

## *Julius Caesar*

To the Elizabethans, the assassination of Julius Caesar was quite simply one of history's most important and compelling events. Because of this, Shakespeare is remarkably faithful to his source, North's translation of Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*,<sup>1</sup> using the historian's names, events, and locales to give his play an aura of authenticity. But *Julius Caesar* is a great play not because of its fidelity to history or because of Shakespeare's acute analysis of the politics of power but, finally, because it is a profoundly moving study of two vulnerable and rather private men trapped in a very public tragedy. In spite of ourselves, we feel for the personal agonies of Brutus and Cassius, for their human shortcomings as men, and for their touching personal relationship. As director Terry Hands once said of the play, "It is actually a love story."<sup>2</sup>

There are six separate days of action in the play that are spread out over a historical period of more than two and a half years. Within each day, Shakespeare is exceptionally precise as to the actual time of the action (clocks are always striking in his ancient Rome!),<sup>3</sup> but the length of the intervals between the days is not always clear, except as they fit into Plutarch's established two-and-a-half-year time frame.

**Pre-action:** In what he believed would be the last decisive conflict of the Roman civil wars, Julius Caesar defeated Pompey's senatorial forces at the battle of Pharsalia in 48 B.C. Pompey escaped but was later murdered in Egypt. Caesar then campaigned against Pompey's sons, Gnaeus and Sextus, defeating them at the battle of Munda in Spain on March 17, 45 B.C. Eleven months later, the Lupercal festivities that

begin the play are celebrating this last victory. For the first time since the beginning of the civil wars, Caesar was secure from enemies outside of Rome.

### Act I, scene i; Day 1

The story: Two Republican tribunes disperse a crowd of commoners and tradespeople who are celebrating Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons.

*Place:* A street near the Forum (marketplace) in Rome.

*Time:* The morning of February 15, 44 B.C.  
(The Feast of Lupercal).

The Lupercalia was an annual holiday that held a dual significance for Romans. On the one hand, it had its origins in ancient fertility rituals and farming festivals that honored Lupercus, the god that protected flocks of sheep from wolves.<sup>4</sup> In more recent history, it had become an urban celebration that commemorated the founding of Rome and feted the she-wolf that had suckled Romulus and Remus. The Lupercalia was an intensely patriotic festival that featured games and races. However, *this* Lupercal is being used by Caesar to celebrate his victory in the battle of Munda fought against Pompey's sons the year before in March 45 B.C. And this is what so infuriates the two tribunes, Flavius and Marullus—that Caesar should use a patriotic Roman holiday to celebrate a battle fought against fellow Romans, not a battle fought against foreigners for imperial conquest. It also infuriates them that the common people have embraced Caesar's

subverting of a festival honoring Rome's past and *their* aristocratic ancestors.

Historically, Caesar celebrated his triumph over Pompey's sons on his return from Spain in October 45 B.C., four months earlier than the scene in the play. Shakespeare combines the two holidays into one for dramatic effect. The Roman games generally began quite early in the morning and lasted all day.

*Interval between scenes: A few hours.*

In the Folio, Flavius and Marullus are included in Caesar's grand entrance at the beginning of I.ii, but at the end of this first scene, they exit to "Disrobe the images" of Caesar and "drive away the vulgar from the streets" (I.i.64–70). If their inclusion in the I.ii entrance is Shakespeare's stage direction, this would indicate that he wanted time to elapse between the two scenes. Casca ambiguously tells us that Flavius and Marullus are later "put to silence" (I.ii.286) for their treason. Their arrest occurs offstage, presumably during the "mock-crowning" episode between I.ii.24 and 177.

### Act I, scene ii; Day 1

The story: Caesar and his train enter on their way to the games. He scoffs at the warning of a soothsayer to beware the Ides of March. After he exits, Cassius begins his seduction of Brutus into a conspiracy to assassinate Caesar. Casca enters and tells them that at the games Antony offered Caesar a crown that the dictator reluctantly refused.

*Place: A street in Rome.*

Casca says that Caesar's epileptic fit occurred in "the market-place" (I.ii.253), so this scene occurs in a street close to the Forum; Brutus and Cassius can clearly hear the crowd shouting their approval of Caesar's refusal of the crown. The two-mile Lupercal race started at the cave of the Lupercal on the southwestern corner of the Palatine Hill, wound partway around the base of the Palatine, then up the Via Sacra, ending in the Forum. Caesar watched the end of the race from a gilded chair atop the Rostra in the Forum.<sup>5</sup>

*Time: Unspecified; perhaps late morning.*

The "running of the course" in which Antony competes was part of the original Lupercal fertility ritual. As they ran, the runners carried leather flails with which they ceremoniously "touched the barren" to cure their sterility. (The flails were called *februa*, thus the name of the month, February.) Not one to let any political situation go unexploited, Caesar publicly suggests that Antony touch Calpurnia to make her fertile, hinting in the process that he wants to be a king and father heirs. Interestingly, Caesar had another vested interest in the race. Traditionally, the runners represented two colleges of priests, the Quinctilii and the Fabii. Only the year before, in 45 B.C., Caesar had inaugurated a third college, the Julii, and had placed Antony at its head.

*Interval between scenes: One month.*

The length of this interval has caused a great deal of unnecessary confusion. Several commentators<sup>6</sup> have written that the storm (I.iii) occurs during the night of the Lupercalia (I.ii). This sets the first three scenes of the play neatly into one twenty-four-hour day but ignores all the evidence in the text that the storm takes place in the early hours of the Ides of March, one month later. This evidence is conclusive. At ll. 36–38 and 85–88, for example, there are several references to "to-morrow" as the time when Caesar will be crowned in the Senate, while early "to-morrow" the conspirators will visit Brutus (ll. 153–56 and 162–64). In addition, Casca makes it clear that the portentous weather associated with the storm of I.iii has been with them for at least two days: "And *yesterday* the bird of night did sit / Even at noon-day upon the market-place" (I.iii.26–27, italics added).

Why, then, the misunderstanding? It appears there are two reasons for it. First, the Folio puts an act division after I.iii, perhaps indicating to some that a break in the action should occur *there*. But as Taylor and Jowett have demonstrated, before 1610, plays were performed without intervals, and the act and scene divisions in the Folio cannot be relied on except as they relate to late Jacobean stage practice.<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare's original audience watching *Julius Caesar* in 1599 had only the playwright's words and his

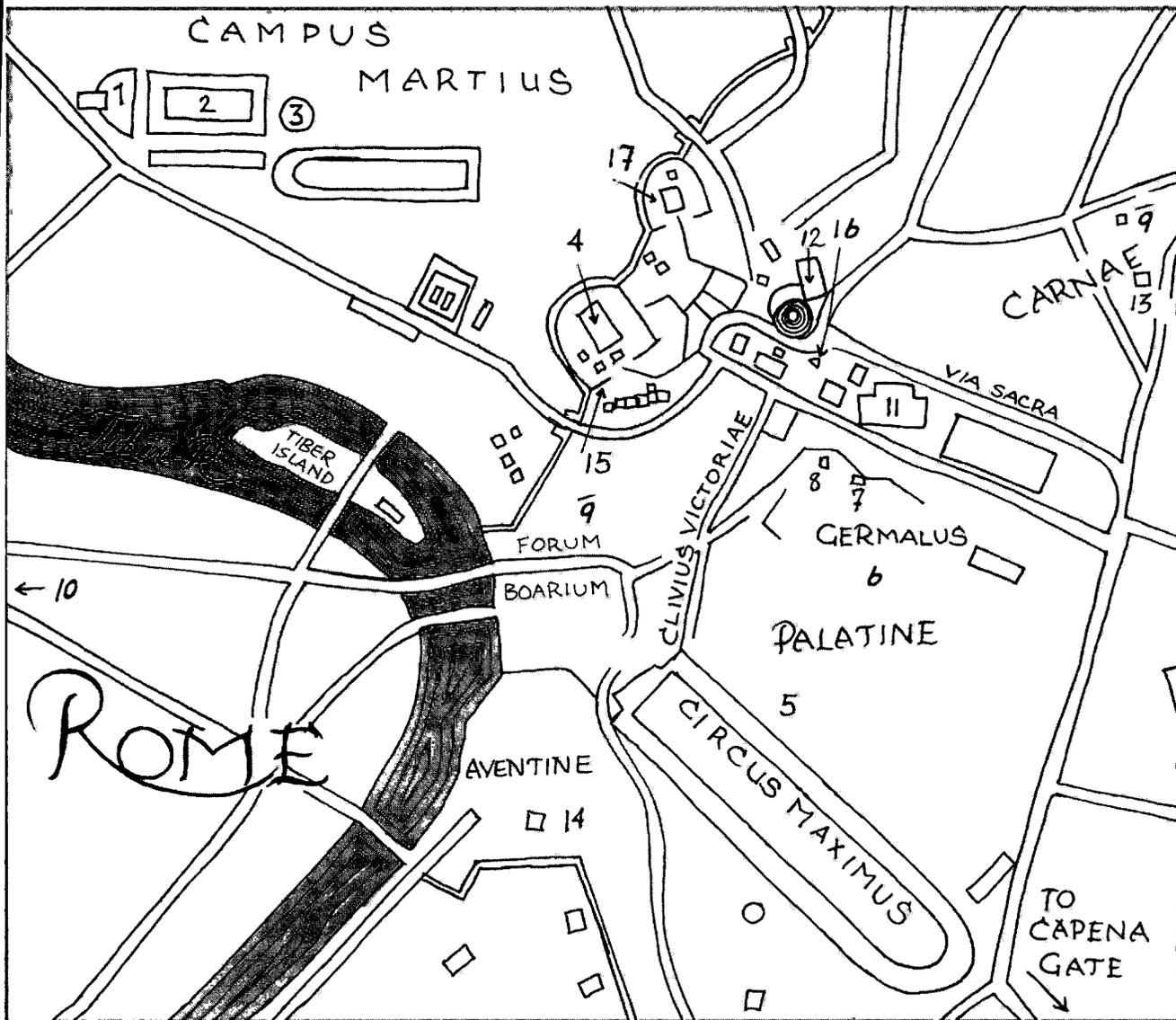


Figure 8.1. Map of Rome (for the Roman plays): (1) Pompey's Theatre; (2) Peristyle; (3) Senate meeting hall where Caesar was historically assassinated; (4) Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (statue of the Elder Brutus was here); (5) Cave of Luperca; (6) Octavius' House; (7) Brutus' House (?); (8) Lepidus' House (?); (9) Pompey's House, appropriated by Antony; (10) Caesar's Pleasure Gardens willed to Rome. Following Plutarch, Shakespeare locates the gardens on "this side Tiber" (III.ii.250), but in point of fact they were on the west bank of the river near the Janiculan Hill; (11) Domus Publica; (12) Curia Hostillia; (13) Temple of Tellus; (14) Temple of Ceres; (15) Tarpeian Rock; (16) Tribunal of Praetor; (17) Arx.

theatre's limited abilities in creating special effects to indicate time intervals. And in this instance, Shakespeare uses both to carefully separate the Lupercal scene from the Ides of March by ending scene ii with Cassius' rhyming couplet

And after this let Caesar seat him sure,  
For we will shake him, or worse days endure.

(I.ii.321-22)

and by beginning scene iii with the thunder and lightning of the storm. Taken together, his audience would have been ready for a break in the action to occur.

The second cue for the misunderstanding of this interval comes from Cicero's question to Casca at the beginning of scene iii: "brought you Caesar home?" Evidently, editors have interpreted this to mean "home" from whatever supper Casca talked about attending in I.ii on the evening of the Lupercalia

(I.ii.288–89). But there is really no basis for connecting these social functions. Shakespeare is simply establishing Casca as a social butterfly and sought-after dinner companion who is intimate with Caesar's inner circle. While it is true that Shakespeare is interested in creating a seamless and swiftly moving narrative with a sense of dramatic inevitability, it is equally true that he is interested in crafting a logical and realistic sequence of events that must include a month's interval between February 15 and March 15.

### Act I, scene iii; Day 2

The story: During a portentous storm, Cassius recruits Casca into the conspiracy.

*Place: A street in Rome.*

Casca has taken Caesar to his house, the Domus Publicus, on the southeastern corner of the Forum and has walked westerly to the Capitol, where he met the "surly lion" (I.iii.20–21). Cassius is on his way to Pompey's Porch, where the conspirators are to rehearse the assassination. It is possible that the two meet around the Porta Flumentana, the gate in the Servian Walls that separates the city from the Campus Martius, where Pompey's theatre complex was located (see figure 8.1). Pompey's Porch (or the Curia Pompey) was a colonnade building next to Pompey's Theatre, the first permanent theatre built in Rome in 55 B.C. During the period of the play, the Senate met here while their regular meetinghouse, the Curia Hostilia in the Forum, was undergoing renovations.

*Time: Midnight and the early hours of March 15, 44 B.C. (the Ides of March).*

At the end of the scene, Cassius tells us that it is "after midnight" (l. 163). Earlier Casca had said that Caesar "Comes [. . .] to the Capitol to-morrow" and that "the Senators to-morrow / Mean to establish Caesar as a king" (ll. 36, 85–86). During the month that has gone by since the Feast of the Lupercal, Cassius has recruited the rest of the conspirators<sup>8</sup> and met with Brutus (probably) several times. He has also

bombarded Brutus with anonymous "writings" from "several citizens" urging him to take action. As Brutus says in his garden at II.i.49–50, "Such instigations have been often dropp'd / Where I have took them up."<sup>9</sup> For his part, Brutus has evidently met with Caius Ligarius and "given him reasons" for joining the faction (II.i.219).

In the Roman Republican calendar, the "ides" (from *iduate*, meaning "to divide") occurred in the middle of the month and coincided with the full moon. The ides of March, May, July, and October fell on the fifteenth day of the month, while the ides of the remaining months fell on the thirteenth. Because of the full moon and because the "ides" was the day of the month when bills were due to be paid (no businessman would consider doing business during the waning moon), it was considered, literally, a "day of reckoning" and an unlucky time. Interestingly, our culture has inherited these traditions and superstitions. Until recently, income tax day in the United States was always on March 15. It was not changed to April 15 until 1954.

*Interval between scenes: A little less than three hours.*

Cinna needs time to "throw this [i.e., Cassius' anonymous letter] / In at his [i.e., Brutus'] window" (ll. 144–45), while the rest of the conspirators need time for their meeting at Pompey's Porch (ll. 146–48).<sup>10</sup>

### Act II, scene i; Day 2

The story: Having made up his mind to join the faction, Brutus assumes leadership of the conspiracy and rejects the killing of Mark Antony. Brutus' wife, Portia, begs to know what he is planning and why he is so upset but is put off by him.

*Place: The orchard of Brutus' house on the Palatine Hill.*

This was probably the "peristyle" in Brutus' villa. These enclosed courtyard gardens were in the center of the Roman house, usually surrounded by a colonnade. The historical location of Brutus' house is unknown, but as (literally) the wealthiest man in Rome,

he almost certainly would have lived on the Germalus of the Palatine Hill, the most fashionable address in the city.<sup>11</sup>

*Time: 3:00 A.M.*

The anachronism of the Forum's clock striking "three" gives us the hour (l. 193). However, as commentators have pointed out, there appears to be a temporal inconsistency in the proximity of the clock's striking "three" eighty lines after Cinna describes the first stages of the dawn (II.i.101–11) since civic twilight should occur around 5:00 A.M. in mid-March. In his fascinating and challenging book on the temporal symbolism in *Julius Caesar*, Steve Sohmer explains this anomaly (and many more in the play) as an example of the calendrical dislocation that existed in 44 B.C. (and also during Shakespeare's lifetime) as a result of Caesar's introduction of the Julian calendar. Thus, in a more obvious example from the Folio, in the same scene Brutus asks the date of his servant Lucius:

Is not to morrow (Boy) the first of March?

LUCIUS

I know not, sir.

BRUTUS

Looke in the Calender, and bring me word.

(ll. 658–60)

When Lucius returns, he tells his master that it is not the *kalends* but the *ides* of March. Brutus' guess is off by two weeks. Sohmer explains this (on one level) as the understandable confusion caused by the revolutionary new Julian calendar introduced in Rome on January 1, 45 B.C. (slightly more than a year before the start of the play). Caesar's calendar reforms had inserted some ninety days into the old lunar-based Republican calendar during 46 B.C. in order to restore the equinoxes and solstices to their correct dates. However, this meant that while 47 B.C. (and obviously the years within memory before that) were 355 days long, 46 B.C. lasted 445 days, while 45 B.C. was 365 days long. No wonder Brutus is confused about what day of the month it is. On a more significant level, of course, we see how Caesar's time (and Caesar's influence)

has replaced the old Republican system of timekeeping making Brutus, in Sohmer's words, an "untimely man."<sup>12</sup> In the same way, the seasonal reforms of the Julian calendar had moved the hour of sunrise "forward" in comparison to the old Republican calendar by one hour and eight minutes (Sohmer, 81). This is clearly what Casca is referring to in his discussion of the relationship of the sunrise to the seasons, the months, and the points of the compass:

Here, as I point my sword, the sun arises,  
Which is a great way growing on the south,  
Weighing the youthful season of the year.  
Some two months hence, up higher toward the north  
He first presents his fire; and the high east  
Stands, as the Capitol, directly here.

(ll. 106–11)

On another matter, Brutus tells us that he hasn't slept during the month since his first meeting with Cassius (ll. 61–62).

*Interval between scenes: A few hours.*

## Act II, scene ii; Day 2

The story: Caesar at first heeds his wife's pleas to stay at home, but after being flattered by Decius Brutus, he decides to accompany the conspirators to the Senate.

*Place: Caesar's house (the Domus Publicus) in the Forum.*

*Time: From the early hours of morning to 8:00 A.M.*

Shakespeare tells his audience that it is still dark as the scene begins by having Caesar appear "in his night-gown," a conventional stage direction that indicated a character roused from his bed. Toward the end of the scene, Brutus tells us that the clock has "strucken eight" (l. 114). Shakespeare is meticulous in keeping us informed of the time to maintain tension.

*Interval between scenes: One hour.*

**Act II, scene iii; Day 2**

The story: Artemidorus waits for Caesar on the way to the Senate House, rehearsing his warning to him.

*Place: The Via Sacra on the way to the Capitol.*

The Via Sacra was the road through the Forum that connected Caesar's residence in the Domus Publicus with the steps leading up to the Capitol.

*Time: 9:00 A.M.*

This short scene is probably meant to take place at the same time as II.iv, Portia's meeting with the soothsayer, who tells us in that scene that it is "About the ninth hour" (II.iv.23).<sup>13</sup>

*Interval between scenes: The action of II.iv is coincident with that of II.iii.*

**Act II, scene iv; Day 2**

The story: Fearing for her husband's safety, Portia sends their servant, Lucius, to find out what is happening at the Senate. The soothsayer enters on his way to the Capitol.

*Place: The street in front of Brutus' house.*

If Brutus lived on the northwest side of the Palatine, this street would have been the Clivus Victoriae, which offered a fine view across to the Capitolium.

*Time: 9:00 A.M.*

The soothsayer tells us that Caesar has not yet left his house for the Senate (ll. 24–25).

*Interval between scenes: Perhaps half an hour.*

**Act III, scene i; Day 2**

The story: Brushing aside warnings from both Artemidorus and the soothsayer, Caesar enters the Senate and

is assassinated. Antony confronts the conspirators and is given permission to speak at Caesar's funeral. After the conspirators exit, Antony prophesies a civil war.

*Place: This scene moves from the street outside the Senate to the interior of the Senate.*

In the last scene, the soothsayer told us his plans for confronting Caesar:

Here [in front of Brutus' house] the street is narrow;  
The throng that follows Caesar at the heels,  
Of senators, of praetors, common suitors,  
Will crowd a feeble man almost to death.  
I'll get me to a place more void, and there  
Speak to great Caesar as he comes along.

(II.iv.33–38)

To avoid this confined space, the soothsayer has moved up to the open area in front of the Capitol steps.

At some point between ll. 12 and 31, the action moves "inside" the Senate House. At ll. 11–12, Cassius berates Artemidorus: "What, urge you your petitions in the street? / Come to the Capitol." But by ll. 31–32 of this scene ("Are we all ready? What is now amiss / That Caesar and his senate must redress?"), the action has moved "indoors." Shakespeare uses this technique of changing place in the middle of a scene twice in this play—here and then later in the tent scene (IV.iii), where the action moves from outside to inside Brutus' tent. Bringing on, or revealing, Caesar's chair of state in the Senate House could have easily accomplished the move from outside to inside the building. The street action would have occurred downstage, with Caesar moving up toward the tiring-house wall after his confrontation with Artemidorus. As any director will tell you, the stabbing itself and the subsequent "stooping and washing" in Caesar's blood would have had to have taken place as far upstage as possible to "mask" the action from the audience placed on three sides of the stage.

Suetonius tells us that the actual assassination took place in the Curia Pompey adjacent to Pompey's Theatre (where the conspirators go to rehearse the killing in the play and where there existed an enormous statue of Pompey the Great, III.i.115), but Shakespeare is undoubtedly ignoring his source and

following the accepted medieval tradition that located Caesar's murder "in the Capitol."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps he thought that the "Capitol" was simply another name for the Senate House. Historically, after the assassins murdered Caesar in the Curia Pompey, they fled to the Capitol, where they took sanctuary in the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The actual site of the assassination stands in Rome today in the area between the Campo De' Fiori and Largo Argentina.

*Time: Perhaps 9:30 A.M.*

*Interval between scenes: One day.*

III.ii (the Forum scene) "feels" like it follows immediately on the heels of III.i, but a close examination of the text reveals that Shakespeare is following his historical source by placing a one-day interval between the two scenes. At the end of III.i, Octavius' Servant says that his master is on his way to Rome and will lie "tonight within seven leagues" of the city (III.i.286). This means that word of the assassination has to travel the seven leagues (or twenty-one miles) to Octavius, and then Octavius has to travel the twenty-one miles back to Rome, arriving at the end of Antony's oration. For their part, the conspirators need time to enroll "the question" of Caesar's death in the Capitol (III.ii.37-38), while Antony needs time to fetch the will from Caesar's "closet." Historically, wills in Rome were administered by the Vestal Virgins and kept in their precinct, the Domus Publicus. Among the many honorific titles held by Caesar was Pontifex Maximus, the head of the College of Priests, who traditionally lived in the home of the Vestals. Thus, perhaps without knowing it, Shakespeare is absolutely correct in having Antony fetch Caesar's will from his "closet" in the Domus Publicus. Plutarch says that the eulogies over Caesar's body took place on the day after the assassination but that the funeral itself occurred four days later on March 20 (Bullough, 103-5). Shakespeare telescopes the time for dramatic effect.

### Act III, scene ii; Day 3

The story: Brutus makes his rational case to the people for the assassination of Caesar, but Antony's emo-

tional speech and his reading of Caesar's will inflames the mob against the conspirators. Octavius' Servant brings word that his master has arrived in Rome and that Brutus and Cassius have fled the city.

*Place: The Rostra, or speaking pulpit, in the lower end of the Forum.*

The eulogies and games for Caesar's funeral were held in the Forum. The location where his body was cremated is marked today with the remains of a circular altar. Shakespeare calls the location of the eulogy scene "the pulpit" (III.i.84, 250; III.ii.0.1)—the only time he uses that word in the canon—and it's fairly certain that he was thinking of the outdoor pulpit in the courtyard of London's Saint Paul's Cathedral, where open-air sermons were delivered before large audiences.

*Time: Unspecified but probably early afternoon.*

Historically, Octavius didn't arrive in Rome until some six weeks after the assassination. He was in Apollonia across the Adriatic on the Ides of March.

*Interval between scenes: The action of III.iii is continuous with that of III.ii.*

### Act III, scene iii; Day 3

The story: Cinna the poet is attacked by the Roman mob because he has the same name as one of the conspirators.

*Place: A street near the Capitol.*

Cinna the Poet tells us where he lives and that he has just come "forth of doors" (ll. 25, 3). Plutarch places Cinna's murder in the "market place" (Bullough, 88).

*Time: Afternoon.*

Sohmer argues that Shakespeare moved Cinna's murder from Plutarch's afternoon to the night of the funeral (Sohmer, 144). But there is nothing in the text to suggest this. When Cinna says, "I dreamt *to-night* that I did feast with Caesar" (l. 1, italics

added), he is, of course, referring to *last night*, while the “fire-brands” carried by the mob (l. 36) are not nighttime torches but “brands [to] fire the traitors’ houses” (III.ii.255).

*Interval between scenes: Twenty months (see below).*

#### Act IV, scene i; Day 4

The story: The Triumvirate of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus meet to proscribe their enemies. Antony and Octavius make plans to recruit an army.

*Place: Probably Antony’s house; most editors place the action there.*

Plutarch reports that after Pharsalia Antony moved into the villa formerly owned by Pompey the Great (Bullough, 279). This house was an enormous nouveau riche mansion in the Carinae district at the foot of the Esquiline Hill and near the temple of Tellus (see figure 8.1).<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare wrote of this in *Antony and Cleopatra* (II.vi.26–29).

*Time: Afternoon or evening toward the end of November 43 B.C.*<sup>16</sup>

The Triumvirate appears to have just finished a long day’s work on the proscription lists. Although this scene feels like it takes place shortly following the assassination, historically there was an interval of over a year and a half between the arrival of Octavius in Rome and the Triumvirate’s proscriptions. In the play, Cassius and Brutus have begun levying armies in Asia Minor, but the Triumvirate, busy with their proscriptions, have not yet started the process of raising the money necessary for recruiting. This is why Antony sends Lepidus for Caesar’s will—“to cut off some charge of legacies” (l. 9).

*Interval between scenes: Several months.*

The two battles of Philippi took place during October 42 B.C. over two and a half years after the assassination and twelve months after the Proscriptions. Cicero was

cut down by Antony’s proscription on December 7, 43 B.C., six months after Portia’s suicide. Historically, Brutus and Cassius met in Sardis in mid-July 42 B.C.<sup>17</sup>

#### Act IV, scenes ii and iii; Day 5

The story: Brutus and Cassius argue about the conduct of the war. Overriding Cassius, Brutus determines that they should march immediately to confront the Triumvirate at Philippi. Caesar’s ghost visits Brutus.

*Place: First outside, then inside, Brutus’ tent near Sardis.*

Forty miles from the Aegean coast and 850 miles (as the crow flies) from Rome, Sardis was the capital of ancient Lydia. It was located near what is now the city of Izmir in modern Turkey (see figure 8.2). After the assassination, Cassius and Brutus claimed Syria and Macedonia as their parts of the spoils, so Asia Minor is logically where they would go to raise armies. In the play, Antony and Octavius have already crossed the Adriatic and are in the field near Philippi, which is ten miles from the coast in Thrace (northeastern Greece).

The scene moves from outside to inside Brutus’ tent at l. 52. Although many editors of the play note a scene division at this point, there should be no break in the action during performance. The Folio prints the stage direction “Mane[n]t Brutus and Cassius,” and the stage is certainly never cleared. On the Globe’s stage, this change could easily have been accomplished by simply bringing on the tent furnishings (chairs and a table) during the early part of the scene and by having Brutus and Cassius, like Caesar going “into” the Senate House in III.i, move upstage as the others go off or take their places as guards by the tiring-house doors. Since Brutus twice mentions his “tent” in the seven lines before the move (IV.ii.46–51), it seems unlikely that an actual tent was brought out and set up onstage.<sup>18</sup> The action is perfectly clear as written.

*Time: From early evening to shortly before dawn on a night in mid-July 42 B.C.*

Lucius’ entrance with a taper midway through the scene (IV.iii.157.1) signals the gathering dark. One

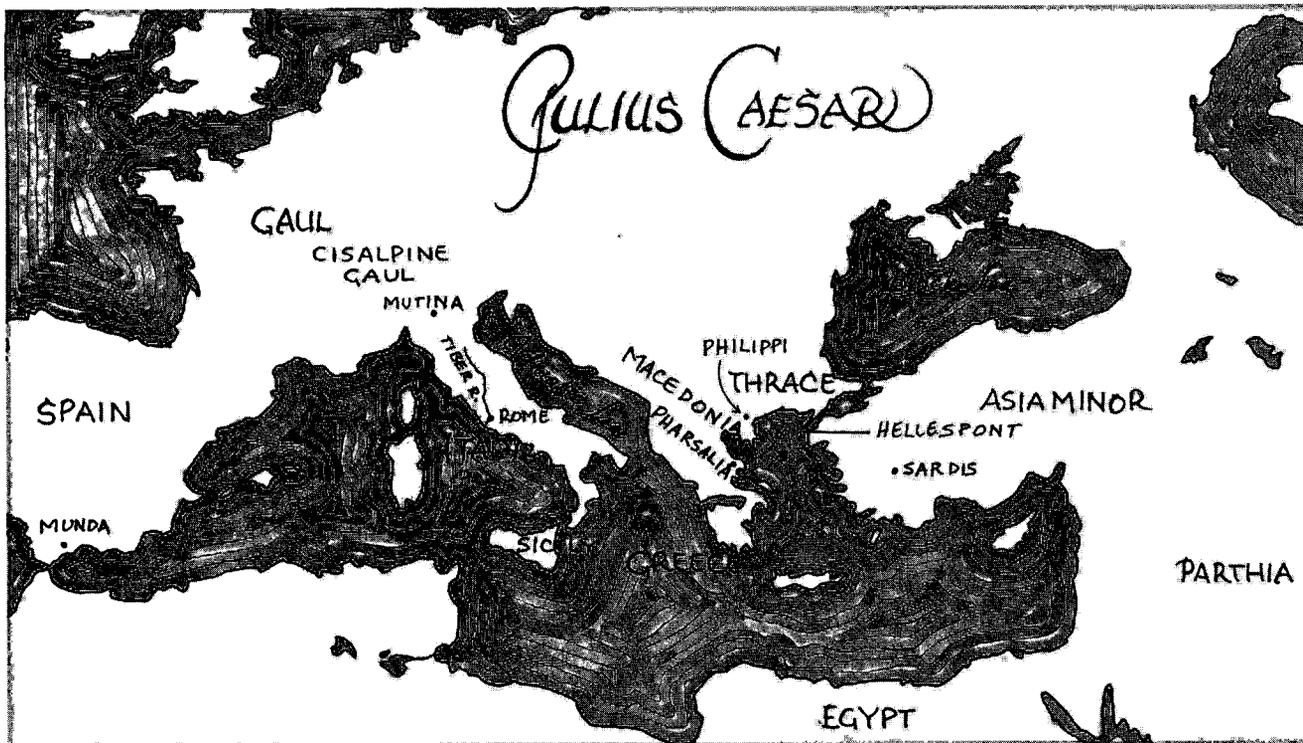


Figure 8.2. Map of the play.

hundred lines later, it's midnight, which (as Sohmer, 145, points out) was the hour when the Roman guard was changed. If Caesar's Ghost walks at the same time as Hamlet's father, it's 1:00 A.M. when he appears (see my discussion of time for I.i in *Hamlet*).

*Interval between scenes: Several months.*

The march from Sardis to Philippi was an arduous one of almost 300 miles that involved crossing the Hellespont (which the Republicans did in early September 42 B.C.) and marching into Thrace. Philippi, itself, was of no military importance. It was situated above the Via Egnatia, a major Roman military road that ran from Dyrrachium (in Albania) across Macedonia all the way to the Hellespont. There were actually two battles of Philippi, with twenty days elapsing between the first and second engagements (October 3 and 23), but Shakespeare compresses them into one long day.

### Act V, scene i; Day 6

The story: The armies meet and exchange insults on the plain near Philippi. Brutus and Cassius say their

farewells to each other in the event that they die or are captured in battle.

*Place: The plain of Philippi.*

Shakespeare probably didn't look any further than Plutarch's *Lives* for his knowledge of the battle. All the basic "facts" that the playwright uses to establish the lie of the battlefield and the disposition of forces on it can be found in Plutarch's *The Life of Brutus*.

1. The Republican forces approached Philippi from the "hills and upper regions" to the north of the battlefield plain (V.i.3; *Brutus* in Bullough, 117).

2. The Triumvir army held the weaker position on the plain. Brutus and Cassius had only to stay where they were and hold their stronger ground to win. As Octavius says,

Now, Antony, our hopes are answered:  
You said the enemy would not come down,  
But keep the hills and upper regions.  
It proves not so: their battles are at hand;  
They mean to warn us at Philippi here,  
Answering before we do demand of them.

(V.i.1-6; *Brutus* in Bullough, 118-19)

As a look at the historical battlefield will show (see figure 8.3), the Republicans were in an excellent defensive position. Camped on either side of the Via Egnatia, with a malarial marsh to their south and hills to their north and east, they had freshwater from a mountain stream (the Gangites) and supply lines to the harbor at Neapolis, which their fleet controlled. The Triumvirate, on the other hand, had no freshwater (they were forced to dig wells) and no supply lines. Charging the Republicans' strong defensive position would have been madness. Yet, with winter coming on, to stay where they were would expose them to hunger and disease.<sup>19</sup> Brutus and Cassius should have simply held their ground. Sooner or later, Antony and Octavius would have had to retreat.

3. Cassius opposed battle but was, as usual, overruled by Brutus (V.i.73–75; *Brutus* in Bullough, 118). Shakespeare is intent on painting the picture of a Brutus who is unalterably convinced of both the justness and the ripeness of his cause:

Our legions are brimful, our cause is ripe:  
The enemy increaseth every day;  
We, at the height, are ready to decline.  
There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now afloat,  
And we must take the current when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures.

(IV.iii.215–24)

Yet all of Brutus' military decisions—leaving Sardis to march to Philippi, the decision to attack once at Philippi, and his decision later to “try fortune in a second fight” (V.iii.109)—suggest a reckless commander who believes in an “all-or-nothing” decisiveness rather than in a wiser defensive stratagem. Plutarch's description of Brutus obviously influenced Shakespeare considerably:

But Brutus [. . .] did always before, and at that tyme also, desire nothing more, than to put all to the hazard of battell, assoone as might be possible: to the ende he might either quickly restore his contry to her former libertie, or rid

him forthwith of this miserable world, being still troubled in following and mainteyning of such great armies together. (*Brutus* in Bullough, 118)

I have mentioned the points where Shakespeare followed Plutarch exactly in the disposition of the battle, but there are two key areas where Shakespeare altered his source:

1. According to Shakespeare, the disposition of the armies was as follows:

Octavius (R)	Antony (L)
vs.	vs.
Brutus (L)	Cassius (R)

This was the reverse of the historical reality. Moreover, in the play, Octavius and Antony argue about who should take the position on the right wing, which was the most prestigious (and vital) militarily. As Sohmer points out, “Most men being right-handed, a sword-wielding army's right flank was more aggressive” (Sohmer, 168). Octavius prevails because he's “Caesar” (V.i.16–24). Note that on the Republican side, this honor goes to Cassius who was the “elder” soldier. This is very different in Plutarch, where it is Brutus and Cassius, not Antony and Octavius, who argue about wing positions:

Brutus prayed Cassius that he might have the leading of the right wing, the which men thought was far meeter for Cassius, both because he was the elder man, and also for that he had the better experience. But yet Cassius gave it him, and willed that Messala, who had charge of one of the warlikest legions they had, should be also in that wing with Brutus. (Bullough, 120)<sup>20</sup>

The change was probably made by Shakespeare to balance the dissention in both camps. Brutus and Cassius argue in IV.iii about money but resolve their differences. Antony and Octavius never settle their rivalry.

2. Shakespeare seems to infer that the Triumvir forces arrived at Philippi long before the Republicans. Back in IV.iii, Brutus reported that “young Octavius and Mark Antony / Come down upon us with a mighty power, / Bending their expedition toward

Philippi" (ll. 168–70), and Octavius and Antony appear in the field first in V.i. However, Plutarch makes it clear that while Philippi was held by eight legions of an advance unit of the Triumvir army, Antony did not arrive on the scene until after the Republicans had moved in and set up their camps on the best ground. Octavius, who was ill, arrived even later and never did take part in the fighting (*Brutus* in Bullough, 120, see also *Antony and Cleopatra*, III.xi.35–40).

So, the battle is ready to be joined. Brutus and Cassius have command of nineteen legions, or about 80,000 infantry, plus 20,000 horse. Antony and Octavius lead twenty legions of 90,000 men supported by 3,000 cavalry.<sup>21</sup>

*Time: Midday on October 3, 42 B.C.*

Cassius says of the eagles that accompanied the army to Philippi:

This morning are they fled away and gone,  
And in their steads do ravens, crows, and kites  
Fly o'er our heads, and downward look on us,  
As we were sickly prey. Their shadows seem  
A canopy most fatal, under which  
Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost.

(V.i.84–88)

A sun high enough in the sky to cause this "canopy of shadows" suggests the midday setting. On the night before this, Caesar "spirit" visits Brutus for the second time. In V.v, he tells us,

The Ghost of Caesar hath appear'd to me  
Two several times by night; at Sardis once,  
And this last night, here in Philippi fields.

(ll. 17–19)

*Interval between scenes: Perhaps an hour.*

The short scene ii takes place after the first action of the battle. In Shakespeare, Brutus has overrun Octavius' forces and is encouraging Cassius to "come down" from the hills to attack Antony because he perceives "But cold demeanor in Octavius' wing" (V.ii.4).

The actual beginnings of the battle, as described by Plutarch, were as follows: Antony saw that the Republicans weren't going to attack, so he conceived of a plan of cutting trenches through the marshland south of the plain to attack the enemy's supply lines to Neapolis (see figure 8.3). The work progressed over ten nights hidden by the dark and the tall marsh reeds. Eventually, on October 3, Cassius figured out what Antony was up to and started throwing up transverse work and a palisade to isolate Antony's trench builders from their camp. Seeing his plan failing, Antony launched a desperate all-out attack on Cassius' front. Brutus' troops heard the attack and, without waiting for orders, charged Antony's flank and then, unexpectedly, turned and overwhelmed the unprepared legions of Octavius, driving into their camp and routing them.

Shakespeare's version of the events essentially corresponds with this. Titinius says in scene 3,

O Cassius, Brutus gave the word too early,  
Who, having some advantage on Octavius,  
Took it too eagerly. His soldiers fell to spoil,  
Whilst we by Antony are all enclos'd.

(V.iii.5–8)

From the beginning of the battle, the Republican army was a shambles. Their intelligence and communications were especially faulty. Plutarch's story of the confusion over the "battle order" is witness to this:

Brutus that led the right winge, sent litle billes to the Colonels and Captaines of private bandes, in the which he wrote the worde of the battell: and he him selfe riding a horse backe by all the trowpes, did speake to them, and incoraged them to sticke to it like men. So by this meanes very fewe of them understoode what was the worde of the battell, and besides, the moste parte of them never taryed to have it tolde them, but ranne with greate furie to assaile the enemies; whereby through this disorder, the legions were marvelously scattered and dispersed one from the other. (*Brutus* in Bullough, 120–21)

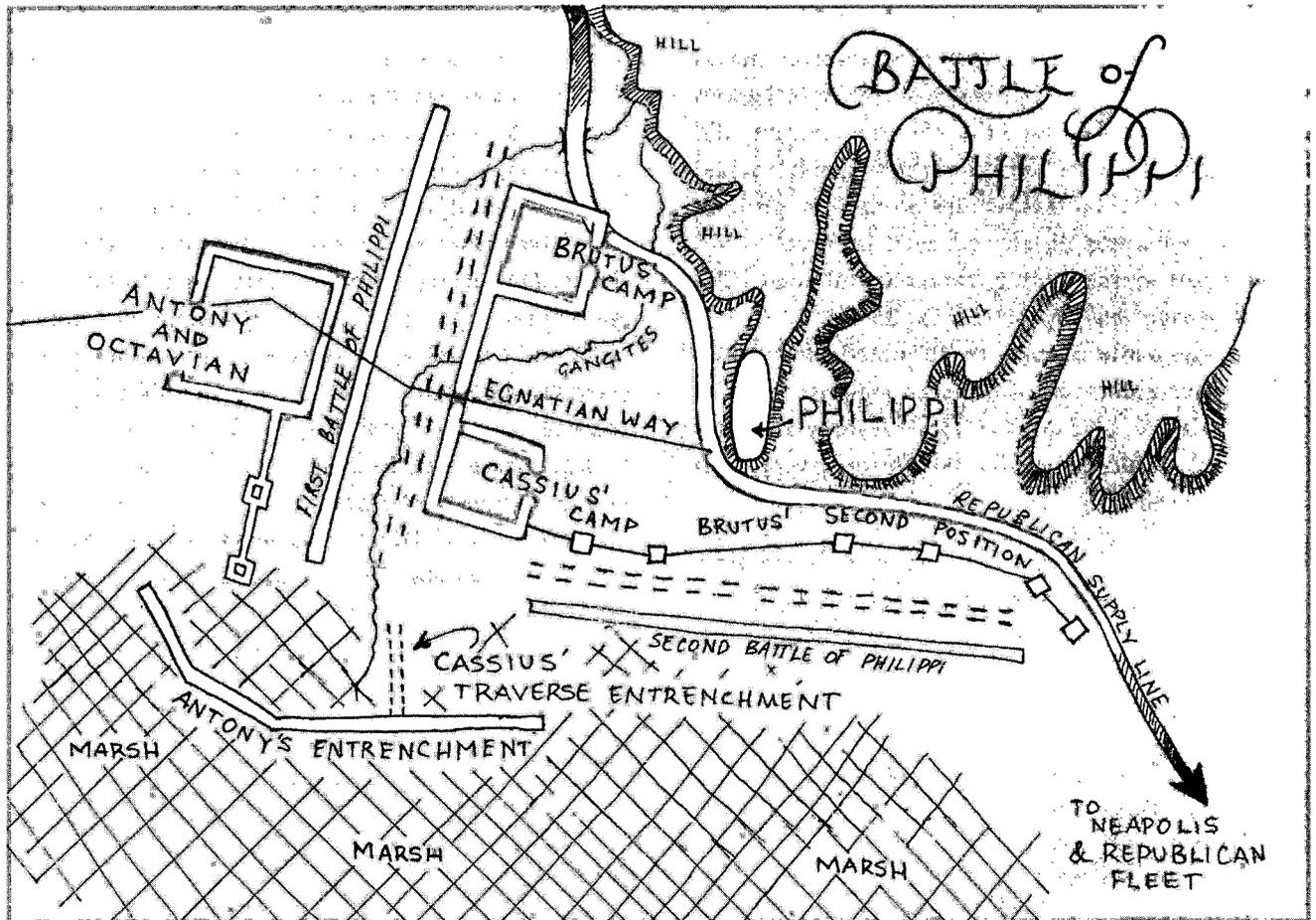


Figure 8.3. Map of the battle of Philippi.

### Act V, scene ii; Day 6

The story: The battle begun, Brutus sends word to Cassius encouraging him to attack.

Place: Octavius' half of the Triumvir camp.

Time: Afternoon.

Interval between scenes: An hour or so.

Because of his successful advance on Octavius, Brutus thought that victory was at hand. What he didn't know was that Antony's hazardous frontal assault on Cassius was, improbably, succeeding. After leaving his trench diggers as a feint to occupy the Republican left, Antony's legions broke through the gate in the wall that separated the two Republican camps and turned Cassius' flank. What Brutus should have done,

of course, was to keep his wing from advancing so far that they wouldn't be able to fall back and support Cassius' wing in case of need. Instead, as Titinius says, Brutus' troops fell to looting Octavius' tents when they ought to have turned and attacked Antony's army from the rear. (Shakespeare's irony in having the troops of the high-minded Brutus "fall to spoil" is wonderful. Remember, as the tent scene tells us, they were never paid.)

Meanwhile, Cassius' legions were fighting on two fronts. Cassius and part of his army were attacking along the entrenchments in the marshes, while the rest were trying to defend his camp against Antony's assault through the gate. As V.iii begins, Cassius has retreated to higher ground up into the hills toward Philippi and has had to kill one of his own ensigns fleeing from the rout in his camp. It is at this point that he realizes that Antony has broken his lines and is

burning the tents in his camp (V.iii.10–13). Unaware that Brutus' army has taken Octavius' camp, Cassius despairs and commits suicide.

### Act V, scene iii; Day 6

The story: Believing the battle lost and his friend Titinius captured, Cassius orders his slave, Pindarus, to kill him. Brutus discovers Cassius' body and launches a last attack.

*Place: In the hills above the battlefield of Philippi.*

*Time: 3:00 P.M.*

Brutus tells us the time at l. 109. The three o'clock hour when Brutus decides to "try fortune in a second fight" (l. 110) is clearly meant to parallel the three o'clock nighttime setting of II.i, when Caesar's fate was likewise irrevocably determined. On another matter, forty-nine lines earlier in the scene, Titinius had compared Cassius' death to the setting sun:

O setting sun,  
As in thy red rays thou dost sink to-night,  
So in his red blood Cassius' day is set!  
The sun of Rome is set. Our day is gone . . .

(V.iii.60–63)

But, as David Daniell points out, the image is certainly meant to be proleptic and refer to the "setting of Cassius' day"<sup>22</sup> and should not be read as a report of the current time. F prints the phrase in l. 61 as "sinke to night" (l. 2546) with the possible sense of "sink toward night."

*Interval between scenes: A few hours.*

At this point in the battle, in spite of their tactical errors, things are not going all that badly for the Republicans. As Messala says, "It is but change, Titinius; for Octavius / Is overthrown by noble Brutus' power, / As Cassius' legions are by Antony" (V.iii.51–53). But this is the high point for the Republicans. With Cassius dead, Brutus takes over command of the army

and mounts a counterattack. The second battle of Philippi actually occurred twenty days after the first, but Shakespeare combines them into one day.

### Act V, scene iv; Day 6

The story: Brutus' army is defeated in a second battle.

*Place: The battlefield at Philippi.*

*Time: Late afternoon.*

*Interval between scenes: Several hours.*

By the end of this scene, it is clear that the Triumvirate has been victorious and that all that remains are mopping-up operations. The only question yet unanswered is if Brutus is alive or dead. Antony retires to Octavius' tent.

Historically, Brutus behaved much more responsibly in the second battle. He wanted to retain his still-strong defensive position but was pushed into attacking by the insubordination of his troops. (How different is this from Shakespeare!) The events of the second battle were as follows: Brutus moved into Cassius' camp, where he could better guard his communications with Neapolis, and strung out a series of defensive redoubts facing the marsh to the south. He was encouraged by word from Dyrrachium that his navy had defeated and captured a convoy of supplies and reinforcements for the Triumvir army.<sup>23</sup> Still trying to cut off the Republican supply line, Antony moved his legions into a line facing Brutus' new defensive position and taunted Brutus' legions to come out and fight. It was at this point that Brutus lost control of his army. In truth, from the beginning, the Republican army's loyalty was suspect. As Appian says,

Brutus greatest fear [was that] those soldiers who had formerly served under Caesar should become disaffected and desert to the enemy. This both himself and Cassius had apprehended from the beginning, and they had been careful not to give any excuse for such disaffection toward themselves.<sup>24</sup>

In any event, Brutus' officers demanded that he answer the Triumvir's taunts and attack, which they did in the late afternoon of October 23. Antony and Octavius' forces routed them. Brutus escaped with four legions into the hills east of Philippi, where he committed suicide.

### Act V, scene v; Day 6

The story: Brutus kills himself and is praised by Antony. Octavius orders an honorable burial for Brutus.

*Place:* In the hills above the battlefield at Philippi.

*Time:* Night.

At the end of V.iii, Brutus vowed "yet ere night / We shall try fortune in a second fight" (ll. 109–10). He enters now with the "poor remains of friends," and with the mention of Statilius' torchlight signal, the audience knows that the battle has been lost and that night has fallen. There are several other references to the nighttime setting in ll. 41 and 78.

Thus, the time scheme of the play may be summarized as follows:

- Day 1: Act I, scenes i–ii  
Interval: One month
- Day 2: Act I, scene iii; Act II, scenes i–iv; and Act III, scene i
- Day 3: Act III, scenes ii–iii  
Interval: Twenty months
- Day 4: Act IV, scene i  
Interval: Several months
- Day 5: Act IV, scenes ii–iii  
Interval: Several months
- Day 6: Act V, scenes i–v

### Notes

1. Citations in the text from North's Plutarch will be from *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 5, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964).

2. Claire Colvin, "Hands to the Fore: An Interview with Terry Hands," *Drama* 164 (1987): 10.

3. For a discussion of the play's anachronisms (like the clock in the Forum), see John W. Draper, "The Realism of Shakespeare's Roman Plays," *Studies in Philology* 30 (1933): 225–31.

4. Cassius is certainly thinking of this when he compares Caesar to a wolf in I.iii: "I know he would not be a wolf, / But that he sees the Romans are but sheep" (ll. 104–5). See Naomi Conn Liebler's discussion of the Lupercal in *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 90–111. On the important parallels between the Lupercalia and the English Shrovetide season, see Richard Wilson, "'Is This a Holiday?' Shakespeare's Roman Carnival," *English Literary History* 54 (1987): 31–44.

5. H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), 77.

6. For a thorough treatment of this confusion, see Marvin Felheim, "The Problem of Time in *Julius Caesar*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (August 1950): 399–405, and Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 42–50.

7. Gary Taylor and John Jowett, *Shakespeare Reshaped, 1606–1623* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 3–50.

8. North's Plutarch in Bullough (95) says that Cassius spoke to Brutus before he approached any of the other conspirators because nobody else would join unless "Brutus were the chief of their conspiracie."

9. The paper that Lucius finds in Brutus' closet in II.i is the one given by Cassius to Cinna at the end of I.iii ("throw this / In at his window," ll. 144–45) and shouldn't be confused with those petitions Cassius talked about distributing at the end of I.ii.

10. Kristian Smidt, *Unconformities in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 49, thinks Shakespeare changed his mind at the end of I.iii, sending Cassius and Casca to Brutus' house rather than to their meeting with the conspirators at Pompey's Porch. But Cassius' words, "Let us go, / For it is after midnight, and ere day / We will awake him and be sure of him" (I.iii.162–64, italics added), are vague as to precisely when they will visit Brutus, and the three-hour interval between I.iii and II.i certainly gives them time to do both.

11. At II.i.110–11, Casca places Brutus' house west of the Capitol ("the high east / Stands, as the Capitol,

directly here"). But this is impossible. West of the Capitol stood the Campus Martius, a nonresidential area devoted to military training. W. A. Wright suggests that Shakespeare had London in mind: "the Tower [of London], which would be the building in London most resembling the Capitol of Shakespeare's mind, was as nearly as possible due east of the Globe Theatre" (cited in *The New Variorum Julius Caesar*, ed. Horace Howard Furness [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1913], 89).

12. Steve Sohmer, *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: The Opening of the Globe Theatre 1599* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 78 (hereafter cited in the text as "Sohmer").

13. Editor John F. Andrews (*The Everyman Shakespeare: Julius Caesar* [London: J. M. Dent, 1993], 86) has suggested that the "ninth hour" was chosen by Shakespeare to echo the passage from Matthew 27:45-46 concerning the Crucifixion: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" However, the biblical "ninth hour" would have been the ninth after sunrise (3:00 P.M., the hour of Jesus' death). Historically, Caesar was assassinated a little before noon; see Nicholas Horsfall, "The Ides of March: Some New Problems," *Greece and Rome* 21, no. 2 (October 1974): 197.

14. Suetonius, *The History of Twelve Caesars*, in Bullough, 152. North's Plutarch also alludes to the theatre as the site of the assassination: "the place where the murder was prepared, and where the Senate were assembled, and where also there stood up an image of Pompey dedicated by him selfe amongst other ornamentes which he gave unto the Theater" (Bullough, 85). Lizette Andrews Fisher, "Shakespeare and the Capitol," *Modern Language Notes* 22 (1907): 177-82, fully discusses both medieval and Renaissance conceptions of the Capitol and its location. On Shakespeare's understanding of the scene of the crime, see, for example, *Hamlet*, III.ii.103-4, where Polonius says, "I did enact Julius Caesar. I was kill'd i' th' Capitol."

15. Samuel Ball Platner, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 178.

17. Shakespeare skips over a good deal of the history of the conflict between the future members of

the Triumvirate that occurred in the interval between the assassination and the proscriptions (i.e., between Acts III and IV). However, in *Antony and Cleopatra* (I.iv.56-71), he fills in some of these details. After the assassination, Decius Brutus fled to Cisalpine Gaul in northern Italy. Antony led an army northward and besieged him in the town of Modena (Mutina). Back in Rome, Octavius, aided by Cicero, convinced the Senate of the lawlessness of Antony's actions and persuaded them to declare war on him. This they did and sent an army led by the consuls Hirtius and Pansa against Antony, who suffered a humiliating defeat at their hands in April 43 B.C. Antony was forced to retreat over the Alps into Gaul. Octavius recounts the hardships of this retreat in the later play.

17. Alain M. Gowing, *The Triumviral Narratives of Appian and Cassius Dio* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 110.

18. For a discussion of the use of tents on the Elizabethan stage, see George F. Reynolds, *The Staging of Elizabethan Plays at the Red Bull Theatre, 1605-1625* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 77-78, and Frances Teague, *Shakespeare's Speaking Properties* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1991), 21.

19. For an excellent modern account of the battle of Philippi, see T. Rice Holmes, *The Architect of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 80-89. See also Gowing, appendix 3, for side-by-side accounts of the battle from Appian and Dio.

20. In point of fact, Brutus and Cassius were exactly the same age.

21. Wisely realizing that the battle would be fought in close quarters by infantry, Antony had sent most of his cavalry back west to his base in Amphipolis.

22. *The Arden Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998), 311. See also Verity's note in the *Variorum*, 267, and Sohmer's discussion, 96-99.

23. North's Plutarch in Bullough, 126, says that Brutus was ignorant of the sea victory and that this ignorance was one of the reasons for his desperate and unadvised attack. However, Holmes, 87, citing Appian and Dio, makes the case that Brutus must have known of the capturing of the reinforcements.

24. *Appian's Roman History*, trans. Horace White, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 374. See also North's Plutarch in Bullough, 118-19.

# Shakespeare's Watch

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Buzz Podewell

*Volume 1*  
*Greek, Roman, and Italian Plays*

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