

Brutus v caesar

People



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

How do you find Marcus Brutus and Julius Caesar compare as the main characters in Shakespeare's play? Do you find them to be representative of good vs. evil? In the historical tragedy of Julius Caesar, there are a number of contrasting themes and characters who develop the theme of good vs. evil and perhaps are constantly changing from the protagonist to the antagonist. It is hard to distinguish who is suppose to be the savior of the Roman people and who is the hypocrite that is misleading both the audience and the other characters. For this particular question, we are asked to compare the two leading characters that essentially define the themes of the play and enhance them. Despite the constant struggle the audience faces as to whether they should support Brutus in light of the fact that he betrays his best friend and brutally murders him, we seem to find his character more likeable than Caesar's. We soon realize that despite the obvious differences between the two characters in the initial stages of the play, many disturbing similarities begin to appear in Act 2. Julius Caesar is introduced to us first in Act 1 Scene 1 where a stark contrast is created by the Roman public and the tribunes Flavius and Marullus. The scene opens with the Romans celebrating the feast of Lupercal and the return of Caesar from Spain for which the people have decided to take a holiday and join the festivities. As a crowd of workmen are approaching Caesar's procession they are stopped by the tribunes and are chastised for their behavior and are called, " senseless things, " as well as " cruel men of Rome". The reason for this is soon revealed when the tribunes ask the workmen, " knew you not Pompey? " indicating that they had accepted Caesar as their new leader and were rejoicing in his return having completely forgotten their previous leader Pompey. The tribunes are the voice of loyalty that seems to have eluded the

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

Romans which emphasizes one of Caesar's main traits those being disloyalty and selfishness. The tribunes continue to speak of Caesar in a derogatory way by telling off the Romans further, " And do you now cull out a holiday? And do you now strew flowers in his way that comes in triumph over Pompey's blood? Be gone! " They then continue to " disrobe images" of Caesar in protest of his having driven Pompey into exile. Later on in Act 2 we discover that Flavius and Marellus have been " put to silence" by Caesar for being traitors, which further shows us his tyranny. Therefore, the very first scene gives us an extremely distorted view of Caesar being popular amongst the Roman people purely due to their distance from the politics of the senate coupled with the tribune's complete dislike of Caesar due to his untrustworthiness and ambitious plans for his own selfish gain. Moving to Act 1 Scene 2, the scene opens with Caesar humiliating his wife Calpurnia, by openly announcing her inability to have children, " Forget not, in your speed Antonius, to touch Calpurnia; for our elders say, the barren, touched in this holy chase, shake off their sterile curse. " During holy celebrations there was a ritual carried out by the religious elders of Rome which included touching the women of Rome with bunches of sage in order to make them more fertile so that they would bear sons. This ritual is what Caesar is talking about when he asks Antony to touch Calpurnia in order that her infertility is rectified. The audience's response to this further enforces the idea that Caesar is clearly a ruthless and selfish man who does not care for others feelings, including his own wife's honour! If Caesar does not hide his marital problems from the public, then this can only get worse as we continue on in observing his character. During this scene Caesar also has an encounter with the mythical soothsayer who provides a very important role in this play as he prophesizes

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

Caesar's assassination. The soothsayer says, "beware the ides of March," which Caesar simply ignores by calling the soothsayer, "a dreamer" which indicates that he is not superstitious but a practical man. We later find out in Act 2 that this is in fact a lie, which then enhances the theme of public life vs. private life of a public figure. Finally, we meet Brutus who is worried and anxious due to the people's rejoicing over Caesar's return. Cassius then enters and asks Brutus why he is not joining the festivities and if he feels that Caesar should be crowned to king, to which he replies, "I would not, Cassius; yet I love him well." We realize now that Brutus seems very troubled by the fact that Caesar is to be crowned king, which the audience recognizes as a concern only because Rome is a republic and creating a monarchy would completely obliterate that ideal that the founders of Rome had created. Cassius actually portrays Brutus very well for us in this scene as Brutus seems to come across as very quiet, humble and genuine about his concern for Rome and for Caesar who is his close friend. Cassius praises Brutus saying, "Where many of the best respect in Rome, except immortal Caesar, speaking of Brutus and groaning underneath this age's yoke, have wish'd that noble Brutus had his eyes." We realize that Cassius is attempting to manipulate Brutus here but most of the character traits he speaks are, are factual. We see that Brutus is well respected and considered honourable amongst his fellow Romans. It is worth noting, that Cassius (despite hating Caesar and being a thinker rather than a soldier) is not afraid to mock and speak ill of Caesar even though he knows full well the punishment for doing so. The senators of Rome clearly held their own personal powers which superseded the people of Rome. Brutus catches on quite quickly to the fact that Cassius is keeping him there for a purpose, "But wherefore do you hold

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

me here so long? What is it that you would impart to me? " indicating that he is not completely oblivious to Cassius' intentions. Contrary to our first opinion of him being meek and humble though he goes on to say, " If it be aught toward the general good, set honour in one eye and death i'the other, And I will look on both indifferently, For let the gods so speed me as I love, the name of honour more than I fear death, " we have found another heroic figure ready to defend Rome and who cites death before dishonor. These are very strong words for someone who has just been introduced to the audience but these noble traits are then confirmed by Cassius, " I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus. " Considering we have just met Brutus, our impression of him so far is that of being the hero of the story who is clearly far more sincere, loyal and honourable than Caesar. We go on to discover Cassius' opinion of Caesar and he himself begins to compare the two characters, " Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that ' Caesar'? Why should that name be sounded more than yours? " of course we realize that this is his intention, to turn Brutus to his advantage in order that he assassinate Caesar for Cassius' motives. Despite this, we recognize that Brutus is a simple man and that he has already been considering the issue of Caesar's desire to be more than leader of Rome. Brutus would " rather be a villager, than to repute himself a son of Rome, " if Caesar became king even though they were close friends and confidantes of one another. Turning back to Caesar, we see that he is speaking to Antony and telling him that he does not trust Cassius. The reason being that he " has a lean and hungry look; he thinks too much: such men are dangerous...he looks quite through the deeds of men" This sheds a new light on Caesar's observation skills as he clearly sees that Cassius is someone to be worried about due the fact that he is clever and " thinks too

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

much, " this further reflects Caesar's distrust and insecurity of his followers and those around him. Antony of course being the continued loyal lapdog to Caesar dismisses his fears, to which Caesar claims, " Would he were fatter! " as if this physical characteristic would change Cassius' demeanour. Caesar is clearly not arrogant enough to believe that his subjects are all loyal but he does believe that he has nothing to fear, " I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd, than what I fear; for always I am Caesar. " The audience's opinion of Caesar at this point is somewhat complete as we see that he truly believes that he is invincible and that he notices what other men don't. Our dislike of him has already developed substantially so he will gain little sympathy from us in future scenes. The scene ends with Caesar being offered a ' coronet' by Antony as if it were a crown in front of a crowd of Romans which he three times rejected although Casca says, " he was very loath to lay his fingers off it, " indicating Caesar's conflict as to whether he himself should ignore all rules of the republic and become king. We see that this is going to be the reason for Caesar's downfall as everyone knows Caesar is thinking to crown himself king over all the Romans. With his selfish behavior, it is clear that none of the senators appreciate this abandonment of the principles of Rome nor do they believe Caesar is worthy of being in such a position. This worries Brutus and despite his reserved attitude earlier in this scene, he then asks Cassius to come to his house later in order to talk further on this matter. We see now that he has become further determined in preventing Caesar from crowning himself king. Cassius ends the scene with some reflections on Brutus' character, " Well Brutus, thou art noble; yet, I see, thy honourable metal may be wrought from that it is disposed: therefore it is meet that noble minds keep ever with their likes; " Cassius is clearly the only character

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

who sees straight through all the characters and knows their intentions. Moving to Act 2 Scene 1, we see Brutus changing from the meek, humble man he was, to a man of action and internal conflict. The scene opens with him having received the letters from 'Roman citizens' concerned for the welfare of Rome. This is simply Cassius' ploy to convince Brutus to agree to his plan. We watch as Brutus tries to rationalize the murder of Caesar to his conscience, "It must be by his death: and for my part, I know no personal cause to spurn at him, but for the general. He would be crown'd: How that might change his nature, there's the question. It is the bright day that brings forth the adder; And that craves wary walking...the abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins, Remorse from power: and to speak truth of Caesar, I have not known when his affections sway's more than his reason. But 'tis a common proof, that lowliness is young ambition's ladder." Brutus sees that Caesar is ambitious and then he is currently thinking of having himself crowned king. Brutus fears of course that once this is done, Caesar will become a tyrannical dictator who will "unto the ladder turn his back" and forget the loyal followers who helped him attain greatness. He then further pushes himself to stop thinking of Caesar as his own close friend but think of him as a "serpent's egg, which, hatch'd, would, as his kind, grow mischievous, And kill him in the shell," as if he were a threat to Rome and her people. This is the only way that Brutus can possibly consider killing his friend which he had mentioned earlier in his 'death before dishonour' stance. Brutus further convinces himself that in times such as these, "Speak, strike, redress!" is something that he would be willing to do for Rome as he believes that the people are depending on him as a result of Cassius' letters. As we move along in the scene, we see that despite such a brave and

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

noble declaration, Brutus is still not able to become a cold-blooded murderer which is shown when he cannot take an oath, “ No, not an oath: if not the face of men, The sufferance of our souls, the time’s abuse,--If these motives weak, break off betimes, And every man hence to his idle bed; So let high-sighted tyranny range on, Till each man drop by lottery. ” Brutus doesn’t seem able to stomach creating a pact to murder his close friend no matter his dictatorial nature, he is a man of action, a soldier not a politician. Cassius has conveniently stepped into the shadows and let Brutus take the reins of the conspiracy as he had initially planned and unfortunately, in Brutus’ rush to save Rome he has become the pawn in Cassius’ game for power. The next major comparison which is depicted in the play is the difference in Brutus’ and Caesar’s treatment of their wives Portia and Calpurnia respectively. At the end of the Scene 1, we see Portia awaken to find out what is happening with Brutus and why he is acting so strangely. Brutus knowing full well that he cannot tell his wife tries to placate her by telling her he “ is not well in health. ” Portia begins to praise her husband saying, “ Brutus is wise, and, were he not in health, He would embrace the means to come by it, ” showing that she is aware that Brutus does not make excuses but confronts problems head on which is evident from his aforementioned actions. Brutus instead of dismissing Portia’s worries speaks to her softly and in an understanding matter urging her not to worry, “ you are my true and honourable wife, as dear to me as are the ruddy drops, that visit my sad heart. ” Brutus is extremely kind and gentle with his wife whom he respects and clearly loves. This is something very uncommon for the Elizabethan era due to the position in society of women who were simply treated as weak, emotional creatures. Despite Portia being portrayed somewhat in this light, Brutus answers her

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

questions and promises to confide in her as well which in those times would have been considered a privilege only for men. When we reach Act 2 Scene 3, we see Caesar and his wife Calpurnia at home after the assassination plot has been planned and is in action. Calpurnia has had prophetic dreams regarding the assassination and warns Caesar by saying , “ I never stood on ceremonies, yet now they fright me. There is one within, besides the things that we have heard and seen, recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch. A lioness hath whelped in the streets; And graves have yawn’d, and yielded up their dead; Fierce fiery warriors fought upon the clouds, In ranks and squadrons and right form of war, Which drizzled upon the Capitol; The noise of battle hurtled in the air, Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan, And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets. O Caesar! These things are beyond all use, And I do fear them. ” We see that Calpurnia is sincerely upset and worried by her dreams and wishes Caesar should not go anywhere but he continues to be arrogant and says, “ the valiant never taste of death but once, ” therefore confirming that he believes he is supremely powerful and that he is definitely soldier by nature. He further speaks of “ death being a necessary end, ” which gives Caesar a depth that we have not seen before and also shines a light on the free will and destiny theme in the play. This highlights the path that every human leads no matter what position, rank or attributes they may have. Caesar then receives news from his priests regarding a bad omen in the form of a “ beast without a heart, ” but instead of abiding by his superstitious nature, he continues to speak of himself in an immortal fashion, “ No, Caesar shall not: danger knows full well, That Caesar is more dangerous than he: We are two lions litter’d in one day, And I the elder and more terrible: And Caesar shall go forth. ” Caesar is speaking as if

<https://assignbuster.com/brutus-v-caesar/>

he is completely immune to all human problems but we the audience, know full well that he is paving a path to his own downfall. Further, we can see why Brutus has joined the conspiracy as Caesar seems to be completely irrational and illogical in his thinking, whereas Brutus has faith in Rome and bases his decision purely on this premise which is a much nobler and wiser cause. Calpurnia convinces Caesar to not leave their home further with her vivid dreams to which he finally agrees and then Decius arrives to take Caesar to the Capitol. Once Decius has convinced Caesar with flattery that, "this dream is all amiss interpreted," then Caesar dismisses Calpurnia's dreams and her obvious worry for him and proceeds to the Capitol in the company of the conspirators. This essentially solidifies our contempt for Caesar as he is clearly swayed by flattery and potential mockery. The comparison between the two characters is very obvious throughout these two acts but it is also clear that Brutus has committed himself to perform the same act as Caesar had just done with Pompey. He has agreed to assassinate his best friend and leader which highly traitorous and is a great betrayal, yet we still prefer her over Caesar due to his arrogant and selfish nature. Brutus and Caesar have both been fooled by flattery though to differing extremes but nevertheless they both have some similarities. Having examined both characters in detail, we come to the conclusion that Brutus is clearly the hero and in this scenario despite the fact that he is committing a terrible act by conspiring to kill his best friend and leader but Caesar is clearly acting as if he is invincible and as if he no longer needs to care about the problems and opinions of the senators or the Roman people. We do see though that despite these characteristics that Brutus may very well be turning into Caesar and that his present reasons for assassination Caesar

have not completely convinced him that this is the right decision. Despite this, we see later on how Brutus changes.