded by fat, lazy men. Antony says Cassius can be trusted. Caesar says Cassius is too intellectual and cannot enjoy himself, and that such men are to be feared, but quickly points out that he only speaks rhetorically, not personally, because he himself fears nothing. Caesar asks Antony for more of his opinion of Cassius, telling him to speak into his good right ear. The procession exits, leaving Cassius, **Brutus**, and **Casca**.

Once Caesar is gone, **Casca** tells **Brutus** and **Cassius** that **Antony** offered **Caesar** a crown three times, and that Caesar refused it, causing the crowd to cheer, but seemed to find it harder to refuse each time, and finally had an epileptic seizure. Casca adds that before the fit, Caesar courted the favor of the crowd by offering them his throat to cut, implying that he would die for the people. Casca adds that privately he wished he could have cut Caesar's throat himself.

Casca goes on to say that the famous orator **Cicero** addressed the crowd in Greek, which he did not understand, and that **Murellus** and **Flavius** have been removed from their offices as tribunes because they took the wreaths from **Caesar**'s statues.

Cassius makes arrangements to meet with both **Casca** and **Brutus** the next day, and the others exit. Alone, Cassius says that though Brutus is too honorable now to be influenced, he plans to throw messages through Brutus's windows that night, praising Brutus's honor and impugning **Caesar**'s ambition, and that afterwards it will be easier to move Brutus against Caesar.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

In the street that night, **Cicero** encounters **Casca**, who says he has seen many strange sights, including fire dropping from the sky and a lion in the Capitol, which he interprets as bad omens. Cicero asks if **Caesar** is coming to the Capitol the next day, and Casca says yes.

Caesar is of course correct to suspect Cassius; this demonstrates the political acumen that has helped make him so powerful, while showing that Antony still has much to learn. This scene could be used to make a case for Caesar's alleged ambition: he must be planning something, if he fears perceptive men. Caesar's partial deafness contrasts with his immense political power.



Casca is a cynic. This is reflected by his belief that Caesar's gestures before the crowd were phony, and by the fact that he speaks in colloquial prose while the others speak blank verse. Caesar's epilepsy, like his deafness, is another ironic contrast to his power.



Both of these events reflect the fact that secrecy and division are spreading among the powerful, as well as the importance of controlling the populace.



The fact that Cassius must resort to trickery to persuade Brutus is evidence that he does not believe his cause to be just. His chosen method is evidence of Brutus's great sense of duty towards Rome and its people.



The supernatural events presaging Caesar's murder reflect its historical importance, and also raise the question of whether fate has decreed it inevitable.



Cicero exits and **Cassius** enters. Cassius says he's been walking in the storm unafraid, daring the lightning to strike him. **Casca** tells him he's unwise to tempt the Gods. Cassius says if Casca were a true, brave Roman, he'd understand that these omens are warnings about a certain man who, although he seems imposing, need not be feared because he's no mightier than they. Casca guesses he means **Caesar**.

The omens have definite meanings to the audience, because they know that Caesar will be murdered. The characters, in contrast, don't know what will happen, so they can interpret the omens to mean anything. Once again, Cassius manipulates conversation to make his own idea seem like someone else's.



Cassius says that the manly spirits of their Roman forefathers must be dead, with only those of women surviving, for things to have come to this. **Casca** says that the senators mean to make **Caesar** king the next day. Cassius says "I know where I will wear this dagger then: / Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius" (1.3.88-9).

Ideas of right and wrong are closely tied to masculinity, as well as to tradition. Notice that Cassius is still only strongly hinting, rather than directly stating, that they should kill Caesar.



Casca agrees that those who are enslaved have the power to free themselves. **Cassius** says that **Caesar** could never have risen so high if other Romans were not so weak, and that Rome is "trash" if it will "illuminate / so vile a thing as Caesar" (1.3.107, 109-10). Casca says that he is willing to go as far as Cassius is.

Phrasing it in terms of slavery and weakness makes it seem like a moral duty to kill Caesar. Cassius continues gradually changing his description of Caesar from "immortal," to equal, to weak, to "vile."



Cassius says he's persuaded others to take up their cause, and that they wait for him at a theater erected by the defeated Pompey. **Cinna** enters and says the other conspirators are assembled. Cassius gives him letters to plant where **Brutus** will find them. **Casca** and Cassius discuss how Brutus is essential to their plan, because he's so respected that his name will lend legitimacy to whatever they do.

This scene highlights the difference between the other conspirators and Brutus: While they suspect that their plans are ignoble, and are complicit in Cassius's trickery, Brutus must be "fooled." Also, getting Brutus involved is essential to fooling the people, since everyone knows that Brutus is so morally upright.



ACT 2, SCENE 1

Brutus, unable to sleep, paces in his courtyard. He orders his servant **Lucius** to light a candle in his study. Alone, Brutus admits that the only possible course of action is to kill **Caesar**. He adds that, while Caesar's behavior so far gives no excuse for murder, it seems likely that absolute power will change him.

While the other conspirators fear reprisal and punishment, Brutus only fears whether killing Caesar is in the best interests of Rome. Ironically, Brutus is the first of them to explicitly state that Caesar must be killed.



Lucius returns and hands **Brutus** a letter he found. Brutus asks him to go check whether the next day is the ides of March, and reads the letter by the light of a meteor shower. It asks "Shall Rome, et cetera?" and urges him to "Speak, strike, redress" (2.1.46-7). Brutus takes this to mean that Rome must not have a king, and that he, like his ancestor, must prevent this.

Meteors were supposed, even in Shakespeare's time, to herald important events. As he does in conversation, Cassius leaves blanks in his letter. Brutus fills in the gaps—without his interpretation, the letter is meaningless.



Lucius returns to say that the next day is indeed the ides of March. There is a knock and **Brutus** sends Lucius to the door. Alone, he says that he hasn't slept since **Cassius** brought up the idea of moving against **Caesar**, and that the time leading up to a horrible deed feels like a rebellion within the body.

Brutus here symbolizes all of Rome—sleep represents peace, physical abilities represent governmental powers, and indecision, here brought on by a crisis of conscience, represents rebellion.



Cassius is admitted, with **Casca**, **Decius**, **Cinna**, **Metellus**, and **Trebonius**. Cassius whispers with **Brutus**, and then suggests they all swear an oath to follow through with their plans. Brutus says an oath should not be necessary, since the well-being of Rome, and the fact that they've already given their words, should be enough to motivate any true Roman.

Once Brutus decides that killing Caesar is necessary, he is unwavering. Because he's motivated by his morality, he rejects any suggestion that makes the conspiracy seem underhanded, such as the need to be bound by an oath.



Cassius suggests they ask **Cicero** to join them, and **Metellus** says that Cicero's venerability and known wisdom will make them look better. **Brutus** says that Cicero is too proud to take part in any plan that was someone else's idea.

The second suggestion of Cassius's that Brutus overrules. He, rather than Cassius, is beginning to seem like the leader of the conspirators.



After **Decius** asks whether only **Caesar** will be killed, **Cassius** suggests they kill **Antony** as well, since he may oppose them afterwards. **Brutus** says that without Caesar, Antony will be harmless, and more likely to kill himself out of grief than anything else.

Murdering Antony would be motivated by concern for their safety, not the good of Rome, and therefore is not morally defensible. This decision will have dire consequences.



Cassius says that **Caesar's** superstitions may keep him away from the Capitol, and **Decius** offers to go to Caesar in the morning, as he knows how to persuade him. **Metellus** suggests that **Ligarius** should be brought into their confidence, and **Brutus** says that he'll take care of this. The conspirators part.

More examples of an uncertain future: the omens might convince Caesar not to go; Decius might not be able to persuade him. Brutus is now in charge and takes responsibility for recruiting Ligarius.



Brutus's wife **Portia** enters, and questions him about the visitors and his strange behavior. He makes excuses, but she sees through them. Portia kneels before Brutus, but he asks her to rise. She argues that if he won't bring her into his confidence, then she is not truly his wife. She argues that she is stronger than other women, based on the noble characters of her father and husband, and reveals that she's stabbed herself in the thigh to prove her fortitude.

Like the male characters, Portia makes skillful arguments based on accepted ideas, e.g. the rights of a wife. Yet she uses her relationships to men, not her own merit, as evidence of her strength. The wound in the thigh combines violence with sexual overtones, symbolizing Portia's wish to be trusted like a man.



There is a knock. **Brutus** promises to reveal his secrets to **Portia**, who goes inside. **Ligarius** enters, and seems to suspect what is being planned. Brutus leads him inside, and Ligarius says that Brutus's involvement in the plot is sufficient evidence that it's a good idea.

Though Brutus decided that the plot was legitimate based on logic, Ligarius makes his decision based on what Brutus does. Through his virtue, Brutus unintentionally makes his poor decisions seem virtuous.



ACT 2, SCENE 2

In **Caesar's** house, Caesar is awakened by both the storm and by his wife **Calpurnia's** talking in her sleep. She has been dreaming of his murder. Caesar orders a servant to tell the priests to sacrifice animals to try and tell the future.

More evidence of Caesar's superstition. Calpurnia's apparent gift for prophecy aligns her with the supernatural elements of the play, and contrasts her with the logical Portia.



Calpurnia enters, telling **Caesar** he must not leave the house that day, but he insists that he will, since none would dare attack him. Calpurnia says that night watchmen have seen a lioness give birth in the streets, graves open and the dead walk, and blood rain on the Capitol. Caesar is still not swayed, saying that these omens could be intended for anyone, and that no-one can escape what the Gods have decreed. He adds that death should not be feared, since it must come when it will, and that "Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once" (2.2.32-3).

Caesar's ego makes him suspect that the omens are intended for him, but since this would conflict with his belief that he is invincible, he rejects the idea. In a way, Caesar is trapped: even if the omens do predict his death, he is compelled to disregard them, since seeming afraid would mean the "death" of Caesar as he sees himself.



The servant enters and says that the priests advise **Caesar** not to go to the Capitol, since they found no heart in the sacrificial animal. Caesar reinterprets this to mean that he would be a coward (heartless) to stay home, and adds that he is more dangerous than Danger itself.

Caesar must go to increasingly ridiculous interpretive lengths to reconcile the mounting supernatural evidence that he is in danger with his belief—or duty to act like—this is impossible.



When **Calpurnia** begs on her knees for **Caesar** to stay, he consents to send the message that he is sick, and remain at home. **Decius** enters, and Caesar tells him he will not go. When Calpurnia tells Decius to say Caesar is sick, Caesar says that he should not have to make excuses, and that his will should suffice as a reason.

Calpurnia, unlike Portia, kneels to beg rather than as a formality. Caesar must contradict his earlier agreement to make an excuse, since needing to lie to the Senate would indicate that they have power over him.



Decius entreats **Caesar** for an explanation, and Caesar admits that **Calpurnia** was frightened by a dream where a statue of him spurted blood that Romans bathed in. Decius reinterprets this as a good omen, signifying that Rome draws its life from Caesar, adding that the Senators may mock Caesar for listening to his wife, and whisper that he is afraid to come.

Other characters misinterpreted omens based on information they lacked, but Decius lies about an omen based on information he has. The idea that it's shameful for Caesar to be influenced by his wife underscores the masculinity of Roman culture.



Caesar decides to go to the Capitol after all. **Cassius**, **Brutus**, **Ligarius**, **Metellus**, **Casca**, **Trebonius**, and **Cinna** enter to escort him. **Antony** enters a moment later, and Caesar teases him about being up late partying. Caesar suggests they all share some wine, and then leave together. Aside, Brutus laments what he and his fellow conspirators are about to do.

The joke about Antony's reputation for being fun-loving supports the idea that he is harmless. Conversely, Brutus, who has appeared coldly steadfast in front of the others, is privately in pain over their approaching deed.



ACT 2, SCENE 3

Artemidorus reads a letter he's written warning **Caesar** against each of the conspirators. He plans to stand by the Capitol and hand it to Caesar when he passes, adding that if the letter does not reach Caesar in time, then the fates support the conspirators.

It's not clear how Artemidorus found out about the plot, but his willingness to let "the fates" decide whether Caesar gets his warning indicates that he's somewhat ambivalent about Caesar.



ACT 2, SCENE 4

At **Brutus's** house, **Portia**, nearly hysterical, orders **Lucius** to run to the Capitol. She wants news of the conspirators' success or failure, but cannot think what to tell Lucius, who mustn't know of Brutus's plans. Portia, aside, bemoans the female weakness that makes it so hard for her to keep secrets.

Portia's panic here contrasts her earlier strength. She sees her weakness as being characteristic of her gender, just as her fortitude was uncharacteristic.



The **Soothsayer** passes, and **Portia** asks if he is going to the Capitol. He says that he is, to warn **Caesar**. Portia asks if he knows of any specific threat against Caesar; he says he doesn't know anything specific, only fears. The Soothsayer continues on. Portia sends **Lucius** after **Brutus** with only a greeting, and then goes inside.

The fact that the Soothsayer himself attempts twice to warn Caesar would seem to indicate that his assassination is a possible outcome, not an inevitable one—if it is inevitable, why bother warning him?



ACT 3, SCENE 1

Caesar approaches the Capitol with the conspirators, followed by **Antony**, **Lepidus**, **Publius**, **Popilius**, and other Senators. Caesar notices the **Soothsayer**, and tells him his prophecy hasn't come true; the Soothsayer says the day's not over yet. **Artemidorus** tries to hand Caesar his letter, but is blocked by **Decius** and **Cassius**. Popilius wishes Cassius good luck, and Cassius realizes that word of their plans is spreading, which means they must be quick.

The Soothsayer's final line is more like cryptic gloating than a warning. There are now others besides Artemidorus who know of the conspiracy, but are sympathetic to it. It's never made clear whether one of the conspirators leaked information, or if they were spied on.



In the Capitol, **Trebonius** talks with **Antony**, to draw him away. **Metellus** kneels before **Caesar** to beg for the repeal of his brother's banishment. The other conspirators join him, in order to position themselves near Caesar. Caesar refuses to reverse his order, comparing himself to the North Star in terms of constancy: "there's but one in all that holds his place" (3.1.65)

Caesar's egotistical boasts about his constancy make him less likable (which makes Brutus more likable to the audience), but also calls Brutus's logic into question: Caesar seems determined not to change, and Brutus's decision is based on believing that he will.



The conspirators stab **Caesar**—**Casca** first, **Brutus** last. Caesar's last words are "Et tu, Bruté?—Then fall Caesar" (3.1.76). The conspirators attempt to start a rallying cry about Liberty, but a panic ensues and many Senators flee. Brutus sends **Publius** to tell the other Senators that no harm will befall anyone else. On Brutus's advice, the conspirators smear themselves with Caesar's blood, and prepare to march forth into the streets.

Antony's servant enters with a message. Antony sends word that he will support **Brutus** if he may safely approach and be given a satisfactory explanation for **Caesar's** death. Brutus praises Antony and grants the request. **Cassius** remarks that he still doesn't think Antony can be trusted.

Antony enters, and is moved by the sight of **Caesar's** body. He says that if the conspirators intend to kill him, they should do it now, as seeing Caesar dead has made him ready to die. **Brutus** and **Cassius** tell Antony that they mean him no harm, and that he'll have an equal voice in the establishment of a new government. Antony shakes hands with them, and apologizes to Caesar's spirit for doing so. He asks permission to speak at Caesar's funeral, which Brutus grants, despite Cassius's objections. They agree that Antony should be the one to bear Caesar's body outside, and all but Antony exit.

Alone, **Antony** predicts that a terrible war will engulf Rome as a result of **Caesar's** murder. A servant of Octavius enters to tell Antony that Octavius has almost arrived in Rome. Antony sends word that it's too dangerous for Octavius to enter the city, and that their actions must depend on how the citizens react to Caesar's death.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

Outside, assembled **Plebeians** demand an explanation for **Caesar's** death. **Cassius** leads half of them away while **Brutus** stays to address the others. Brutus explains that he loved and honored Caesar, but loved Rome more, and killed Caesar rather than let every Roman become a slave. The people are persuaded by his rhetoric and proclaim Brutus a hero. One even cries "Let him be Caesar" (3.2.47)

Antony has entered with **Caesar's** body in a coffin. **Brutus** departs, turning the pulpit over to Antony. The crowd denounces Caesar and continues to laud Brutus.

Caesar supposedly stopped defending himself when he saw that Brutus was one of his attackers. Their bathing in Caesar's blood confirms Calpurnia's dream, but their slogan about liberty seems ironically unpersuasive: they have "delivered" Rome from things that haven't happened yet.



It is unclear whether any explanation could pacify the passionate Antony, but the logical Brutus seems convinced that his will. The contrast between Brutus's rhetoric and Antony's begins here.



Brutus does not suspect that Antony means to use his speech at Caesar's funeral to turn the people against the conspirators because the idea of emotion overpowering logic or honor is foreign to him. Cassius, who had always been ruled by emotion (his jealousy) does suspect Antony.



Octavius is Caesar's heir, but their cause now rests on Antony. Rome is, for the moment, without a government, and Antony correctly observes that power will go to whoever can win the hearts of the people.



Brutus's speech rests on two points: that Caesar was ambitious, and that he would have made slaves of all Romans. Both ideas are assumptions, but Brutus speaks of them as fact. The cry of the last plebeian shows that some citizens would be happy to have a king.



It's incredibly foolish of Brutus to leave now—he's seen how easily the people's minds can be changed.



Antony says that he has "come to bury **Caesar**, not to praise him" (3.2.71). He says that the conspirators who claimed Caesar was ambitious are all honorable men, but then gives examples of Caesar acting in non-ambitious ways. When Antony pauses to weep, the crowd begins to say that Caesar was murdered unjustly.

Antony regains his composure, and says he has no intention of wronging the honorable **Brutus** and **Cassius**, or inciting the mob to riot. He mentions that he's found **Caesar's** will, which would make the people venerate Caesar if they knew its contents, but that he dare not read it. The **Plebeians** clamor to hear it. Antony descends to stand over Caesar's coffin.

Antony describes **Caesar's** murder in graphic terms, and then uncovers Caesar's body. The crowd is ready to hunt down and kill the conspirators, but Antony bids them stay. He maintains that he does not wish to incite them to violence, and that he is not as well-spoken as **Brutus**.

Antony finally reads **Caesar's** will, which promises a sum of money to every citizen, and announces the conversion of Caesar's property into public parks. The crowd leaves in a frenzy, intending to kill the conspirators and burn their homes. A servant of Octavius enters to say that Octavius has arrived in Rome, and is waiting for Antony with **Lepidus** at Caesar's house. He adds that **Brutus** and **Cassius** have fled Rome.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

The mob of **plebeians** encounter **Cinna the Poet** in the street. They interrogate him about his identity, and start to attack him when they learn his name, thinking him to be Cinna the conspirator. When he tells them that he is Cinna the Poet, they attack him anyway, for being a bad poet.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

At **Antony's** house, Antony, Octavius, and **Lepidus** make a list of those who should be executed for their part in the conspiracy. Antony suggests they amend **Caesar's** will so it pays out less money, and sends Lepidus to get it. Antony then tells Octavius that Lepidus is too weak to share power, and should be gotten rid of once the struggle with **Brutus** and **Cassius** is over. They then discuss raising an army to meet the enemy.

Antony's opening line exemplifies his tactic: to announce the opposite of his true intentions. Antony calls the conspirators "honorable," because the crowd supports them, but slowly renders the term sarcastic by illustrating their mistakes.



Weeping provides time for the plebeians to interpret Antony's hints—the same trick Cassius uses. Rioting is precisely what Antony wants, but again he claims the opposite. He pretends to mention the will accidentally, to seem unskilled at speaking.



Caesar's body adds strength to Antony's argument. He pretends to hold the crowd back, but only wishes to stir them up more. His claim of being less well-spoken than Brutus is clearly untrue.



Caesar's will seems to prove that he really did love the people. Octavius apparently ignored Antony's instructions, coming to Rome before word was sent. Shakespeare manipulates time here—in actual history, Brutus and Cassius actually remained in Rome for a year after Caesar's murder.



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.



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. 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

Encamped near Sardis, **Brutus**, **Lucius**, **Lucillius**, and other Soldiers meet **Titinius** and **Pindarus**. Brutus talks with them about a disagreement with **Cassius**. Aside, Brutus tells Lucillius that Cassius is starting to seem fake and over-courteous, and that he doesn't trust him like he used to.

The personality differences between Brutus and Cassius are becoming a problem. While Cassius accused Brutus of impoliteness in their first exchange, Brutus now suspects Cassius because he seems too polite.



Cassius arrives with his soldiers. He says that **Brutus** has done him wrong, and Brutus responds that this is impossible, as he is not even unjust with his enemies. Cassius continues to argue, and Brutus suggests they go inside his tent, as they should not be fighting in front of the soldiers. **Titinius** and **Lucius** guard the door.

Cassius is becoming annoyed with Brutus's relentless nobility.



Cassius is angry that **Brutus** punished an officer for a small offense, even though he'd written to him asking that the man be pardoned. Brutus accuses Cassius of habitually getting people out of trouble in exchange for bribes, adding that since they murdered **Caesar** for his corruption, it would be hypocritical of them to be corrupt now.

Conflict between Brutus's morals and Cassius's pragmatism, which began with the disagreement about whether to kill Antony, comes to a head here. Brutus's adherence to his principles is beginning to impede their efforts.



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 they argue about Caesar, they begin to mirror him. Cassius's dramatic gesture of baring his chest and asking for death is the same one Caesar used before the crowd, and Brutus's refusal to repeal the officer's punishment is identical to the argument Caesar made just before his murder. Caesar was a successful politician because he combined elements of both Brutus and Cassius.



Brutus softens, and apologizes. **Cassius** apologizes too, saying that he inherited his temper from his mother. Brutus says that from now on, he will regard Cassius's mother as being responsible for his bad moods, not Cassius himself.

Esteem for masculinity is demonstrated again.



An old **Poet** enters the tent, arguing with **Lucillius**, who is trying to keep him out. The Poet rhymes badly, saying that **Brutus** and **Cassius** should not be arguing. Brutus and Cassius mock him and have him sent 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.



When they are alone, **Cassius** says that **Brutus's** recent anger was uncharacteristic of him. Brutus tells **Cassius** that **Portia**, afraid that Octavius and **Antony** will win, has committed suicide by swallowing hot coals. Cassius expresses sympathy, but Brutus says he doesn't want to talk about it any more. **Lucius** is ordered to bring wine, and Brutus and Cassius drink to their reconciliation.

Portia's suicide refreshes the audience's sympathy for Brutus, and helps explain the preceding argument, since losing his temper is so uncharacteristic of Brutus. Her manner of death is typically gruesome, as if intended as final proof of her unfeminine toughness.



Titinius and **Messala** enter with news from Rome. They say that **Antony**, Octavius, and **Lepidus** have executed many senators. After some hesitation, Messala tells **Brutus** of **Portia's** death, thinking he does not know yet. Brutus makes a show of acting unaffected, and **Cassius** commends him for his strength.

This is the only scene where Brutus "acts," exaggerating his stoicism in front of the troops. Such behavior would be second nature for Caesar, Antony, or Cassius.



Brutus suggests they march to Philippi to meet the triumvirate's army immediately. **Cassius** says they should let the enemy come to them instead, so that they'll be tired out. Brutus says this would give the enemy time to enlist more troops, whereas numbers would favor them if they attacked now. Cassius agrees and they say good-night. Cassius leaves with **Titinius** and **Messala**.

As always, Brutus wins the argument with Cassius—but here, it is because his suggestion is more pragmatic, rather than it being a case of pragmatism versus morality.



Brutus orders **Lucius** to play music and **Varrus** and **Claudio** to sleep in his tent, in case he should need to send a message to **Cassius**. Varrus, Claudio, and Lucius all fall asleep. The Ghost of **Caesar** appears, identifying himself as "Thy evil spirit, Brutus" (4.2.333) when, and saying he will appear again at Philippi, before vanishing. Brutus wakes the others, and sends word to Cassius to prepare to march.

The Ghost's manner of identifying himself implies that murdering Caesar was the only thing Brutus ever did wrong. The revelation that he will come again implies that Brutus will die at Philippi, but Brutus seems unaffected. He may realize here that killing Caesar was wrong.



ACT 5, SCENE 1

Antony and Octavius wait on the battlefield. Antony says that **Brutus** and **Cassius** are only attacking to make themselves look braver than they are. A **messenger** alerts them that the opposing army approaches. 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" (5.1.20).

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 and **Cassius** speak with **Antony** and **Octavius** before the battle. They taunt each other. Brutus and Cassius call Octavius young and inexperienced, and accuse Antony of being a social butterfly. Antony and Octavius call Brutus and Cassius hypocrites and traitors. Antony and Octavius exit.

At this point, the conflict is a power struggle nearly devoid of ideological disagreement. Brutus is no longer fighting for the good of Rome, but for self-preservation.



Brutus speaks apart with **Lucillius**. **Cassius** tells **Messala** that, though he never previously believed in omens, he was given a bad feeling by the fact that carrion birds now circle their army, when eagles once had done so. Brutus returns. He and Cassius say their goodbyes, because if they lose they will never see each other again. When asked by Cassius what he plans to do if they are defeated, Brutus says he does not believe in suicide.

This highlights the different philosophical schools to which Brutus and Cassius belong. Cassius, as an epicurean (those who believed the Gods were non-interventionist), had never believed in omens before. Brutus, as a stoic, does not believe in suicide, but that people should weather whatever life brings.



ACT 5, SCENE 2

In the thick of the battle, **Brutus** sees a weak point in Octavius's lines. He sends **Messala** to his troops on **Cassius's** wing with instructions to attack there.

This maneuver overcomes Octavius, but leaves Cassius vulnerable to Antony's troops.



ACT 5, SCENE 3

Cassius, weakened by the loss of those troops and by deserters, is losing his half of the battle to **Antony**. He sends **Titinius** on horseback to see whether his camp is being burned, and sends **Pindarus** to mount a hill and watch Titinius. Pindarus sees Titinius overtaken by other riders. Cassius, thinking the battle is lost, orders Pindarus to kill him. Pindarus kills Cassius with the same sword Cassius used to stab **Caesar**. Pindarus then flees Rome forever.

While suicide is not out of line with Cassius's 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 that perched on his standards.



Titinius enters with **Messala**. It turns out the other horsemen were allies bringing news of **Brutus's** victory over Octavius. Titinius is bearing a wreath of victory from Brutus to **Cassius**. They notice Cassius's body, and Titinius sends Messala to tell Brutus. Alone with Cassius's body, Titinius draws out Cassius's sword and kills himself out of grief.

The omen Cassius saw was paradoxical. It influenced him to believe the battle was lost when it wasn't, so he killed himself, which causes his forces to lose the battle. It wouldn't have come true if he hadn't believed it.



Brutus enters with **Messala**, **Young Cato**, **Strato**, **Volumnius**, **Lucillius**, **Labio** and **Flavius**. On seeing the bodies, Brutus remarks that **Caesar's Ghost** is hunting them all down. He gives orders for **Cassius's** body to be taken to Thasos, adding that the battle is a standstill so far, and will soon be joined again.

Brutus's comment reflects not so much a fear of Caesar's Ghost as a growing belief that their deaths are deserved. For Brutus, situations that progress from wrong action can never be righted.



ACT 5, SCENE 4

During the resumed battle, **Brutus** passes by with **Messala** and **Flavius**, leaving **Lucillius** and **Young Cato** on stage. Enemy soldiers enter and fight with them. Cato is killed, but Lucillius pretends to be Brutus and is taken prisoner. **Antony** enters, and recognizes Lucillius, who says that Brutus will never be captured alive. Antony spares Lucillius's life in the hopes that he will become an ally, and sends men to seek Brutus.

Just as Brutus once spared Antony, Antony now spares Lucillius. But while Brutus spared Antony because he mistook him for being as noble as Brutus himself, Antony spares Lucillius for pragmatic reasons: he thinks he can turn Lucillius into an ally and in that way gain more power.



ACT 5, SCENE 5

Brutus and his attendants stop to rest, with **Antony's** men closing in. Knowing that he is beaten, and revealing that he has seen **Caesar's Ghost** a second time, Brutus asks **Clitus**, **Dardanius**, and **Volumnius** in turn if they will assist him in committing suicide, but all refuse him and resume running, urging Brutus to do the same. Brutus wakes the sleeping **Strato**, and asks him to hold his sword while he runs on it. Strato consents, and Brutus kills himself, saying that he feels better about doing this than he did about killing **Caesar**.

Unlike Pindarus, Brutus's men are reluctant to assist his suicide. Brutus's dying words indicate that, unlike Cassius, he kills himself not to avoid the humiliation of capture, but because he believes he deserves death. If his suicide is a just punishment rather than an avoidance of future events, then Brutus does not exactly violate his philosophy.



Antony and Octavius enter, with soldiers, and **Lucillius** and **Massala** captive. **Strato** is made a servant to Octavius. Antony says that **Brutus** was "the noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.67), because he killed **Caesar** out of genuine concern for the future of Rome, while the other conspirators were merely jealous. Octavius says that Brutus shall have a funeral befitting his virtue, and that his body shall lie in state that night in his own tent. He then leads the army away to divide the spoils.

Even his enemies confirm the difference between Brutus and the other conspirators. The closing focus on the ironic difference between Brutus's great virtue and disastrous end provides a good argument for seeing the play as the Tragedy of Brutus, rather than of Caesar. Octavius, as the highest-ranking character, speaks the closing lines.

