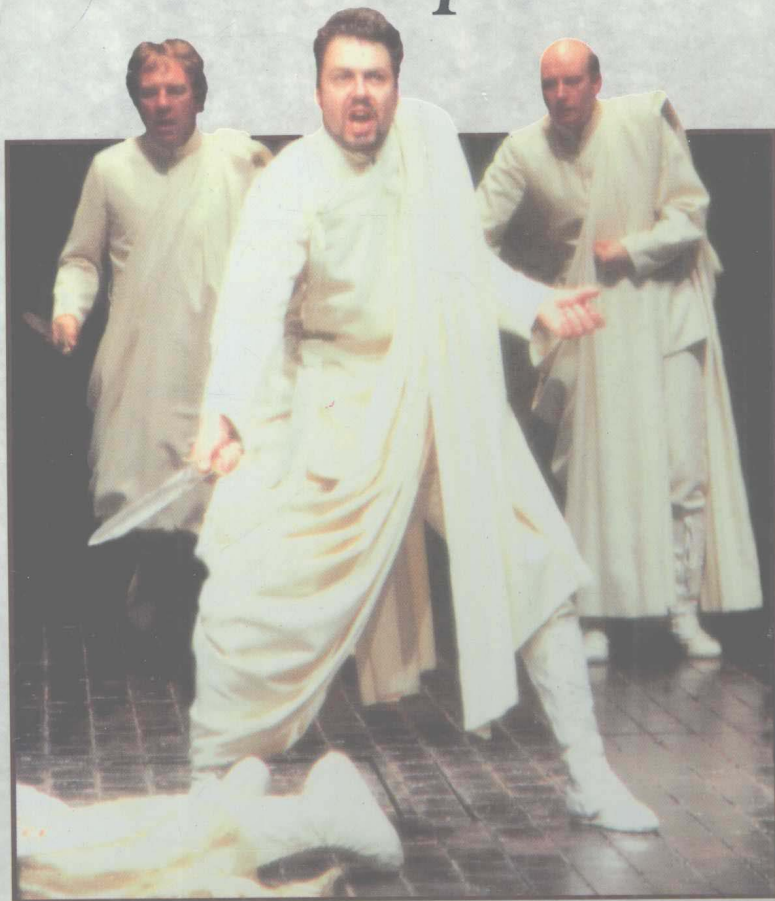


OXFORD SCHOOL

Shakespeare



JULIUS CAESAR

尤里乌斯·凯撒

外语教学与研究出版社

Oxford School Shakespeare

Julius Caesar

尤里乌斯·凯撒

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Shakespeare and the Romans

Shakespeare read of the murder of Julius Caesar in a history by Plutarch's *Lives of the Greeks and Romans*. This was written in Latin during the first century after the birth of Christ. Plutarch's *Lives* was translated into French by James Amyot, and then in 1579 Thomas North translated the French into English. I have printed a selection of passages¹ from North's translation at the end of the play, so that you can read some of the story that inspired Shakespeare, and also compare the prose narrative with the play. For instance, Plutarch mentioned the detail of Caesar's dislike of women (p. 95), and this becomes verse in *Act 1*, scene 2, lines 19-20. You can see how a dramatist works when Shakespeare takes account of the killing of Cinna (p. 98) and invents words to be spoken by the nameless 'common people', in *Act 3*, scene 3. Most remarkable of all is the way Shakespeare interprets Plutarch's hints about the tone and content of Antony's funeral oration for Caesar (p. 97) to construct the famous speech, 'Friends, Romans, countrymen', that the play's Antony makes to the citizens (3.75-253).

Occasionally in discussing the characters of Caesar and Brutus I have made reference to Plutarch's history. The details that Shakespeare borrows from his source are always of interest, but it is even more fascinating to notice the differences between the history and the play. What Shakespeare changes, or ignores, or invents can be very helpful when we try to understand the characters as the audience intended them to be understood.

Writing for a stage performance allowed Shakespeare to ignore the actual times at which these historical events occurred. Caesar made his triumphal entry into Rome in 45 B.C.; he was assassinated in March the following year. Octavius was hostile to Antony for more than a year after the assassination, but finally joined forces with him and Lepidus in 43 B.C. The conspirators were defeated at Philippi in 42 B.C. Shakespeare's play starts with a scene in which the crowd waits eagerly for Caesar's entry into Rome; from 1.1 until the day of the murder in *Act 3*, scene 1, there is no break in the action. The Elizabethan theatre had no curtains, and no divi-

¹ I have taken the passages from *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (London 1964); page numbers from this edition are given with the passages.

was marked (as it is in a printed text) between one scene and the next. Once or twice we are made aware that *some* time is passing, but we have no sense of hours, days, or months. As a result, causes seem to be very closely linked with their effects. Immediately we have heard Cassius plotting to hide letters where Brutus will find them (1, 3, 142-6), we are shown Brutus, in his study, being given and reading one of the mysterious letters.

We often make a fuss today about the historical accuracy of theatrical scenery and costumes. Shakespeare had no such worries. A little scenery was perhaps available to the actors, but we have no means of knowing how they indicated; for example, the Capitol. But in *Act 3*, scene 1 we hear Cassius reproaching Artemidorus—

What! urge you your petitions in the street?
Come to the Capitol; (lines 11-12)

this is enough to tell us that we are, for the moment, 'in the street'. Later in the scene, Caesar announces that he is ready to listen to petitions (line 31), and so we know that the scene has changed, slightly, and that we have been taken to the Capitol. In the matter of costume, it is clear that Shakespeare did not think of the Romans as we think of them. He shows us Cassius 'unbraced'—that is, with his doublet unfastened (1, 3, 48); and he makes Brutus discover a book with 'the leaf turn'd down / Where I left reading' (4, 3, 272-3). An Elizabethan would wear a doublet and read a book: the Roman wore a toga and read from a scroll (see illustration on p. 16). A clock strikes on two occasions in the play (2, 1, 191 and 2, 2, 114); but striking clocks had not been invented in the time of Julius Caesar. These anachronisms—the placing of objects in the wrong period—are sometimes said to show Shakespeare's ignorance or carelessness, but this makes them too important. The striking clock adds urgency to the scene; Brutus with his book and Cassius in his doublet would seem familiar figures to the Elizabethans—men of their own time and type, instead of foreigners from a remote past.

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted o'er,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown. (3, 1, 111-13)

This prophetic utterance is made by Shakespeare's character, not by the historical Cassius; he speaks the truth. The play gives new life to a series of historical events and persons, and, by doing this, rescues them from antiquity. The pride of Caesar, the love of Antony, and the conflict in Brutus between personal and public

loyalties are as real today as they were two thousand years ago. Nevertheless, an outline of the historical and political background to the events in Rome between 45 B.C. and 42 B.C. will help you to understand Shakespeare's play better; it is especially necessary for the understanding of Brutus's dilemma.

In the sixth century before the birth of Christ, Rome was ruled by a king, Tarquin the Proud. He was a brutal tyrant, and the people, under the leadership of Lucius Junius Brutus, rebelled against him, deposed him, and in 509 B.C. established Rome as a republic. From that time, Rome was governed by two consuls, who were elected by the people; their authority was equal, and they remained in power for one year only. They acted upon advice from the Senate, which had originally been the king's council and which was composed entirely of men who had held some state office. Tribunes, elected from the body of the citizens, kept watch over the Senate, to protect the rights of the common people.

Eventually, however, this political structure began to weaken, and early in the first century B.C. three men—Pompey, Crassus, and Julius Caesar—united to form a triumvirate (from the Latin *tres viri*) to govern Rome and its provinces. In 53 B.C. Crassus was killed whilst fighting the Parthians (in the battle where Cassius captured Pindarus; see 5, 3, 37). Neither Pompey nor Caesar would agree to share power with the other, and so civil war broke out. At the battle of Pharsalia (48 B.C.) Caesar defeated Pompey; then, a little later, he conquered Pompey's two sons. The play opens with Caesar's return from this last victory.

Caesar now appeared to have absolute power, but the name of 'king' was hated and feared in Rome. Yet Caesar was popular. He was brave, successful, and generous; and the citizens loved him. But some of the senators and aristocracy were afraid that he would become a tyrant (like Tarquin) and make slaves of the people. Chief among these senators were Marcus Brutus (a descendant of Lucius Junius Brutus) and Cassius. In the civil war they had both fought on Pompey's side against Caesar, but Caesar had pardoned and befriended Brutus and, at Brutus's request, recalled Cassius to Rome.

After the murder of Julius Caesar, full democracy never again returned to Rome. A second triumvirate was formed, this time consisting of Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius Caesar. Lepidus was the weak link (as Antony tells us in 4, 1, 12–40); and Antony himself was well known to be 'a masker and a reveller' (as Cassius taunts him in 5, 1, 62). Only Octavius, called a 'peevish schoolboy' by Cassius (5, 1, 61) because he was only eighteen at the time of the murder, was able to sustain his role as one of the three rulers of

the great Roman empire. Octavius was Julius Caesar's great-nephew and heir; he adopted the name 'Caesar', with the addition of 'Augustus', and these titles were ever afterwards bestowed upon Roman rulers. In 27 B.C. Octavius took the further title of 'Princeps'—the chief one; and Rome ceased to be a republic.

Leading characters in the play

- Julius Caesar** The greatest and most powerful of the Romans, and the last of the three men who formed the first triumvirate (see p. vi). He is assassinated by a band of conspirators led by Brutus and Cassius, who believe that Caesar is ambitious to be made king. See also p. x.
- Calphurnia** The wife of Julius Caesar ; she is worried about her husband's well-being, and her prophetic dream foretells the assassination.
- Octavius Caesar** The great-nephew of Julius Caesar, heir to his uncle's wealth and position. He joins Mark Antony in making war on the conspirators.
- Mark Antony** Caesar's loyal friend. His funeral oration for Caesar is calculated not only to praise the dead man, but also to incite the citizens to mutiny against the murderers. Antony joins Octavius Caesar and Lepidus to form the second triumvirate (see p. vi). and together they lead an attack on the conspirators and defeat them at Philippi.
- Marcus Brutus** Caesar's great friend, who joins in the conspiracy because his love for Rome is even greater than his love for his friend. He is an idealist, and believes that other men have the same high principles as himself; this leads him to make errors of judgement which ultimately result in the defeat at Philippi. See also p. xxii.
- Portia** The wife of Brutus ; she is devoted to her husband and distressed by his anxiety. Through her we see another aspect of Brutus—the gentle, loving husband. Portia is the daughter of Marcus Cato, who preferred to kill himself rather than be captured by Julius Caesar when Pompey was defeated; Portia shows the influence of her father's Stoic philosophy in her apparent indifference to physical suffering.
- Cassius** The inspirer and organizer of the conspiracy against Caesar, whom he hates. He is a fanatic, but he is also a practical man, well aware of his own limitations and those of other men. At first Cassius is not a very attractive character, but he becomes more noble—even heroic—in his defeat.

Casca He is prominent among the conspirators, not because he is a strongly-drawn character but because Shakespeare uses him in so many different ways: he scoffs at the ceremony with the crown; he is superstitious in the storm; and he strikes the first blow in the murder of Caesar.

Julius Caesar—‘the foremost man of all this world’

In Shakespeare’s play we hear a lot *about* Julius Caesar—he is praised by Mark Antony; Brutus loves him; Cassius hates him; and the Roman citizens change in their feelings towards him from admiration to dislike, then back again to respect and love. We see, however, very little of the man himself: he appears in only three scenes. In *Act 1*, scene 2 he enters twice, each time walking in procession from one side of the stage to the other, and making brief comments as he passes. The first entrance shows him as a man of authority, accustomed to unquestioning obedience: ‘When Caesar says “Do this”, it is perform’d’ (1, 2, 10). On the second occasion he speaks of his suspicions of Cassius; we know that these are well-founded, and we approve his judgement. In *Act 2*, scene 2 Caesar is at home, listening to his wife’s worries about his safety. He also is anxious; at first he refuses to show fear, then he is persuaded not to go to the Capitol, and finally he yields to Decius’ argument—perhaps because, as his enemies have claimed, he is ambitious to be crowned king.

Caesar’s last appearance is in the Capitol on the ides of March—the day that a Soothsayer has warned him to avoid. He firmly refuses to repeal a sentence of banishment, and this refusal is the cue for the conspirators. They stab, and Caesar dies.

We have seen, then, a man of authority, brave, and possibly ambitious—but we cannot feel that we *know* Caesar, or understand him, from these quick glimpses of his character. We have seen the ‘public’ man, rather than the ‘private’ one. And yet, Mark Antony’s praise does not seem extravagant when he says that Caesar was ‘the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of time’ (3, 1, 256-7). We are certain of this, not because the play has presented us with a great man, but because even before we began to read *Julius Caesar*, we knew Caesar’s name—even though we were perhaps unable to say exactly *why* he was so famous. The Elizabethan education system, however, made sure that Shakespeare’s contemporaries were very well informed about such matters. Latin was the main subject in every school, and pupils studied the history as well as the language and literature of Rome. There was no need for Shakespeare to record Caesar’s achievements, and he most certainly did not need to invent fictions when the facts were both familiar and

dramatic. Today, many more subjects are taught in schools, and we cannot afford so much time to study the great contribution made by the Romans to English culture. For this reason—and not because Shakespeare failed in his creation of the character—explanations are necessary. We have to do our homework before we read *Julius Caesar*.

Julius Caesar was born in 100 B.C., and before he was twenty years old he had become a distinguished soldier. In the course of a glittering military and political career, he fought and held office in Africa, Spain and France, and he extended Roman rule to the Atlantic and to the English Channel. He was renowned both as general and as statesman. With Crassus and Pompey he formed the first triumvirate in 60 B.C.; then the death of Crassus in 53 B.C. and the defeat of Pompey in 48 B.C. gave him the power of an autocrat. In the intervals between military campaigns he devoted himself, with amazing energy, to re-establishing order in Rome, improving the economic situation, regulating taxation, codifying the law, and instituting a public library.

Caesar was also a gifted writer. His *Commentaries* on the Gallic Wars and on the Civil War are masterpieces of narrative skill. Other writings have not survived, but we know that they included a textbook of grammar (written during a journey across the Alps), and a work on the stars. He was an expert astronomer and mathematician, and the calendar that he devised in 46 B.C. is the one we use today; in his honour, one of the months was renamed Julius—July.

Every single one of these achievements is, in its own way, a triumph; when they are considered together, and recognized as the contribution made to civilization *by one man*, it is hard to find appropriate words of praise. We can only agree with Brutus that the man he has murdered was indeed 'the foremost man of all this world' (4, 3, 22).

With the assistance of Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* we can be sure how Shakespeare intended us to regard the character. Plutarch is not, on the whole, sympathetic to Caesar: he speaks of Caesar's pride, which made him act as though he were a god, and of 'the covetous desire he had to be called king', which gave the Roman citizens 'just cause . . . to bear him ill will' (page 81). In the play, however, Shakespeare has ignored most of this. Only Cassius refers to Caesar's god-like behaviour (1, 2, 115 ff.), and he is not to be trusted. Caesar is persuaded by Decius to go to the Capitol (2, 2, 93 ff.), but it is not clear whether he is tempted by the promise of a crown, or afraid of being laughed at if he stays at home. And the

first scene of the play shows that the people, far from bearing him 'ill will', are eager 'to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph' (1, 1, 34).

The long description of Caesar given by Cassius (1, 2, 100-31) is remarkable for what it tells us of the speaker, and not for its revelation of Caesar. On one occasion, we learn, Caesar almost drowned; at another time, he was very ill. Cassius speaks of physical weakness as though it were moral weakness, interpreting the shivering and pallor of fever as the trembling and bloodlessness of fear. In fact, Caesar's struggles against his disability made his achievements appear even more triumphant; even Plutarch admitted this, recounting how Caesar

yielded not to the sickness of his body, to make it a cloak to cherish him withal, but, contrarily, took the pains of war as a medicine to cure his sick body, fighting always with his disease. (page 37)

Cassius shows his own mean spirit, which is shared by Casca when he scoffs at the epileptic fit that embarrassed Caesar in the marketplace (1, 2, 246 ff.).

A small incident that Shakespeare alters from Plutarch is Caesar's reception of the letter from Artemidorus. In the historical source, Caesar accepts the letter,

but could never read it, though he many times attempted it, for the number of people that did salute him. (page 91)

The alteration in the play is significant. Artemidorus presses Caesar to take the letter and read it:

O Caesar, read mine first; for mine's a suit
That touches Caesar nearer. Read it, great Caesar.

With dignity, Caesar rejects the letter:

What touches us ourself shall be last serv'd. (3, 1, 6-8)

Unselfishness, and not the throng of people, puts Caesar's life at risk; this alteration to Plutarch's account should direct our total response to Shakespeare's Caesar.

Caesar is murdered at the beginning of Act 3, and you may at first think it odd that the hero should vanish from the stage before the play is half-finished. But although the man is dead, his spirit lives on. It is present in the minds of those who murdered him, and of those who seek to avenge the murder. We are so conscious of this unseen presence that it is no surprise when the spirit materializes,

and the ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus before the battle at Philippi. Brutus does not seem surprised either: when the ghost tells him 'thou shalt see me at Philippi', his reply is one of calm acceptance: 'Why, I will see thee at Philippi then' (4, 3, 282, 284).

The tragedy of *Julius Caesar* is not the tragedy of one man alone. Brutus shares the tragic fate—and so too does Cassius, although to a lesser extent. The tragedy was not completed when Caesar died in the Capitol, and Brutus makes this plain when he talks to Cassius before Philippi:

this same day

Must end that work the ides of March begun. (5, 1, 112-13)

Julius Caesar: the play

Act I

Scene 1 Flavius and Marullus are annoyed when they find that the Roman citizens have taken a holiday from work and are crowding on to the streets 'to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph'. A cobbler tries to joke with the tribunes, but they are too angry to laugh. Marullus reproaches the people for their disloyalty: they have forgotten their love for Pompey, and now Caesar is their hero. The blank verse and dignified language of the tribune's speech contrasts with the cobbler's colloquial prose, and mark a kind of class distinction between the major characters in the play (who are identified by name), and the ordinary citizens, the men-in-the-street.

When they hear what Marullus has to say, the people are silent and slink away from the scene. Flavius explains what is happening:

See whe'r their basest mettle be not mov'd;
They vanish tongue-tied in their guiltiness.

The Roman citizens are very important in *Julius Caesar*, and provide an essential background to the action. They are influenced by emotion, not by reason, and their affections are not to be trusted: in the past they cheered for Pompey; now they are welcoming Caesar, the man who has defeated Pompey; and soon we shall hear them applauding the men who have murdered Caesar.

Flavius and Marullus are determined to insult Caesar by tearing down the decorations intended to honour him. Their conversation gives us a hint of what is to come—we shall hear from other characters who also fear that Caesar will 'soar above the view of men / And keep us all in servile fearfulness'.

Scene 2 As the tribunes depart, Caesar's ceremonial procession enters, and we have a brief glimpse of the great man. The ominous words 'Beware the ides of March' are spoken, and then the procession leaves the stage. Brutus and Cassius stay behind. Very gently, Cassius tries to win Brutus's confidence. He flatters Brutus a little, then declares his own honesty. A shout from the crowds attending Caesar, offstage, startles Brutus, and he accidentally speaks his

thoughts aloud: 'I do fear the people / Choose Caesar for their king'. The word 'fear' encourages Cassius to proceed with an attack on Caesar. He recalls two instances when Caesar showed weakness, but Cassius speaks as though the weakness were moral, and not merely physical. Cassius shows a mean spirit here, but Brutus does not seem to notice—or perhaps his attention is distracted by another shout from the crowd. Cassius returns to flattery, reminding Brutus of his own reputation and that of his ancestor, the Brutus who expelled Tarquin from Rome (see p. vi). At last Brutus promises that he will give some thought to the matters that Cassius has raised.

Some relaxation of tension is needed now, and it is supplied by Casca's account of the ceremony with the crown—'yet 'twas not a crown neither, 'twas one of these coronets'. Again there is a contrast between prose and verse, and between the colloquial, idiomatic language of Casca's speeches and the formal, dignified utterances of Brutus and Cassius.

When Cassius is alone, he points out how easily Brutus's nobility of character can be perverted; we realize, too, what a dangerous man Cassius is, and the threat to Caesar becomes very frightening:

let Caesar seat him sure;
For we will shake him, or worse days endure.

The threat is echoed in the thunder that heralds the next scene.

Scene 3

The storm renews the tension. Both the Romans and the Elizabethans believed that the world of Nature (the macrocosm) and the political world of human affairs (the microcosm) reflected each other, and that disturbances in one foretold, or paralleled, unusual events in the other. Of course, there were sceptics in both nations who denied that there was any link between the two worlds: Cicero is such a sceptic, but Casca is convinced that the storm is intended as a warning from the gods. Cassius, however, welcomes the storm, and shows his fanaticism as he walks unprotected. He interprets the night's unnatural events as being parallels to the monstrosity in the Roman world, and Casca understands: 'Tis Caesar that you mean; is it not, Cassius?'

Cassius tests Casca's feelings about Caesar, then invites him to take part in the conspiracy. When Cinna joins them, we learn that the plot is well advanced.

Act 2**Scene 1**

We now recognize that the play is operating on two time-scales. Cicero's opening remark in *Act 1*, scene 3 ('Good even, Casca: brought you Caesar home?') suggests that Casca has just left Caesar, having escorted him home after the celebrations of the Lupercal (*Act 1*, scene 2). When this scene ends, Cassius observes that 'it is after midnight'. The conspirators go in search of Brutus and find him at home, just as dawn is breaking ('yon grey lines / That fret the clouds are messengers of day'). But more than *hours* have elapsed. The storm gives an impression of continuity between *Act 1*, scene 3 and *Act 2*, scene 1; but we have in fact moved from 15 February (the feast of Lupercal) to 15 (the ides) March. Brutus has had weeks, not hours, in which to decide upon a course of action, and his soliloquy now reflects the thoughts of that whole period.

A soliloquy—words, not intended for a listener, spoken by a character when he is thinking aloud—is, by the conventions of Elizabethan drama, always to be trusted. Brutus now states his dilemma clearly: he has no personal grudge against Caesar, and no reason to distrust him—but, on the other hand, all power corrupts, and if Caesar is given imperial power, he may prove a danger to Rome. His honour and his patriotism urge Brutus to take action against Caesar, and although he recognizes the ugliness of the situation, he steps forward to welcome the conspirators. He shakes each one by the hand, speaking his name in token of fellowship (and incidentally introducing the different characters to the audience).

Brutus shows his idealism when he rejects the suggestion that they should swear an oath of allegiance. He has taken command of the situation now, and Cassius meekly accepts his decision to leave Cicero out of the conspiracy. He is more doubtful when Brutus—still idealistic—declares that Antony shall not be killed with Caesar, but he again allows himself to be overruled. The striking clock brings to an end the serious business of the meeting, and after a joke at the expense of Caesar, the conspirators leave Brutus to his thoughts.

Portia makes us remember the mental anguish that Brutus has endured. She is a character with whom we can sympathize, in her loving care for her husband, and whom we are intended to admire for her fortitude in bearing the wound in her thigh. Because of our feelings for Portia, we are sympathetic to the man she loves. There

is no need, however, for the audience to hear what Brutus tells Portia about the conspiracy, so Shakespeare is able to show us a further example of the high regard in which the Romans hold Brutus. To Caius Ligarius, Brutus is a 'Brave son, deriv'd from honourable loins'; this is a final reminder of the nobility of Brutus, the man who can 'make sick men whole'.

Scene 2 Like Casca, Calphurnia is distressed by the unnatural events of the night, and she has also had a frightening dream, which Caesar narrates to Decius Brutus. But Decius is determined to get Caesar to the Capitol, and his interpretation of the dream is flattering. Tempted with the thought of a crown, and also afraid of being laughed at, Caesar has made up his mind to go out when the conspirators come to escort him.

Scene 3 Another warning has been prepared for Caesar. Artemidōrus reads his letter aloud, so that we shall know what is in the paper that Caesar refuses to read.

Scene 4 Portia is anxious. Brutus has told her of the conspiracy, and she knows the danger that her husband is in. The tension grows.

Act 3

Scene 1 Caesar, accompanied by the conspirators (like armed guards to see that he does not escape from them), approaches the Capitol. He rejects the petition from Artemidorus, and goes towards the Senate House, where the senators are waiting for him. Brutus and Cassius stay at the back of the procession. There is a moment of panic for Cassius, but Brutus calms him down; and now everything goes according to plan. At the very moment when Caesar is speaking of his own constancy (which reflects the order and constancy in the universe), chaos breaks loose. Caesar is killed; the conspirators (whom we now see as anarchists) proclaim the death of tyranny; 'Men, wives and children stare, cry out and run / As it were doomsday'. Calphurnia's dream comes true when the conspirators, at Brutus's command, bathe their hands in Caesar's blood, congratulating themselves on having performed a deed which will be recorded in history.

Into this hysterical scene comes Antony's servant, calming the riot situation with his master's careful words, before Antony enters. At the beginning of this scene, Trebonius drew Antony aside, so