

## Supernatural Elements and Omens

Forces of nature play a very important role in *Julius Caesar* by *William Shakespeare*. There is much attention paid to omens and nightmares, and how they foreshadow the death of Julius Caesar. All events that lead up to the death of Julius Caesar are predicted by omens from multiple characters such as his wife Calpurnia, the soothsayer, and Artemidorus. These omens are ignored by many of the main characters. However, this does not make omens an unimportant part of life for these characters. Even after the death of Caesar, omens and nightmares occur, revealing the guilt-ridden nature of the conspirators. Hence, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* shows that there is always a relationship between omens and nature in everyday life and this affects those who believe in them. One might argue it even affects those who do not believe. Some people rely on them to show how to live their life, and what to do with it. Regardless, whatever happens in nature or society is portrayed by omens and vice-versa, which is how they are related.

In the play *Julius Caesar* by *William Shakespeare* and many other plays he has written, omens play a very large part. This play in particular has many omens, whether they are interpreted or not, and they foreshadow the death of Julius Caesar himself. In the beginning of the play, the soothsayer warns Caesar that he should "Beware the ides of March" (I.ii.18) the Ides of March refer to the 15<sup>th</sup> of March which is the exact day Caesar is killed. The soothsayer is an important character because he tries to warn Caesar one last time on the 15<sup>th</sup>, but he is also ignored. The first time he states this, Caesar responds with "He is a dreamer; let us leave him. Pass" (I.ii.24) and the second time "The ides of March are come" (III.i.1). The first time he shrugs it off, and the second time when he notices that it is the ides of March, he thinks that since nothing bad has happened yet, nothing will. This is why the soothsayer says "Ay, Caesar; but not gone" (III.i.2) meaning that it has come, but not gone and there is still time for something to go wrong. Likewise, when Calpurnia has a dream on the night before the 15<sup>th</sup>, lightning and thunder can be heard, which is an example of a bad omen and many Romans believe this. Her dream was that the statue of Caesar had 100 sword holes in him and the Romans had come to bathe in the blood flowing from it. "She dreamt tonight she saw my statue, / Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts, / Did run pure blood; and many lusty Romans / Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it" (II.ii.76-79) Caesar tells this to his friend Decius when he came to pick up Caesar to go to the senate house on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Calpurnia's dream foreshadows the death to come, but no-one believes this omen for it was portrayed as a good thing by Decius. Decius told Caesar that he knew it meant the dream was good and the Romans bathing in the blood was a symbol of them bathing in his influence and spirit. That was the only thing standing in the way of Caesar getting to the senate house, and now he would arrive on time, for his own death. People will believe anything if it's put into words they would like to hear. On the way there, after Calpurnia has heard of the plan from the soothsayer, she sent him to tell Caesar, only to be rejected by him. While going to the senate house, he is interrupted by Artemidorus "Hail, Caesar! Read this schedule" (III.i.3) and Caesar responds with "What touches us ourselves shall be last served". (III.i.8) This is the last time and last

chance to get Caesar from entering the house, but he has yet again ignored these very important omens, and enters, to be stabbed by 23 senators. These are the best known parts and lines from the play and symbolize how omens are used to foreshadow Julius Caesar's death. These quotes that predict the death of Julius Caesar are significant because it shows how many omens are used to predict how things may play out in the future. When there is misinterpreted, bad things can happen.

There is so much attention paid to omens in Julius Caesar, but the most important ones are often misinterpreted. The reason is that the characters do not want to interpret omens that did not suit what they were doing, or they did not like what it had to say. Everything, small or large, could have been interpreted into something good or bad. While Caesar is making his way down the street center in the beginning of the play, he tells his good friend Antonius "to touch Calpurnia; for our elders say,/ The barren, touched in this holy chase,/ Shake off their sterile curse" (I.ii.7-9). It was said that if a woman who might be infertile, and was touched with leather straps, would be cured of the infertility. This omen was one of the more wrongly interpreted in this play, because this could never be true. Some characters like Decius use the power of persuasion and conversation to sway others into believing them, and changing their certain opinion on an omen. For example "This dream is all amiss interpreted;/ It was a vision fair and fortunate:/ Your statue spouting blood in many pipes, / In which so many smiling Romans bath'd/ Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck" (II.ii.83-87) Caesar was not going to go to the senate house with Decius because of his wife Calpurnia's dream, but Decius persuaded him by changing the dream around, so the meaning was made as something good and Caesar liked what he was hearing. After her dream, before Caesar thought any good could come of it, he sent a servant to tell a priest to do a sacrifice. After the servant tells Caesar what happened "They would not have you stir forth today./ Plucking the entrails of an offering forth,/ They could not find a heart within the beast." (II.ii.38-40). When an animal doesn't have a heart, it was interpreted as a very bad thing, and that's what almost kept Caesar from leaving, but persuasion made him. It doesn't matter if it was a person, an animal, or Mother Nature, anything could have been made into a good or bad omen. In this play, many were interpreted right when it was too late to do anything about it. The misinterpretation of important omens caused Caesar to lose his life

Before the death of Caesar, many characters used to omens to predict how to live their life, and sometimes it caused them to have odd dreams and see things that weren't necessarily there. Even after the death of Julius Caesar, there are many omens that show the conspirators are very guilt ridden. The ghosts were mainly used to show how someone is guilt-ridden, like the conspirators, or in some cases, to give a bad omen to scare people. There was also the use of fire in the play, but only while bad things were happening, mainly as an interpretation of a bad omen. This happened a few days before Caesar's death with a woman in the street who tells Casca what she has seen. "Upon a heap, a hundred ghastly women,/ Transformed with their fear, who swore they saw/ Men all in fire walk up and down the streets." (I.ii.23-25). This relates to Caesar's death because this is not a normal thing to see or dream about. Since this woman is not one of the main characters, no-one notices

how it relates or foreshadows anything and because of how it's not normal, it is seen as a bad omen. The men on fire were always ghost like people, so this is one of the references to them. Right after Caesar is murdered, Brutus's wife Portia starts to become agitated because she kept the news of the conspiracy to herself instead of telling Caesar and Calpurnia. In addition to the "men all in fire" (I.ii.25) there is another reference to fire, which is when Portia commits suicide. This is after the death of Caesar, but is still similar, "That tidings came—with this she fell distract,/ And, her attendants absent, swallow'd fire." (IV.iii.154-155). In the plains of Philippi where Brutus was sleeping, he has a real-life/dream sequence where he sees the ghost of Caesar. "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./ I know my hour has come. (V.v.17-20). Brutus was so guilt-ridden, ashamed, grief stricken of how he killed one of his good friends, that he has been seeing Caesars ghost off and on a few times. He knows he has done something very bad, and decided to kill himself because of it. He finds that it is his time now to die; he kills himself, unlike the other three conspirators who had someone to kill them. He ends up impaling himself to "die honorably". In the beginning and the end of the play, omens are used for so many different parts to foreshadow, predict and tell the characters and people what they need to do.

There are many examples of how the forces of nature, omens and the supernatural show that they play many important parts in this play. They have been shown throughout and work towards foreshadowing the death of Julius Caesar because of the interpretation and misinterpretation of these many omens and forces of nature. Even after the death of Caesar, omens are part of what makes the many conspirators feel guilt, sorrow and doubt. Omens and the supernatural also scare many characters and sometimes gave false hope or false truth, but it doesn't matter because they believe them anyways. It is the same way now, though many people don't feel as strongly towards them. Many Romans believe in these kinds of things, but through time, omens, supernaturals and false gods don't have any real impact and are really figments of their imagination. The omens made decisions that they should have made themselves using logic.