

# How is brutus portrayed as a tragic hero?

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Throughout the works of Shakespeare, tragedy has always been a vital foundation and a key to his immense successes. His fine mastery of the art became legendary amongst the audiences that watched his various plays. Romeo and Juliet is a prime example of the tragedy he could combine into a stage performance. An Irish poet named Oscar Wilde who was a novelist, dramatist and critic in the late eighteenth century once wrote, " There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. This has an exact correlation to the play Julius Caesar where the tragedy lies in the greed of a man who wants too much. This particular play is based entirely upon dreadful choices leading to demise. The character Brutus in particular is a key personality to the structure of the play in his fall from honour. Being a man of utmost glory and loyalty becomes his biggest weakness. In Act 1 Scene 2 we are presented with the pressure that Cassius weighs upon Brutus' mind. In lines 79-80 the truth of Brutus' troubles become clear.

In the heat of conversation he says " What means this shouting? I do fear the people choose Caesar for their king". This is the turning point in the play as the stepping stones begin to fall in place and Brutus reveals to the viewers his deep down uncertainty to the decision of Caesar being crowned emperor. Cassius is a very influential force in the corruption of Brutus. The real change of heart for Brutus arrives in Act 2 Scene 1 when he receives the letter (lines 46-47). The play begins to see him question his values and reasons.

The true torment of all he has lived for, the honour he based his life upon becomes clear and treachery looms close by. Though the letter is simple and only two lines, it sparks the questions needed to be raised in order to get

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beneath the unwavering loyalties that he is shown to carry. In the lines that read, " Brutus, thou sleep'st: awake'. Such instigations have often been dropp'd where I have took them up" (lines 48-49), and, " Shall Rome stand under one man's awe? What Rome? " (line 52), it is apparent that the few words the letter carried have created doubt in Brutus' mind.

The fact that Brutus is so appealing to the audience is a mixture of emotions stirred within each person watching the play. It is comprehensible and probable that Shakespeare's ambition was to connect this character to the everyday temptations and conscientious objecting that every person goes through. Although this has been extremely dramatised, people can familiarise with Brutus' predicament as they have at least once in their lives faced a temptation for which they have most probably given in to.

In Act 1 Scene 2, lines 82-89 it provides the loose fibre in the strength of Brutus' loyalty, but also shows the torment inside of this character facing the brutal reality of his own thoughts and feelings, a classic example being, " I would not, Cassius; yet I love him well". It presents the fractured reasoning of the human mind; the inability to come to a threatening conclusion against all that has been previously believed, a sympathy that everyone has subconsciously acquired through a relation to their own similar experiences. The flaw in the character of Brutus is his own deep thirst for honour.

Though this is important in order for the play's theme to coincide with the historical Roman context, it is also a weakness inside the characters personality that was intentionally added to bring the play to a rise in calamity. The character Cassius uses this weakness to an advantage. The

deceitful cunning that he possesses alone pushes Brutus into seeing a whole different side to his own glory. He begins to build a frame for his motives and starts to press upon himself a false story of the higher nobility. This is entirely proven in the eulogy he gives at Caesar's funeral.

He speaks of himself in such a manner that he even fools himself into believing he's done nothing wrong, specifically shown in Act 3 Scene 2, lines 20-28 where it says, " If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more". This signifies the fact that Brutus is completely tricked into thinking he did the right thing. Although being far more intelligent than to believe that Cassius is truly trying to bring Rome to justice, he starts to consider the possibility that the treacherous character may have a point.

Once again Act 2 Scene 1, line 52 comes into play where he sees a different light on Caesar. Instead of seeing him as a proud but honest ruler, he looks upon him with the eye of Cassius and sees an over ambitious ruler with a hunger for power. This weakness was a calculated imperfection on the part of Shakespeare. It is evident that his goal was to produce the suitable factor to manipulate in order to make Brutus a tragic hero and effectively utilise that status to get the audiences emotionally involved in the play.

To finalise Brutus' " tragic hero" status, the last component was to have the character die a dramatic death. As most people in Shakespeare's lifetime where in the age where they began to appreciate the lifestyles and arts of Ancient Rome, they were well aware of the battle standards and were all too familiar with the classic death on the battle field when a soldier lost his

honour. So it was only justice to have Brutus follow the same fate at the end of the play in order to hit home on the audiences' interests.

The clarity of Brutus' misconduct becomes obvious to him when he sees the blood spilt on his behalf and realises the end is near, presented in Act 5 Scene 5, lines 1-51, especially in the line where it says, " Sit thee down, Clitus. Slaying is the word; it is a deed in fashion. Hark thee, Clitus. " (lines 4-5). With this consequence, the audience will be in a deep sympathy because by this stage they have grown to like this character and feel sorry for his poor decisions if Shakespeare's methods are convincing and will be enthralled in the drama of his exit, admiring the characters honour even after his descent from valour.

In conclusion, the character Brutus is shown as a tragic hero due to a range of reasons. If Shakespeare's in depth and intelligent understanding of sympathy and personal familiarities wasn't shown through the play then the audience would not feel the same emotions and therefore would not have experienced the sorrows or have empathized with Brutus' predicaments that he got himself into.

Shakespeare plays on the audience's personal tragedies and faults by adding a character misled by treachery and blinded with the pursuit of an honour that was false from the start. If the audience was not moved by the play, then the character would become wooden and the effect would be obsolete. Brutus' human faults of being vulnerable to deceit and cunning are what make this character so lifelike. The tragedy of this deluded character killing

himself at the end of a series of bad consequences brought forth by deception is what makes him such a 'tragic hero'.