TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

{ ILLUSTRATED }

BY

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ABOUT AUTHOR



The Chandos portrait, artist and authenticity unconfirmed. National Portrait Gallery, London.

William Shakespeare (26 April 1564) – 23 April 1616) was an English poet and playwright, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His

extant works, including some collaborations, consist of about 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, the authorship of some of which is uncertain. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613 at age 49, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive, and there has been considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, religious beliefs, and whether the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories, genres he raised to the peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the 16th century. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*,

considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.

Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, John Heminges and Henry Condell, two friends and fellow actors of Shakespeare, published the First Folio, a collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's. It was prefaced with a poem by Ben Jonson, in which Shakespeare is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time."

Shakespeare was a respected poet and playwright in his own day, but his reputation did not rise to its present heights until the 19th century. The Romantics, in particular, acclaimed Shakespeare's genius, and the Victorians worshipped Shakespeare with a reverence that George Bernard Shaw called "bardolatry". In the 20th century, his work was repeatedly adopted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

Life:

Early life

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and a successful glover originally from Snitterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and baptised there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, Saint George's Day. This date, which can be traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers, since Shakespeare died 23 April 1616. He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son.

Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, about a quarter-mile from his home. Grammar schools varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but grammar school curricula were largely similar, the basic Latin text was standardised by royal decree, and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin classical authors.



Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing. By William Blake, c. 1786. Tate Britain.

Shakespeare's early classical and Italianate comedies, containing tight double plots and precise comic sequences, give way in the mid-1590s to the romantic atmosphere of his greatest comedies. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a witty mixture of romance, fairy magic, and comic lowlife scenes. Shakespeare's next comedy, the equally romantic *Merchant of Venice*, contains a portrayal of the vengeful Jewish moneylender Shylock, which reflects Elizabethan views but may appear derogatory to modern audiences. The wit and wordplay of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the charming rural setting of *As You Like It*, and the lively

merrymaking of *Twelfth Night* complete Shakespeare's sequence of great comedies. After the lyrical *Richard II*, written almost entirely in verse, Shakespeare introduced prose comedy into the histories of the late 1590s, *Henry IV, parts 1* and *2*, and *Henry V*. His characters become more complex and tender as he switches deftly between comic and serious scenes, prose and poetry, and achieves the narrative variety of his mature work. This period begins and ends with two tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet*, the famous romantic tragedy of sexually charged adolescence, love, and death; and *Julius Caesar*—based on Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*—which introduced a new kind of drama. According to Shakespearean scholar James Shapiro, in *Julius Caesar* "the various strands of politics, character, inwardness, contemporary events, even Shakespeare's own reflections on the act of writing, began to infuse each other".

In the early 17th century, Shakespeare wrote the so-called "problem plays" *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well* and a number of his best known tragedies. Many critics believe that Shakespeare's greatest tragedies represent the peak of his art. The titular hero of one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, *Hamlet*, has probably been discussed more than any other Shakespearean character, especially for his famous soliloquy which begins "To be or not to be; that is

the question". Unlike the introverted Hamlet, whose fatal flaw is hesitation, the heroes of the tragedies that followed, Othello and King Lear, are undone by hasty errors of judgement.



Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus, and the Ghost of Hamlet's Father. Henry Fuseli, 1780–5. Kunsthaus Zürich.

The plots of Shakespeare's tragedies often hinge on such fatal errors or flaws, which overturn order and destroy the hero and those he loves. In *Othello*, the villain Iago stokes Othello's sexual jealousy to the point where he murders the innocent wife who loves him. In *King Lear*, the old king commits the tragic error of giving up

his powers, initiating the events which lead to the torture and blinding of the Earl of Gloucester and the murder of Lear's youngest daughter Cordelia. According to the critic Frank Kermode, "the play offers neither its good characters nor its audience any relief from its cruelty". In *Macbeth*, the shortest and most compressed of Shakespeare's tragedies, uncontrollable ambition incites Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth, to murder the rightful king and usurp the throne, until their own guilt destroys them in turn. In this play, Shakespeare adds a supernatural element to the tragic structure. His last major tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, contain some of Shakespeare's finest poetry and were considered his most successful tragedies by the poet and critic T. S. Eliot.

In his final period, Shakespeare turned to romance or tragicomedy and completed three more major plays: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, as well as the collaboration, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Less bleak than the tragedies, these four plays are graver in tone than the comedies of the 1590s, but they end with reconciliation and the forgiveness of potentially tragic errors. Some commentators have seen this change in mood as evidence of a more serene view of life on Shakespeare's part, but it may merely reflect the theatrical fashion of the day. Shakespeare collaborated on two

further surviving plays, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably with John Fletcher.



Pity by William Blake, 1795, Tate Britain, is an illustration of two similes in *Macbeth*: "And pity, like a naked new-born babe, / Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, hors'd / Upon the sightless couriers of the air".

Shakespeare's standard poetic form was blank verse, composed in iambic pentameter. In practice, this meant that his verse was usually unrhymed and consisted of ten syllables to a line, spoken with a stress on every second syllable. The blank verse of his early plays is quite different from that of his later ones. It is often beautiful,

but its sentences tend to start, pause, and finish at the end of lines, with the risk of monotony. Once Shakespeare mastered traditional blank verse, he began to interrupt and vary its flow. This technique releases the new power and flexibility of the poetry in plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. Shakespeare uses it, for example, to convey the turmoil in Hamlet's mind:

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting

That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay

Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly—

And prais'd be rashness for it—let us know

Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well...

Hamlet, Act 5, Scene 2, 4–8

* * * * *

PREFACE (ABOUT THE BOOK)

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar is a tragedy by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written in 1599. It portrays the 44 BC conspiracy against the Roman dictator Julius Caesar, his assassination and the defeat of the conspirators at the Battle of Philippi. It is one of several plays written by Shakespeare based on true events from Roman history, which also include *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Although the title is *Julius Caesar*, Julius Caesar is not the most visible character in its action; he appears in only five scenes. Marcus Brutus speaks more than four times as many lines, and the central psychological drama is his struggle between the conflicting demands of honor, patriotism, and friendship.

Characters & Synopsis:

Marcus Brutus is Caesar's close friend and a Roman praetor. Brutus allows himself to be cajoled into joining a group of conspiring senators because of a growing suspicion—implanted by Caius Cassius—that Caesar intends to turn republican Rome into a monarchy under his own rule.

The early scenes deal mainly with Brutus's arguments with Cassius and his struggle with his own conscience. The growing tide of public support soon turns Brutus against Caesar (this public support was actually faked; Cassius wrote letters to Brutus in different handwritings over the next month in order to get Brutus to join the conspiracy). A soothsayer warns Caesar to "beware the Ides of March", which he ignores, culminating in his assassination at the Capitol by the conspirators that day, despite being warned by the soothsayer and Artemidorus, one of Caesar's supporters at the entrance of the Capitol.

Caesar's assassination is one of the most famous scenes of the play, occurring in Act 3 (the other is Marc Antony's oration "Friends, Romans, countrymen.") After ignoring the soothsayer as well as his wife's own premonitions, Caesar comes to the Senate. The conspirators create a superficial motive for the assassination by means of a petition brought by Metellus Cimber, pleading on behalf of his banished brother. As Caesar, predictably, rejects the petition, Casca grazes Caesar in the back of his neck, and the others follow in stabbing him; Brutus is last. At this point, Caesar utters the famous line "*Et tu, Brute?*" ("And you, Brutus?", *i.e.* "You too, Brutus?"). Shakespeare has him add, "Then fall, Caesar," suggesting that Caesar did not want to survive such treachery, therefore becoming a hero.