

What do we learn
about the characters
of cassius and brutus
in these scenes



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Julius Caesar is the story of a political murder and a posthumous revenge. In the opening scenes of the play Rome is portrayed as being in a state of turmoil. Julius Caesar defeated the former Roman general Pompey, who used to be one of his closest friends. Pompey was also the person who gave Caesar a position of power by making him governor of Gaul. All the turmoil and problems arose as Julius Caesar was going to be crowned king of the Roman Empire. Two powerful senators Brutus and Cassius cause unrest because they are strongly opposed to the notion of Julius Caesar becoming king.

In this play we are going to see the reasons why they wanted to kill Caesar and their changing relationship during the course of the play. On the one hand there is a very devious, manipulating and vengeful senator in Cassius, who will " be never at hearts ease whiles they behold a greater than themselves. " Cassius is motivated by a personal achievement rather than the good of Rome. That is why Cassius loathes Caesar and is very discontented by the fact that Caesar has all the power. The other main senator who is involved in Caesar's assassination is Brutus who has another agenda for killing Caesar, which is that " it is for the general good.

So we can see instantly that Brutus's reason for killing Caesar are more virtuous and honourable. This sense of Brutus's honour is very important because it is one of the main themes in the play and it is driven from family honour because it was his grandfather that drove away Rome's last king and made the place a republic in 509 BC. We learn many things about the character of Cassius in act 1 scene 2, one of the most important of the points is that Cassius is a very observant man. A good example to prove this is <https://assignbuster.com/what-do-we-learn-about-the-characters-of-cassius-and-brutus-in-these-scenes/>

when he showed Brutus as being stubborn he said “ You bear too stubborn and too strange a hand over a friend who loves you.

Cassius considers Brutus as “ stubborn” because Brutus has a steadfast gaze on events in Rome and is totally oblivious by the plea made by Cassius. We also learn from this opening scene, that Cassius is very much a sycophantic character. That is why he uses this as one of his techniques of manipulation, to convince the stolid Brutus to kill his friend Caesar. He remarks “ tell me good Brutus, Can you see your face? ” In the opening scenes we can clearly recognise that Cassius is a very manipulative person who always like to be in control.

It is these techniques which allows him to convince Brutus to kill Caesar and these methods include flattery like when Cassius remarks “ Therefore good Brutus, be prepared to hear. ” This manipulation, also serves as a very good link with the fact that Cassius is a very attentive and shrewd person. By calling Brutus “ good” he eulogises him, but it leads us to sense a heavy undercurrent of a brewing power struggle. Cassius’s main character is based around his fiery and passionate nature. We can say that Cassius is also a very ambitious character.

This can be linked to his violent nature that is drawn out in Cassius’s speech to Brutus when he says “ How he did shake. ‘ Tis true, this God did shake;” Cassius emphatically denounces and belittles Julius Caesar with his repetitive use of the word “ shake. ” He portrays Julius Caesar as a pathetic creature with the intention of showing himself as a man of stature. Another example of Cassius’s character showing hatred and jealousy towards Caesar is when

he says, “ A man of such feeble temper should so get the start of the majestic world. From this we can also see that Cassius loathes Caesar, and is very discontented with the fact that he holds a greater position than Cassius.

The overwhelming tone of Cassius demeanour is that Rome will be doomed in crowning a “ feeble” person who is unfit to attain a “ majestic” glory. We feel that Caesar’s accurate perceptions of Cassius show us that Caesar is also a very observant character. The perception of Cassius, we get from Caesar is more of a dangerous threat to Caesar’s crown. We can call it fear on Caesar’s side at the time when he remarks “ And therefore are they very dangerous. Caesar’s perceptions also lead us to conclude that Cassius is a very observant man because even Caesar says, “ He is a great observer. ”

On the whole the most important apprehension made on Caesar’s part is when he wisely notices that Cassius is very discontented with his position, when he says, “ Such men as he be never at heart’s ease whiles they behold a greater than themselves. ” Julius Caesar absolutely detests the idea that Cassius is trying to portray himself as “ greater” than the humanity and Julius Caesar condemns the idea with contempt.

In Act 1 scene 2 we can see all the plethora of methods used by Cassius to manipulate Brutus. One of the many techniques used is being sycophantic towards Brutus, because it further increases his egocentric behaviour. An example of this is “ Where many of the best in Rome -except immortal Caesar-speaking of Brutus. ” We detect a tone of sarcasm when Cassius says Julius Caesar as “ immortal” – the underlying intention is to have a supportive effect on Brutus as well as on the audience. This is very clever of

Cassius because he knows that Brutus is a very proud man and that this statement will both raise and dash his expectations.

He does this by saying “ Except immortal Caesar,” showing that if it wasn’t for Caesar he would be the most powerful person in Rome. This really does injure Brutus’s pride. The power struggle continues. This is like a mind game for Cassius because he then goes on and tries to draw reaction from the phlegmatic Brutus. The idea from this plan is to strain and torment Brutus’s conscience. He then tries to calm his mind by patronising Brutus when he says “ therefore good Brutus, be prepared to hear;” The way he is manipulating Brutus is by pushing him towards his argument and trying to bring out Brutus’s fears.

The perfect example of this is when Brutus remarks, “ What means this shouting? I do fear the people. ” This is probably another plan by Cassius to hurt Brutus’s self-importance. Cassius also goes after him in many other ways like being submissive e. g. “ And be not jealous on me, gentle Brutus. ” The use of various ploys put into effect by Cassius in the choice of words such as “ good Brutus” and “ gentle Brutus” as if he was dealing with a child. He intends to be patronising and condescending towards Brutus as a way of showing his supremacy to the audience and to Brutus.

He intends to make a mockery of Brutus’s reserve and hopes to carry the audience with him. Cassius’s objectives are working well in different stages because he is always one step ahead of Brutus and he is carefully restructuring his argument all the time, bringing a new perspective to his scheming manipulation of Brutus. Cassius’s main method of manipulating

Brutus is very simple and effective; it is by playing around with Brutus's conscience. The example of this is "I would not Cassius, yet I love him well." Cassius is doing this because he knows that Brutus has split loyalties and he is trying to bring out the suppressed emotions.

Brutus remarks "the name of honour more than I fear death." These split loyalties can be emphasised in the confessional declaration "I would not Cassius, yet I love him well." Brutus is in a quandary and this is literally tearing him apart. Cassius belittles Caesar's greatness, when he callously remarks "And when the fit was on him, I did mark how he did shake." These words are said to convince Brutus that he is better than Caesar and should be treated that way. The repetition of the word "shake" is a way of undermining and belittling Caesar's authority.

On the other hand the constant use of "shake" by Cassius can be linked to the fact that it fills his superiority desire and makes him feel greater than Caesar. This underlines one of the main themes in the play and that is the fear of belittlement. It is this constant fear that had caused many power struggles to rise in the play. On the whole we can say that Cassius was successful in making Brutus adopt his way of thinking, because he was the one with all the manipulative techniques to persuade Brutus's torn conscience to do what Cassius wanted and that was to assassinate Caesar.

In act 2 scene 1, we perceive how low the tone of Cassius has fallen since he has dealt with the assassination as a politician. I feel that Brutus wants to kill Caesar out of the concern of feeling belittled, because he wants to maintain his self-importance and stature among the crowds. I think that he wants to

kill Caesar because he feels that his great position in society will be under threat once Caesar is crowned king. This fear of belittlement is drawn out by his violent imagery with phrases like “ would run to these and these extremities” and “ kill him in the shell.

From the two scenes we are comparing, we can clearly see that Brutus is a very condescending and patronising figure, who takes pleasure in being superior e. g. “ Not I. ” This very sharp response can also show a very serious side to Brutus’s nature. I think that Brutus is a very assured person by character who has fixed ideas in his head, which leads to his downfall. A good example to show this part of his nature is when he remarks to Cassius “ I am not gamesome. ” The use of the word “ gamesome” shows the audience that Brutus is a very serious character.

Other good words to describe Brutus’s nature are stolid, phlegmatic, egocentric and his sense of superiority. This is summarised when he says to Cassius “ Conceptions only proper to myself. ” This shows that Brutus is somewhat a private person and does not want to express his emotions without due thought, because of the ruthless nature of Roman politics. We can see that there is a stark contrast between Cassius and Brutus, at the start of the play; Brutus from the outset is a very stolid person.

This is different from Cassius who is much more passionate when he remarks, “ To find ourselves dishonourable graves. Whereas the thoughtful Brutus shows little passion and only calmly says, “ For some new honours that are heaped on Caesar. ” This comparison of Cassius and Brutus dramatically changes in Act 2 scene 1, because this time it is Brutus who is

talking in a very violent and emotive tone when he says “ And therefore think of him as a serpents egg, which hatched, would as his kind, grow mischievous, and kill him in the shell. ” In this scene however it is Brutus who is controlling Cassius not the other way around, this makes Cassius feel uneasy when Brutus sharply bites back at his comments with his reply of “ No, not an oath.

We feel that as the scene progresses Brutus is emphasising his power even more when he says, “ O name him not; let us break with him. ” We learn from Brutus’s reaction to Cassius’s attempt to manipulate him, that he is not really an innocent figure waiting to be manipulated, but is actually a person who is aware of the situation at hand and acts accordingly. We can see the quote “ Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar” that he knew Cassius was manipulating him from the outset.

We can learn from his reactions to Cassius manipulating him, that he is using the manipulation by Cassius as a way of excusing himself from blame, when they murder Caesar. We feel that when Brutus remarks, “ to mask thy monstrous visage,” he is trying to give reasons to his own conscience that his reasons for killing Caesar are not for his own personal gain, but for “ the general good” of Rome. The fact that he feels he is doing this for unblemished reasons makes him feel superior to the other conspirators; it could also be linked to the fact that he becomes their leader.

I believe that it is unblemished thoughts that lead to Caesar’s murder by Brutus, but on the other hand we could interpret it as a fear of belittlement from Caesar once he is Emperor. I think this fear of belittlement rose from

the constant sycophantic comments from Cassius, which drastically inflated his ego. So once his ego had reached a certain point the fear of belittlement slowly crept in and that is something that Brutus found very difficult to accept. We think that Brutus has this moral obligation because he lives his life on the basic principle of honour.

A good example to clarify the point is “ the name of honour more than I fear death. ” It is this honour that causes uncertainty in his mind because he has honour for Caesar as a friend and he has equal concern for “ the general good ” and for his family. It is really the family argument that pushes Brutus off the edge; “ The Tarquin drive, when he was called a King. ” I feel that it is this moral code which Brutus lives for, is the main difference between himself and Cassius because Cassius is just thinking of “ Beholding a greater than themselves.

The statement implies that Brutus is a far more honourable and noble character compared to Cassius. I feel that is because Brutus lives for honour and this is shown by the quote “ set honour in one eye and death I’th’other. ” In act 2 scene 1 we can clearly recognise that Cassius’s behaviour has changed considerably from the early scenes, because now Cassius is becoming more doubtful about his plan when he remarks “ But it is doubtful yet, whether Caesar will come forth today or no; ” This can also show that Cassius is losing the self confidence that he showed in early scenes.

We feel that Cassius’s lack of confidence is because he is feeling insecure at not being the leader. His lack of confidence is not made any better by Brutus, who constantly belittles him by opposing his suggestions when he

says, “ Alas good Cassius, do not think of him. ” We think that as the scene progresses Cassius slowly slumps into a position of weakness when he nervously says, “ Yet I fear him. ” Cassius seems to think that his manoeuvre has been unsuccessful and a defeatist attitude is slowly creeping in him. This shows the signs of mellowing as he vents his “ fear” about Marc Anthony.

We think that Cassius’s lack of contribution in the discussions in this scene signifies the fact that power has completely changed over to Brutus that is why it is him who delivers the long speeches like “ And that thought, and die for Caesar. ” This is an enormous contrast from Act 1 Scene 2 where Cassius was giving the long speeches and it was Brutus who was listening to his arguments. Also the fact that Brutus is cutting Cassius off shows us that Brutus is denying Cassius the right of speech.

That is why Cassius says short sentences like “ The clock hath stricken three. We also feel that after the first three times of Cassius’s points being shunned by Brutus e. g. “ Let us be sacrifices, but not butchers, Caius,” Cassius learned his lesson and has taken a backward seat. I gather from the tone of Cassius that he is saying less fearing of further belittlement by Brutus. This fear of belittlement is one of the most important themes in the play and it is on this point that many power struggles have happened during the course of the play.

The power struggle between the two main characters Brutus and Cassius, which has caused Cassius to be constantly belittled and mocked by Brutus, e. . “ No, not and oath,” one of the ways he does this is by denying Cassius the opportunity to voice his opinion in many instances. Brutus’s tone during

the play has changed since he has been in charge. He has been a lot more commanding and domineering over Cassius and to a lesser extent to the other conspirators. As the scene has progressed we can see that the fellow conspirators have taken advantage of Cassius weakness and have started to ridicule him further like when they remark, “ Never fear that. If he be so resolved. ”

We feel that this scene (Act 2 Scene1) is really important because we see the distinctive change in Brutus to a certain conspirator. It also shows the main changes that sweep across Brutus’s attitudes and thoughts. We can see from this scene that Brutus is no more stolid and phlegmatic, but is passionate and fiery as Cassius used to be. This violence has almost turned to hatred towards Caesar when he remarked “ And therefore think him as a serpents egg, which hatched, would as his kind, grow mischievous and kill him in the shell.

It is the letters emotive content that provoked a reaction from Brutus as it prompts Brutus to take action e. g. “ Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus. ” In this scene we can clearly see that Brutus has become the leader of the clan of conspirators and has stamped his authority on the whole plan by attacking Cassius by stating “ O name him not; let us break with him. ” We feel that because he is taking control of the group he doesn’t want any threats to his authority that is why three times he has bluntly opposed Cassius by saying, “ Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.

To Brutus the whole operation evolves achieving “ general good” and there must be sacrifices and there is no scope for butchery. We must conclude that

Brutus was not, actually a villain but portrayed as one; he was simply an upright man who made a tragic mistake. Brutus did not think about the consequences after the assassination of Julius Caesar, but thought of the “general good” of Rome and Romans. Brutus’s murder of Caesar was the right deed for the wrong reasons or the wrong deed for the right reasons it is a teasing situation.

On the other hand some people feel that Brutus was not an innocent man but was in fact a person who felt that his honour and pride was more important to him than the honour of friendship. We can see from his language during the course of the play that he chose his personal honour over friendship and that he was preserving his innocence over the false sense of the “general good.” A good example when he was defending his virtue is when he says, “It is the bright day that brings forth the adder.” Other interpreters think that Brutus was coming up with these excuses as a way of defending his honour against his worst enemy – his conscience.

Another very important point in the play is this personal power struggle within Brutus, which has led to his scorn of Cassius. This is because if he scorns Cassius as well as the other conspirators his conscience feels that he is doing justice, this is evident when he says, “they are the faction. O conspiracy.” On the other hand I feel that Brutus is ridiculing Cassius as a way of releasing his anger at Cassius for “whetting me against Caesar,” I feel that he knows in the depths of his heart that he is doing the wrong thing and by blaming Cassius for making him want to kill Caesar he is washing his hands clean of any blame.

Cassius is more deeply conscious than anyone else of "Julius Caesar." He is too stirred by personal feelings to be a successful politician or a conspirator. He always prefers his friends and hates his enemies. He therefore never suffers from Brutus's painful awareness that a man may be a friend and at the same time embodies a detested principle.