

ENGLISH: *JULIUS CAESAR*

To what extent does Julius Caesar contribute to his own downfall?

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the titular character perishes in the first scene of the third act at the hands of Roman senators. The leader is killed before he is able to become an emperor and abolish the Roman Republic. There are many factors that lead to his undoing, including the plotting of the conspirators, as well as fate itself, possibly providing a predetermined path for Caesar to follow to his death. However, it is largely due to Caesar himself that he dies at this point in time, as he very well could have prevented it.

The conspirators, led by Cassius and Brutus, directly cause the death of Caesar after their thorough planning of his assassination. Cassius, in particular, is envious of the power that Caesar possesses and is consumed with this bitterness of Caesar. As he thinks that Caesar is accumulating too much power and becoming a "Colossus", much to his own displeasure, he resents and longs for the authority that Caesar has, and decides to kill him with the assistance of the other senators so that he himself may progress on the political hierarchy. Many of the conspirators, especially Cassius, do not see any reason why Caesar should hold any power over them and why they could not be in his position; hence, Cassius is motivated to act as the mastermind of the plot and kill Caesar. Cassius shows contempt for Caesar as he had to save him from drowning, as well as Caesar's behaviour "As a sick girl" after contracting a fever. As a result, Cassius does not see how "A man of such a feeble temper should / So get the start of the majestic world / And bear the palm alone", using this as an excuse for murdering Caesar, when in reality it is an attempt for personal gain. Furthermore, knowing that Brutus has already been contemplating turning against Caesar, Cassius tries to spur Brutus to action by telling him that "'Brutus' [name] will start a spirit as soon as 'Caesar'" and sends fake letters from Roman citizens to him. This strengthens Brutus's resolve to kill Caesar, as it appeals to his idealism. Being so quixotic, he instantly believes that the citizens of Rome actually share his opinion of Caesar, blinded by his own cause. This ultimately leads to Brutus's decision to participate in the plot against Caesar. This in itself is a great betrayal against his long-time friend. Although he is "at war with himself" in deciding his position against Caesar, he ultimately relinquishes his close relationship with him, which is exemplified when Caesar exclaims "Et tu, Brute," as he is utterly shocked by the fact that Brutus is too involved in the conspiracy against him. The conspirators, who are led by Cassius, commit the act of murder that leads directly to Caesar's defeat.

In addition, fate plays a significant role in the death of Caesar. Throughout the play, numerous omens and prophecies arise and are ultimately fulfilled, and it often appears that certain events, including Caesar's death, lie beyond human control. Until Caesar's death, each time an omen or nightmare is reported, the audience is reminded of his impending demise. The very first of these seen in the play is that of the soothsayer's warning for Caesar to "Beware the Ides of March". Already, this explicitly presents to the audience the day that will see Caesar's death. This ominous foretelling would have been especially foreboding in Shakespeare's Elizabethan times, during which the people were extremely superstitious and believed in the ability to see into the future. The dramatic irony created as a result of the soothsayer's warning would have built up suspense leading up to Caesar's death. Also, supernatural events that are incomparable to the terrible things in the natural world occur in the night when Casca meets with Cicero. These include "Men, all in fire, [walking] up and down the streets" and a lion that "glazed upon [Casca] and went surly by". Such omens as these that do present themselves represent a warning from the gods, symbolic of the destruction that the conspirators threaten to bring about. This demonstrates how Caesar's death is bound to happen, the act already foreseen by the heavens – once again, the work of fate. Similarly, the night before Caesar is killed, Calpurnia has a nightmare in which she foresees her husband's downfall. This is yet another menacing message from fate, which again warns of Caesar's impending doom. The elaborate details as seen by Calpurnia in her dream are uncannily satisfied soon afterwards, whereby the statue "like a fountain with an hundred spouts, / Did run pure blood" and indeed is surrounded by "many lusty Romans" who bathe their hands in the blood.

Subsequently, it gives the impression that Caesar's death may have been inevitable, that it was his pre-planned destiny to be killed at the hands of the senators.

Nevertheless, it is largely Caesar's fault that he is killed, and his actions and behaviour leading up to his death are demonstrative of this. Not only does he vie for absolute power over Rome, he also revels in the homage he receives from others and in his conception of himself as a figure that will live on forever in people's minds. He is much too ambitious in his pursuit of the crown and is overwhelmed by his desire for power as he climbs up "young ambition's ladder". He does not consider the consequences that may result, and Brutus fears that "Th'abuse of greatness" may "change his nature" for the worse. This is seen from the beginning of the play, when Caesar orders Antony to touch Calpurnia. Antony's reply that "When Caesar says, 'Do this', it is performed" shows how Caesar's authority is so strong that his word immediately brings about the requested action. Because of this ambition, Brutus turns against him and is motivated by the Roman Republic and its preservation, which Caesar threatens. He thinks of Caesar "as a serpent's egg/ (Which, hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous)" and in order to prevent his uprising for the benefit of society, he ultimately decides to "kill him in the shell". Brutus's decision to do this would have been prevented had Caesar recognised that he was becoming much too power-hungry for his own good, and for this, his friend helps to assassinate him. Moreover, Caesar's arrogance and obsession with his ego essentially blind him from his ensuing death. He believes he is "constant as the northern star" and that even danger itself "knows full well / That Caesar is more dangerous than he"; the irony lies in the fact that Caesar delivers this self-centred speech mere seconds before he is assassinated. This exemplifies Caesar's self-assertiveness and vaingloriousness, that he is able to look down upon everyone, especially as he repeats his name several times in the third person, which only further illustrates the extent to which he is conceited; little does he know that he will be stabbed brutally for thinking so highly of himself. His narcissism is substantiated through the course of the play, right from when he dismisses the soothsayer's warning of the Ides of March. His choice to ignore the soothsayer's advice proves the first in a series of failures to heed warnings about his death. When Calpurnia, following her nightmare, tells him that he must not leave the house, he repudiates these claims much like he does with the soothsayer, saying that when the threats "see/ The face of Caesar they are vanishèd". This shows how he thinks that he is above all, even the supernatural, and that he has nothing to fear. Although the augurers reveal that "They would not have [him] to stir forth today", he defies them. This is in spite of the fact that augurers, as well as soothsayers, held tremendous power with their visions during ancient Roman times and were widely believed to be gifted with the power of foretelling future events. Even Calpurnia recognises that he is egotistical and that "[his] wisdom is consumed in confidence". Additionally, Caesar fails to act on his suspicions of Cassius. He observes that Cassius "has a lean and hungry look" and "thinks too much", and is dangerous because of this. He expresses to Antony about how restless, brooding and potentially a source of threat, yet he never takes measures to ensure that Cassius is stopped. It turns out that Cassius would be the one who leads the conspiracy against him, which would probably not have occurred had he been active in eliminating Cassius, a threat that he very well recognised from the beginning. As a result, it is predominantly his own faults that lead to his preventable death.

Julius Caesar paints a picture of a man who is tragically murdered by some of those who are closest to him. Though the conspiracy against him leads right to his death, around which many omens emerge, suggesting the possibility of an inescapable fate, Caesar has himself to blame for the large part of his assassination, which could have been avoided if he were not so unseeing of his behaviour. From the play, one can understand that though there are many factors that may affect the outcome of a situation, the end result can often lie in one's own hands.