

Julius Caesar

W.Shakespeare

April 9-10, 2014

As usual the plot can easily be dispensed with, it is the dialogue and the soliloquys which command our attention, although I have to admit that this so far, is probably the one play by Shakespeare that has held my attention and engaged me in an honest manner as opposed to one of mere affectation.

Caesar is presented as three times refusing the offer of the crown, and then the conspirators, with Cassius playing the leading role, woe Brutus to join them, and eventually succeeding in doing so, after Brutus has suffered a tormented night, refusing to confide in his wife Portia, who consequently accuses him of treating here as a mere harlot. Meanwhile Caesar is implored by his wife not to attend the senate, she has had a bad dream with evil tidings. Caesar vacillates, only cowards die many death, valiant men only one, as he explains to her. Yet he is about to humor her, when one of the conspirators arrives at his home dissuading him, playing on his vanity as a strong man. At the senate Caesar is subjected to the obsequious attention of the conspirators, who then suddenly start to stab him, starting with Casca and ending with Brutus, provoking the well known cry *Et tu, Brute?* before he falls down dead. On the exhortation of Brutus, they dip their hands in the blood of Caesar. In the aftermath, Antony ostensibly plays along, making a big show of pressing the bloodied hands of the mutineers, but furtively inciting the mob to revenge the death. Later on we are privy to Cassius and Brutus having a quarrel, the latter accusing the former of greed and corruption, but nevertheless in face of the great danger presented by the combined armies of Antony and Octavius they miraculously make up. Soon there will be a clash, and the fortunes of respective parties wax and wane. Cassius during a temporary setback loses heart and has his servant kill him with the same sword that he had killed Caesar with, eventually also captured Brutus has his servant hold the sword firm so he can throw himself on it, a classical escape from humiliation in battle, known from the Bible. The play is ostensibly about Caesar, but of course the dramatic main role is given to Brutus, showing a mixture of the good and the bad which is the basis of all tragedy. Brutus, alone of the conspirators, acted not out of envy or greed, but out of duty to the idea of the free state of Rome. Yet of course his act was one of deception towards his friend and mentor. But as he claims. Much as I loved Caesar I love Rome more.

As to noteworthy passages maybe to commit to memory we can First Portia's complaint as to Brutus taciturnity **Act 2, scene 1**

*... Am I your self
But as it were in sort or limitation?
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.*

Or when Calpurnia, Caesar's wife, warns him of the danger to his life, judging from her visionary dream of *drizzled blood upon the Capitol*, Caesar responds **Act 2, scene 2**

*Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I have yet heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.*

Brutus addresses the crowds rationalizing the acts, stressing that it was a strike against tyranny **Act 3 scene 2**

*...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. Had you rather Caesar
was living, and die all slaves, then that Caesar were dead, to live all free man?*

Coming to the climax

*As Caesar loved me, I weep for him. As he was fortunate, I rejoice at it. As he
was valiant, I honor him. But as he was ambitious, I slew him.*

Concluding with

*There is tears for his love, joy for his fortune, honour for his valour, and death
for his ambition.*

The arguments surely could be imbedded in a Platonic dialogue. Further on we have the quarrel between the two brothers in combat - Cassius and Brutus **Act 4, scene 2**

Cassius

*That you have wronged me doth appear in this:
You have condemned and noted Lucius Pella
For taking bribes here of the Sardinians,
Wherein my letters praying on his side
Because I knew the man, was slighted off.*

Brutus

You wronged yourself to write in such a case.

Cassius

*In such a time as this it is not meet
That every nice offence should bear his comment.*

Brutus

*Let me tell you, Cassius, you yourself
Are much condemned to have an itching palm,
To sell and mart your offices for gold
To undeserves.*

And the exchange escalates, with Cassius repeatedly asking *Must I endure all this* in the face of Brutus relentless accusations

Cassius

I denied you not.

Brutus

You did.

Cassius

I did not. He was but a fool

That brought my answer back. Brutus has rived my heart.

A friend should bear his friend's infirmities,

But Brutus makes mine greater than they are.

Brutus

I do not, till you practise them on me.

Cassius

You love me not.

Brutus

I do not like your faults.

Cassius

A friendly eye could never see such faults.

But eventually they do make up. As Brutus exclaims *O Cassius, I am sick of many griefs* and then excuses his ill-humor, by the death of his wife Portia, a clear suicide, and then asks for a bowl of wine, which makes Cassius exclaim

My heart is thirsty for that noble pledge.

Fill, Lucius, till the wine o'erswell the cup.

I cannot drink too much of Brutus love.

And he drinks indeed. And the final words of Brutus, visited as he has been by the ghost of Caesar (there are some great ghosts in the plays of Shakespeare), about to throw himself on the sword held firm by his servant Strato. **Act 5, scene 5**

Caesar, now be still

I killed not thee with half so good a will.

And Strato explains

For Brutus only overcame himself,

And no one else hath honour by his death.

And Antony delivers his homage

This was the noblest Roman of them all.

All the conspirators save only he

Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.

He only in a general honest thought

And common good to all made one of them.

His life was gentle, and the elements

So mixed in him that nature might stand up

And say to all the world 'This was a man'.

And Octavius agrees, and calls this a happy day.

And that is it!

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