

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF MARCUS BRUTUS ROLE IN JULIUS CAESAR DRAMA

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Abstract

Whenever we remember the **Marcus Brutus** instantly comes to the mind **Honorable** and **Patriotic**. **Marcus Brutus** A praetor; that is, a judicial magistrate of Rome. He is widely admired for his noble nature. Their pleadings rise in intensity and suddenly, from behind, Casca stabs Caesar. As the others also stab Caesar, he falls and dies, saying "Et tu, Bruté?" Brutus says, "I know that we shall have him well to friend," but he is wrong Antony has a plan to persuade the populace to his side at the funeral oration and turn them against the conspirators. He cannot justify, to his own satisfaction, the murder of a man who is a friend and who has not excessively misused the powers of his office. Consequently, thinking of the assassination in terms of a quasi-religious ritual instead of cold-blooded murder makes it more acceptable to him. Unfortunately for him, he consistently misjudges the people and the citizens of Rome. Brutus' concentration on honorable and noble behavior also leads him into assuming a naive view of the world. Brutus' character is made even more complex by his unconscious hypocrisy. He has conflicting attitudes toward the conspiracy, but he becomes more favorable following his becoming a member of the plot against Caesar. He attacks Cassius for raising money dishonestly, yet he demands a portion. In his last moments, he has the satisfaction of being certain in his own mind that he has been faithful to the principles embodying the honor and nobility on which he has placed so much value throughout his life.

Key Words- *Marcus Brutus, Julius Caesar, Rigid idealism, conspirators, assassination, ET tu, Bruté? Caesar's blood.*

INTRODUCTION

Whenever we remember the **Marcus Brutus** instantly comes to the mind **Honorable** and **Patriotic**. **Marcus Brutus** is a character in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which is based on the true story of events in Rome more than 2,000 years ago. Caesar's loyal friend, Portia's loving husband, and a noble Roman. However, he leads other conspirators and murders Caesar. People often question, is Brutus a hero or a villain? Brutus is not a hero nor a villain because he is not totally bad or good. Brutus doesn't kill Caesar for power, but the good of Rome. Brutus is not a villain because he trusts Antony and refuses to murder him. Brutus is a villain because he is overconfident and therefore their actions fail.

Marcus Brutus A praetor; that is, a judicial magistrate of Rome. He is widely admired for his noble nature. He joins the conspiracy because he fears that Caesar will become a tyrant, but his idealism causes him to make several poor judgments and impedes his ability to understand those who are less scrupulous than he. Brutus defeats Octavius' force in the first battle at Philippi, but loses the second battle and commits suicide rather than be taken prisoner.

Brutus emerges as the most complex character in **Julius Caesar** and is also the play's tragic hero. In his soliloquies, the audience gains insight into the complexities of his motives. He is a powerful public figure, but he appears also as a husband, a master to his servants, a dignified military leader, and a loving friend.

The conflicting value systems that battle with each other in the play as a whole are enacted on a microcosmic level in Brutus's mind. Even after Brutus has committed the assassination with the other members of the conspiracy, questions remain as to whether, in light of his friendship with Caesar, the murder was a noble, decidedly selfless act or proof of a truly evil callousness, a gross indifference to the ties of friendship and a failure to be moved by the power of a truly great man.

Brutus's
Rigid idealism
Greatest virtue and his
Most deadly flaw.

In the world of the play, where self-serving ambition seems to dominate all other motivations, Brutus lives up to Antony's elegiac description of him as "**the noblest of Romans.**"

However, his commitment to principle repeatedly leads him to make miscalculations: wanting to curtail violence, he ignores Cassius's suggestion that the conspirators kill Antony as well as Caesar. In another moment of naïve **idealism**, he again ignores Cassius's advice and allows Antony to speak a funeral oration over Caesar's body. As a result, Brutus forfeits the authority of having the last word on the murder and thus allows Antony to incite the plebeians to riot against him and the other conspirators.

Brutus later endangers his good relationship with Cassius by self-righteously condemning what he sees as dishonorable fund-raising tactics on Cassius's part. In all of these episodes, Brutus acts out of a desire to limit the self-serving aspects of his actions; ironically, however, in each incident he dooms the very cause that he seeks to promote, thus serving no one at all.

Act III: Scene 1

Outside the Capitol, Caesar appears with Antony, Lepidus, and all of the conspirators. He sees the soothsayer and reminds the man that "**The ides of March are come.**" The soothsayer answers, "**Aye, Caesar, but not gone.**" Artemidorus calls to Caesar, urging him to read the paper containing his warning, but Caesar refuses to read it. Caesar then enters the Capitol, and Popilius Lena whispers to Cassius, "**I wish your enterprise to-day may thrive.**" The rest enter the Capitol, and Trebonius deliberately and discretely takes Antony offstage so that he (Antony) will not interfere with the assassination.

At this point, Metellus Cimber pleads with Caesar that his brother's banishment be repealed; Caesar refuses and Brutus, Casca, and the others join in the plea. Their pleadings rise in intensity and suddenly, from behind, Casca stabs Caesar. As the others also stab Caesar, he falls and dies, saying "**Et tu, Bruté?**"

While the conspirators attempt to quiet the onlookers, Trebonius enters with the news that Mark Antony has fled home. Then the conspirators all stoop, bathe their hands in Caesar's blood, and brandish their weapons aloft, preparing to walk "waving our red weapons o'er our heads" out into the marketplace, crying "Peace, freedom, and liberty!"

A servant enters bearing Mark Antony's request that he be permitted to come to them and "be resolved / How Caesar hath deserved to lie in death." Brutus grants the plea and Antony enters. Antony gives a farewell address to the dead body of Caesar; then he pretends reconciliation with the conspirators, shakes the hand of each of them, and requests permission to make a speech at Caesar's funeral. This Brutus grants him, in spite of Cassius' objections.

When the conspirators have departed, Antony begs pardon of Caesar's dead body for his having been "meek and gentle with these butchers." He predicts that "Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge," will bring civil war and chaos to all of Italy.

A servant enters then and says that Octavius Caesar is seven leagues from Rome, but that he is coming. Antony tells the young man that he is going into the marketplace to "try, / In my oration, how the people take the cruel issue of these bloody men." He wants the servant to witness his oration to the people so that he can relate to Octavius how they were affected. The two men exit, carrying the body of Caesar.

Analysis

When the moment of crisis arrives and Caesar enters the public square, the conspirators are pent up and concerned when Popilius wishes them well. Their anxiety is at such a pitch that they are unable to determine what he actually means when he says "I wish your enterprise to-day may thrive." In fact, they almost act precipitously to kill him but are calmed by Brutus who makes them wait to see if Caesar is put on guard. To heighten the crises, Shakespeare shifts from lengthy speeches, asides, and soliloquies to short bursts of dialogue.

The first crisis in this scene is the accumulating danger of discovery arising from the words of the soothsayer, Artemidorus, and Popilius. As that danger is resolved, a graver crisis is suitably expressed in slower and heavier tones.

The conspirators ritualistically turn to their prey (Caesar) and mock him with their courtesies. Metellus Cimber kneels before Caesar to press his case that his banished brother be allowed to return to Rome, but Caesar preempts him, mocks him and humiliates him. Cimber is a "base spaniel fawning." There is no suit, really.

Instead, Metellus Cimber's actions are a trick on the part of the conspirators to get close enough to Caesar to kill him and to keep others who may help away. One by one, slowly and methodically, the conspirators come to Caesar, circle him, and kneel. Their words bear all the malice that "**sweet words**" can afford, during which Caesar shows himself as a self-involved, self-important tyrant.

They kill him, but the murder is not the last crisis of the scene. There is a slight pause in the action for purposes of regrouping, both for the characters and for the audience. The conspirators turn away from the body of Caesar and shout to the populace of what they have gained freedom and the death of ambition.

Before long, however, the specter of danger reappears. Cassius asks "**Where is Antony?**" Instead of bringing freedom to Rome, the conspirators have actually caused more instability. This group will not hold the state together, and Mark Antony is the troublemaker.

Antony sends a servant to test the waters better the servant should be run through than his master revealing Antony as a consummate survivor. This is not to say that he does not truly grieve Caesar's death.

His feelings are clear when he views the corpse and sees the murderers, their arms bathed in Caesar's blood. Yet, he is able to cover his feelings, not only so that he can place himself in a position to avenge Caesar's death, but also so that he can find his own position of power. In contrast to the conspirators even the sharpest of them, Cassius Antony is strong and politically savvy. Gone are the images of him as womanizer and drunkard. He's taken charge at the moment of greatest danger and he does so by manipulating Brutus' naïveté.

Speaking of Antony, Brutus says, "**I know that we shall have him well to friend,**" but he is wrong Antony has a plan to persuade the populace to his side at the funeral oration and turn them against the conspirators.

Further, while the conspirators weren't very good at keeping their plans to themselves, Antony has been successful. He knows that his ally, Octavius, is on the outskirts of Rome. A military strategy is already afoot. What it is, Antony doesn't divulge, but because Antony tries to dissuade Octavius from entering Rome, the reader may wonder whether Antony does this in order to avoid sharing power.

The ultimate crisis in this scene is the danger that Rome is now in. Consider the way that Antony expresses his grief over his friend's death, indicating that Caesar's body is no longer his own but has become a symbol for Rome itself: "O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth," describing Caesar as "**the ruins of the noblest man.**" No longer flesh and blood, he stands for the breeching of Rome.

It is Rome as well as Caesar whose wounds "Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips to beg the voice and utterance of [Antony's] tongue."

The action begins in February 44 BC. Julius Caesar has just reentered Rome in triumph after a victory in Spain over the sons of his old enemy, Pompey the Great. A spontaneous celebration has interrupted and been broken up by Flavius and Marullus, two political enemies of Caesar.

It soon becomes apparent from their words that powerful and secret forces are working against Caesar. Caesar appears, attended by a train of friends and supporters, and is warned by a soothsayer to "beware the ides of March," but he ignores the warning and leaves for the games and races marking the celebration of the feast of **Lupercal**.

After Caesar's departure, only two men remain behind Marcus Brutus, a close personal friend of Caesar, and Cassius, a long time political foe of Caesar's. Both men are of aristocratic origin and see the end of their ancient privilege in Caesar's political reforms and conquests. Envious of Caesar's power and prestige, Cassius cleverly probes to discover where Brutus' deepest sympathies lie.

As a man of highest personal integrity, Brutus opposes Caesar on principle, despite his friendship with him. Cassius cautiously inquires about Brutus' feelings if a conspiracy were to unseat Caesar; he finds Brutus not altogether against the notion; that is, Brutus shares "some aim" with Cassius but does not wish "to be any further moved." The two men part, promising to meet again for further discussions.

In the next scene, it is revealed that the conspiracy Cassius spoke of in veiled terms is already a reality. He has gathered together a group of disgruntled and discredited aristocrats who are only too willing to assassinate Caesar. Partly to gain the support of the respectable element of Roman society,

Cassius persuades Brutus to head the conspiracy, and Brutus agrees to do so. Shortly afterward, plans are made at a secret meeting in Brutus' orchard. The date is set: It will be on the day known as the ides of March, the fifteenth day of the month. Caesar is to be murdered in the Senate chambers by the concealed daggers and swords of the assembled conspirators.

After the meeting is ended, Brutus' wife, Portia, suspecting something and fearing for her husband's safety, questions him. Touched by her love and devotion, Brutus promises to reveal his secret to her later.

The next scene takes place in Caesar's house. The time is the early morning; the date, the fateful ides of March. The preceding night has been a strange one wild, stormy, and full of strange and unexplainable sights and happenings throughout the city of Rome. Caesar's wife, Calphurnia, terrified by horrible nightmares, persuades Caesar not to go to the Capitol, convinced that her dreams are portents of disaster.

By prearrangement, Brutus and the other conspirators arrive to accompany Caesar, hoping to fend off any possible warnings until they have him totally in their power at the Senate.

Unaware that he is surrounded by assassins and shrugging off Calphurnia's exhortations, Caesar goes with them.

Despite the conspirators' best efforts, a warning is pressed into Caesar's hand on the very steps of the Capitol, but he refuses to read it. Wasting no further time, the conspirators move into action. Purposely asking

Caesar for a favor they know he will refuse, they move closer, as if begging a favor, and then, reaching for their hidden weapons, they kill him before the shocked eyes of the senators and spectators.

Hearing of Caesar's murder, Mark Antony, Caesar's closest friend, begs permission to speak at Caesar's funeral. Brutus grants this permission over the objections of Cassius and delivers his own speech first, confident that his words will convince the populace of the necessity for Caesar's death.

After Brutus leaves, Antony begins to speak. The crowd has been swayed by Brutus' words, and it is an unsympathetic crowd that Antony addresses. Using every oratorical device known, however, Antony turns the audience into a howling mob, screaming for the blood of Caesar's murderers.

Alarmed by the furor caused by Antony's speech, the conspirators and their supporters are forced to flee from Rome and finally, from Italy. At this point, Antony, together with Caesar's young grandnephew and adopted son, Octavius, and a wealthy banker, Lepidus, gathers an army to pursue and destroy Caesar's killers. These three men, known as **triumvirs**, have formed a group called the **Second Triumvirate** to pursue the common goal of gaining control of the Roman Empire.

Months pass, during which the conspirators and their armies are pursued relentlessly into the far reaches of Asia Minor. When finally they decide to stop at the town of Sardis, Cassius and Brutus quarrel bitterly over finances.

Their differences are resolved, however, and plans are made to meet the forces of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus in one final battle. Against his own better judgment, Cassius allows Brutus to overrule him: Instead of holding to their well-prepared defensive positions, Brutus orders an attack on Antony's camp on the plains of Philippi. Just before the battle, Brutus is visited by the ghost of Caesar. "**I shall see thee at Philippi,**" the spirit warns him, but Brutus' courage is unshaken and he goes on.

The battle rages hotly. At first, the conspirators appear to have the advantage, but in the confusion, Cassius is mistakenly convinced that all is lost, and he kills himself. Leaderless, his forces are quickly defeated, and Brutus finds himself fighting a hopeless battle.

Unable to face the prospect of humiliation and shame as a captive (who would be chained to the wheels of Antony's chariot and dragged through the streets of Rome), he too takes his own life.

As the play ends, Antony delivers a eulogy over Brutus' body, calling him "the noblest Roman of them all." Caesar's murder has been avenged, order has been restored, and, most important, the Roman Empire has been preserved.

CONCLUSION

Brutus is the most complex of the characters in this play. He is proud of his reputation for honor and nobleness, but he is not always practical, and is often naive. He is the only major character in the play intensely committed to fashioning his behavior to fit a strict moral and ethical code, but he takes actions that are unconsciously hypocritical. One of the significant themes that Shakespeare uses to enrich the complexity of Brutus involves his attempt to ritualize the assassination of Caesar.

He cannot justify, to his own satisfaction, the murder of a man who is a friend and who has not excessively misused the powers of his office. Consequently, thinking of the assassination in terms of a quasi-religious ritual instead of cold-blooded murder makes it more acceptable to him. Unfortunately for him, he consistently misjudges the people and the citizens of Rome; he believes that they will be willing to consider the assassination in abstract terms.

Brutus is guided in all things by his concepts of honor. He speaks of them often to Cassius, and he is greatly disturbed when events force him to act in a manner inconsistent with them. Consider his anguish when he drinks a toast with Caesar while wearing a false face to hide his complicity in the conspiracy. Ironically, his widely reputed honor is what causes Cassius to make an all-out effort to bring him into an enterprise of debatable moral respectability. **Brutus' reputation** is so great that it will act to convince others who are as yet undecided to join.

Brutus' concentration on honorable and noble behavior also leads him into assuming a naive view of the world. He is unable to see through the roles being played by Cassius, Casca, and Antony. He does not recognize the bogus letters as having been sent by Cassius, although they contain sentiments and diction that would warn a more perceptive man. He underestimates Antony as an opponent, and he loses control over the discussion at the Capitol following the assassination by meeting Antony's requests too readily.

Brutus as a naive thinker is most clearly revealed in the scene in the Forum. He presents his reasons for the assassination, and he leaves believing that he has satisfied the Roman citizens with his reasoned oration. He does not realize that his speech has only moved the mob emotionally; it has not prodded them to make reasoned assessments of what the conspirators have done.

Brutus is endowed with qualities that could make him a successful private man but that limit him severely, even fatally, when he endeavors to compete in public life with those who do not choose to act with the same ethical and moral considerations.

In his scene with Portia, Brutus shows that he has already become alienated with his once happy home life because of his concentration on his "enterprise," which will eventually cause him to lose everything except the belief that he has acted honorably and nobly.

In the tent at Sardis, after learning of Portia's death and believing that Cassius is bringing discredit on the republican cause, Brutus becomes most isolated. His private life is destroyed, and he also has difficulty avoiding the taint of dishonor in his public life.

Brutus makes moral decisions slowly, and he is continually at war with himself even after he has decided on a course of action. He has been thinking about the problem that Caesar represents to Roman liberty for an unspecified time when the play opens. After Cassius raises the subject and asks for Brutus' commitment, he requests time to think the matter over, and a month later, speaking alone in his orchard, he reveals that he has since thought of little else.

He has trouble arriving at a decision whether to participate in the assassination, he expresses contradictory attitudes towards the conspiracy, he attempts to "purify" the murder through ritual, and he condemns Cassius' money-raising practices while asking for a share. His final words, "**Caesar, now be still: I kill'd not thee with half so good a will,**" are almost a supplication for an end to his mental torture.

On the other hand, Brutus characteristically makes decisions that are essential to his and Cassius' success with much less forethought, and after he's committed to a plan, he does not waiver. He quickly takes command of the conspiracy and makes crucial decisions regarding Cicero and Antony. He does not, however, make adequate plans to solidify republican control of government following the assassination, and he too readily agrees to allow Antony to speak.

Brutus' character is made even more complex by his unconscious hypocrisy. He has conflicting attitudes toward the conspiracy, but he becomes more favorable following his becoming a member of the plot against Caesar. He attacks Cassius for raising money dishonestly, yet he demands a portion. Nevertheless, at the end,

Brutus is a man who nobly accepts his fate. He dismisses the ghost of Caesar at Sardis. He chooses personal honor over a strict adherence to an abstract philosophy. He reacts calmly and reasonably to Cassius' death, as he had earlier in a moment of crisis when Popilius revealed that the conspiracy was no longer secret. In his last moments, he has the satisfaction of being certain in his own mind that he has been faithful to the principles embodying the honor and nobility on which he has placed so much value throughout his life.

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