

If caesar had lived,  
would he have  
become a tyrant



Caesar, the emperor of Rome has just come out of battle, with Pompey. The people of Rome celebrate on the streets. There are two men that refuse to celebrate. Indeed, they are strongly opposed to the celebrations taking place. They believe that Caesar is becoming too powerful and is being treated like a God. They are not the only two against the celebrations. There are many others. They find a powerful man, loved by the people of Rome, and turn him against Caesar. Now they are fully equipped. Ready to kill Caesar himself. Was this a blatant act of jealousy, or was Caesar really becoming 'too big for his boots.'

There is much bias in this play and many of the characters are corrupt. There are even more lies, and concealed truths. I have to see past those and make a fair analysis of the play.

In the first scene there is a clash between the upper class, represented by Flavius or Marullus, and the lower class represented by the scores of plebeians, evidently overjoyed with the public celebrations. It becomes clear, especially when Caesar is assassinated, that it is the mob, through their sheer numbers if anything, that hold the power. It is the conspirators' inability to see this that marks their eventual downfall. Caesar, however, despite all his faults, has the vision to see this, and hence has more power, than all the conspirators together.

It is in the second scene that we have a series of clues about Caesar's untimely end. First of all, while celebrating the feast of the Lupercal, a soothsayer confronts the emperor and his gathering. This conversation tells us a lot about Caesar.

Soothsayer: Caesar!

Caesar: Ha! Who calls?(silence is asked for). Speak; Caesar is turned to hear.

Soothsayer: Beware the ides of March.

(Caesar calls for him to be brought closer).

Caesar: What say'st thou to me now? Speak once again.

Soothsayer: Beware the ides of March.

Caesar: He is a dreamer, let us pass.

At first we are a little surprised that Caesar, even on a day of festivity, turns to speak to someone as lowly as a soothsayer. This is the first time we have met him and yet can already see he is deeply superstitious and holds these men with regard. On the day of his assassination he asks for some soothsayers to make a sacrifice, to determine whether, despite his wife's bad dream, he should go to the Capitol. He decides, despite the bad omens, to go forth to the Capitol. This proves to be his final and most grave mistake, as he is slaughtered at the feet of one of his very own statues. He proves to be arrogant, by speaking in the third person. " Caesar is turned to hear." He feigns not to have heard him and so asks for him to be brought closer. Once the soothsayer has bid him to beware the ides of March once more, he quickly turns away and dismisses him. Whether he truly forgets this or not is debatable.

Then we meet Cassius, who at this point, without Brutus, is the chief conspirator. He clearly resents Caesar and his influence on the people of

Rome. 'They are merely sheep, and he is the wolf.' He tries to sway Brutus, but he is not easily convinced. Cassius, in trying to persuade Brutus of the harm Caesar is doing to Rome, then recounts how Caesar swooned and fell down with an epileptic fit. The topic of Caesar being weak leads to him further recounting how Caesar almost drowned in a race across the river Tiber and how he had had to save him. He also mentions 'how pale his lips did go' when he went down with a fever in Spain.

'He had a fever when in Spain, And when the fit was upon him I did mark how he did shake. 'Tis true this God did shake; His coward lips did from their colour fly.'

It is here that Casca enters and tells them of the shouting going on in the back ground. We are told that Caesar was offered the crown. Not once, nor twice, but three times. This is an important moment in the play. It makes the reader wonder whether Caesar really is ambitious as Cassius has made out he is just a few moments earlier. This could make Cassius re-think his ideas about Caesar but it does not. Quite the contrary, it makes his hatred of Caesar even more intense.

The third scene is full of superstition. It underlines how, not only Caesar, but Romans in general fear 'supernatural' powers. They hallucinate to the extent that they see 'a lion roaming free' and 'creatures of the night' flying over head. The thunder they also see as a bad omen, believing that it is a sign that the gods are getting angry. Whether this is meant to highlight the conspirators' fears, we only see Cassius and Casca in this scene, or the forthcoming killing of Caesar. This scene also makes clear to us that Cassius

has formed a conspiracy with some friends to kill Caesar. Casca and Cassius both agree that they need a powerful figure, like Brutus in order to successfully pull off such a stunt.

The first scene of act two makes clear to us exactly who the conspirators are, as they meet Brutus. Brutus agrees to join them. He makes several conditions. The first of which is that only Caesar shall be killed, and not, as Cassius suggests, Mark Antony as well. This proves to be the biggest mistake that the conspirators make, eventually sealing the fate of both Brutus and Cassius. Brutus also says that they shall not sign an oath. Possibly being a sign of reluctance to kill him. He says that they 'are all honourable men' and that honourable men need not sign an oath. Brutus is also keen to observe that they shall be 'clean' in their killing.

'Let us be sacrificers but not butchers...

Let us kill him boldly, not wrathfully...

We shall be killed purgers, not murderers.'

It is at this point that we realise that he has convinced himself that Caesar must be killed.

In the second scene, Calphurnia, Caesar's wife, tells her husband of the terrible dreams that she had the previous night. She dreamt that Caesar's statue 'ran blood' and that the people of Rome came to bathe their hands in it. Caesar quickly dismisses this.

'Cowards die many times before their deaths,

The valiant never taste death but once.'

These seem, especially for a man of his power, to be extremely wise words. However he then goes on to 'spoil' them by continuing, not to be valiant, but to be vain.

'Of all the wonders that I have yet heard,

It seems to me most strange that men should fear.'

Shakespeare appears to confuse the audience, by sandwiching this foolery, with another wise phrase.

'Seeing that death, a necessary end,

Will come when it come.'

Calphurnia is relieved when the augurers, come with bad news, having made a sacrifice. We are informed that the beast that they have cut open had not heart. This was considered a bad sign.

'They would not have you stir forth today' says a servant.

Caesar, shows his arrogance once more.

'The gods do this to put cowards to shame.

Caesar be a beast without a heart

If he should stay at home for fear.

No Caesar shall not. Danger knows full well

That Caesar is more dangerous than he.'

This last sentence in particular seems rather disturbing. It would appear that challenging the Gods is something Caesar does not think too long about. We can now begin to understand why the conspirators think he must be got rid of.

Calphurnia is still not happy and eventually persuades Caesar to stay at home. Undeterred Decius is sent by the conspirators to try and change his mind. Caesar too, is stubborn.

'And tell them (the senators) that I will not come today.

Cannot is false, and dare not, falser.

The last line demonstrates him trying to assert himself upon Decius. He feels uncomfortable, and shows a hint of paranoia.

Decius knows that Caesar is vain so plays on this. Caesar is told that he will be a laughing stock and that he shall lose his respect if he does not come. He also hears that he shall be offered the crown. Despite some more blinding displays of extraordinarily bad timed arrogance, he is eventually persuaded to leave home.

In the first scene of the Third Act, Caesar comes back to the soothsayer, and is given a warning that most would have heeded.

Caesar: The ides of March hath come.

Soothsayer: Aye, but not gone.

The conspirators lead him to the forum. Here one of them, Metellus, pleads that his brother be allowed to return from exile. The group gather round him, some grovelling at his feet. Here the dramatic irony builds up to a pinnacle. We as readers know that Caesar is about to be killed. He does not. And it seems appropriate that Caesar is allowed to deliver one last speech. I have edited it.

'I could well be moved, if I were as you;

But I am constant as the northern star,

Of whose true-fixed and resting quality

There is no fellow in the firmament (sky)

The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks,

But there's but one in al doth hold its place.

So in the world; 'tis furnished well with men,

And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;

Yet in the number I do know but one

That unassailable holds on his rank,

Unshaked of motion; and that I am he,

Let me a little show it, even in this,

That I was constant Cimber (metellus' brother) should be banished,



And constant do remain to keep him so.'

Here he explains that he cannot be swayed as he is more powerful than them. He looks down on them. Then he compares himself to the northern star (which in a world of superstition-would have angered the conspirators all the more). He then compares the sky to humans on earth. The incessant ramblings of Caesar would not help his cause. However, at this point in the play, he believes that he is to be crowned king, and is naturally overjoyed.

This speech sums up Caesar as a character. He thinks himself as unique, and more worthy than anyone else. This is what annoys the conspirators, and indeed probably adds even more fuel to their eventual blows that kill Caesar.

There are still two more things of interest that Caesar says before he dies.

'Hence! Wilt thou lift up Olympus?'

This means, 'Go away! If you will kill me, will you kill a God?' this is ironic, and infuriating once more likening himself to a God. Caesar then tells Metellus that he is kneeling in vain and that he might as well give up.

He was promptly stabbed. His last words were:

'Et tu Brute? Then fall Caesar!'

This underlines the trust that Caesar had in Brutus and that maybe it was the conspirators, and not Caesar that had betrayed Rome. Perhaps the most telling words were those of Cinna.

Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead.

The mighty Caesar had fallen.

If empathetic, we can see that Caesar's predicament is not easy. He is an ageing man and has no direct heir to the throne. We can see this affects him as when they race through the streets at the festival of the Lupercal:

'Caesar: Forget not, in your speed, Antonius'

To touch Calphurnia; for our elders say,

The barren, touched in this holy chase,

Shake off their sterile curse.'

He desperately wants his wife to bear a child. This puts him under a certain amount of pressure.

He is proud of his achievements, quite rightly so, as he has revolutionised many aspects of Roman life. Indeed the calendar that Brutus asks his servant Lucius to look at for him was one that Caesar had edited. We still use the same calendar today. He had also dramatically increased the Roman Empire, claiming Gaul (modern- day France) and much of Briton (now Britain) his own. Even in the play Caesar has just defeated Pompey.

However he must have his weak points. One of them is the fear he superimposes on others. The continuation to the quote above is:

'Antonius: I shall remember.

When Caesar says, 'do this', it is performed'

Despite being humorous, Caesar obviously doesn't pick up on this, and is content. He is only happy if everyone is obedient and does as he says.

Cassius summarises this well, when he says that Caesar is a God. he has only to nod and others will bow before him. Caesar is too powerful.

Caesar's vanity also gets the better of him. None more so than on the day of his murder. There are a series of mistakes. Shakespeare seems to have put these in with a sense of irony. This appears to make the ending less shocking, which was important for an audience in the 1600's when killing on stage was not generally acceptable.

The audience knows the killing is imminent, and Caesar seems to dig himself into 'an even bigger hole'. It starts with him saying he knows no fear, and how alien a concept that is to him. It finishes with him saying he is unshakable. It is clear that the conspirators have reason to kill him.

I believe that Caesar would have become a tyrant, if he had been allowed to live. It was clear that he was behaving like a bully towards others. He tried to compensate for his lack of control over his life by forcing his good points upon others, and making up other characteristics. If he had become king one can only think of the damage he would have caused the empire. He was a desperate and needy man entrusted with too much power for his own good. It was a gloomy end, for a potentially great man.