***Julius Caesar***

1. i. Murellus and Flavius. [2 counts against Caesar, at least: the defeat of Pompey and the robing of his images; for Elizabethans, popularity with the vulgar crowd may also have been a negative]

ii. Race begins; Cassius and Brutus talk; after offstage events, Casca reports. [Emphasis is repeatedly on Caesar’s humanity and mortality: in Calpurnia’s sterility, Cassius account of swimming and fever, Casca’s account of the swoon. Brutus is obsessed with honor, Cassius is consumed with envy, and Casca is being deliberately stupid. First omen: Soothsayer’s “Beware the Ides of March.” Evidence of ambition: deaths of Murellus and Flavius. Evidence against ambition: declining the crown – although he may have done so in order to please the crowd.]

iii. Casca and Cicero; Casca and Cassius; Cinna. [More omens: storm, fire, owl, lion, etc.]

1. i. Brutus at home alone, then with servant, then with conspirators, then with Portia, and finally with another conspirator. [Skepticism about Caesar’s claim to be superstitious; agreement that Caesar is susceptible to flattery; Brutus and Portia have very nearly ideal marriage, except that Brutus began the scene “at war with himself.”]

ii. Caesar at home alone, then with Calpurnia, then with Decius Brutus, and finally with the conspirators. [Omens, dreams, and interpretations of dreams multiply; although Caesar’s self-confidence amounts to arrogance, he yields to his wife, changing his mind to get the crown.]

iii. Artemidorus, with a sober warning.

iv. Portia, with well-founded anxiety.

1. i. Scene takes place at first on the way to the Capitol and then inside it; Caesar is assassinated. [Note good faith of Brutus in contrast to bad faith of Antony, foreshadowing next scene.]

ii. Brutus, speaking in prose, sways the vulgar crowd to see the assassination his way; then Antony, speaking in verse, producing a bloody spectacle, and appealing to the crowd’s greed, sways them to see the assassination in the opposite way. They become a mob.

iii. The mob kills the wrong Cinna.

1. i. New triumvirate: Octavius is honorable, but Antony is exploitative with regard to Lepidus.

ii. Beginning of quarrel between Brutus and Cassius, delayed to obtain privacy.

iii. Quarrel: at first over the honesty of Cassius, then over the ability of Brutus and Cassius as soldiers, then over denial of money from Cassius to Brutus, and then over how much they do or do not love each other; the poet’s interruption of their reconciliation lets them finish venting their anger on him. Cassius learns from Brutus that Portia is dead, and they drink together, fully reconciled; Titinius and Messala bring news, including that Portia is dead, which Brutus pretends not to have known earlier and bears nobly. They debate the location of the imminent battle, and the scene ends with Caesar’s ghost appearing to Brutus, who is by that time alone.

1. i. Octavius and Antony look likely to quarrel; they confront Cassius and Brutus with insults. Cassius, who scoffed at omens in II.i, confesses they are beginning to seem reasonable. Brutus ponders whether suicide is permitted.

ii. Battle message is sent.

iii. Antony having defeated Cassius, Cassius asks Pindarus to kill him, and so dies. Titinius sends Messala to Brutus with the bad news and then kills himself. Brutus, who has defeated Octavius, prepares to fight Antony.

iv. Lucilius, pretending to be Brutus, kills young Cato; Antony recognizes him, however.

v. None of Brutus’ friends will kill him after Antony defeats him, but Strato holds the sword for him to kill himself. Octavius pardons all who followed Brutus, Antony praises Brutus, and Octavius orders a funeral for him.

Focus

If this is the tragedy of Julius Caesar, as its name would imply it is, then we need to see everything bad that happens after his assassination as being a consequence of it. In his lifetime, Caesar polarized Romans into being for or against him; after his death, there seem to be many divisions of the republic.

Division among conspirators: In scenes I.ii, II.i, III.i, III.ii, IV.ii, IV.iii, and in all of Act V, Brutus is contrasted with Cassius in order to make Brutus look better, but that fact suggests that the play is, as it is frequently interpreted to be, the tragedy of Brutus.

Division among members of the triumvirate: Antony and Octavius are contrasted in III.i-ii, IV.i, V.i, and V.iv-v. These scenes set up *Antony and Cleopatra* in some respects, but Plutarch, whose lives of all the major characters serve as source material for both this play and the later one, rather than Shakespeare is likely to deserve credit for the apparent continuity.