Julius Caesar Summary and Analysis

Act 4

Act Four, Scene One

Antony, Octavius and Lepidus have banded together in a counter-conspiracy to destroy the men who killed Caesar. Antony has a paper with names on it and he says, "These many, then, shall die; their names are pricked" (4.1.1). The men then mark more names of people who must die, including the brother of Lepidus and the son of Mark Antony's sister. Antony states that, "He shall not live. Look, with a spot I damn him" (4.1.6).

Antony then sends Lepidus to Caesar's house to fetch the will. He hopes to somehow reduce the amount of money that needs to be paid to the beneficiaries. After Lepidus leaves, Antony tells Octavius that Lepidus was a poor choice to form the second triumvirate with. Octavius says, "You may do your will; / But he's a tried and valiant soldier" (4.1.28). Antony implies in his speech that he will eventually remove Lepidus from rule, but that they should keep him a while longer.

Act Four, Scene Two

Brutus has brought his armies to Sardis (now Western Turkey) and has set up camp. A messenger whom he sent to Cassius informs him that Cassius is not as friendly anymore. Brutus remarks, "Thou hast described / A hot friend cooling" (4.2.18-19). At that moment Cassius' army arrives and Cassius himself appears. He is angry with Brutus and starts to accuse him of wronging him, but Brutus makes him enter the tent so that they do not appear to be fighting in front of their men.

Cassius is upset that Brutus publicly disgraced a friend of his for taking bribes from the Sardians. Apparently Cassius had sent several letter to Brutus urging for the man's release, but Brutus refused. Brutus is furious that Cassius would even consider defending a man for taking bribes, arguing that Caesar was killed for exactly such behavior. He states, "What, shall one of us, / That struck the foremost man of all this world / But for supporting robbers, shall we now / Contaminate our fingers with base bribes" (4.2.73-76). Cassius and Brutus end up threatening each other, with each man convinced he is better able to lead the armies than the other.

The two men continue arguing, and Brutus finally tells Cassius that he is upset that
Cassius refused to send him gold with which to pay his soldiers. Brutus says, "I did send / To you for gold to pay my legions, / Which you denied me" (4.2.130-132). Cassius denies it, and in exasperation pulls out his dagger and offers it to Brutus. He tells Brutus to kill him if he is such an terrible man, but Brutus recants and they finally embrace in friendship.

A poet forces his way into the tent and demands that the generals (Cassius and Brutus) not be left alone. He argues that there is a grudge between them. However, having already resumed their friendship, they order him away.

Brutus finally informs Cassius that Portia is dead. Cassius, is surprised by the news and asks how she died. Brutus explains that Portia, left alone in the city after he fled, was upset that Octavius and Antony had seized control of Rome. She therefore took live embers and swallowed them, killing herself. Titinius and Messala arrive and Brutus immediately changes the subject. Cassius takes him aside and asks, "Portia, art thou gone?" (4.2.218). Brutus tells him not to speak of her anymore.

Brutus and Messala compare letters they have received informing them that Antony and Octavius are marching towards them from Greece. Messala tells Brutus that over one hundred senators have been put to death, but Brutus says his letter only mentioned seventy, including the orator Cicero. Messala then asks Brutus if he has heard anything about Portia, to which Brutus replies, "Nothing, Messala" (4.2.236), and asks Messala for news of her, pretending to hear of her death for the first time.

Brutus and Cassius then decide whether to wait for Antony and Octavius in Sardis or march to meet the opposing army in Philippi. Cassius prefers to wait and keep his men fresh, but Brutus thinks that the enemy is gaining in power every day and therefore must be stopped as soon as possible. Cassius finally agrees with him and leaves for his tent to rest before leaving in the morning.

Brutus remains awake with his servant Lucius. He orders two men, Claudio and Varrus, to enter his tent and sleep there in case he needs to send them on an errand during the night. Brutus then asks Lucius to play him a song on his stringed instrument, which he does until he falls asleep with his instrument in his hands.

Brutus starts reading a book, but the ghost of Julius Caesar appears, causing the flame to dim. Brutus demands to know who has entered the room, and the ghost tells him, "Thy evil spirit, Brutus" (4.2.333). Brutus then asks the ghost why he has come, and is told that the ghost will see him again at Philippi. The ghost leaves, and Brutus immediately wakes up everyone else in the room. He orders Lucius to go back to sleep, and tells Varrus and Claudio to inform Cassius that he should take
his army and march ahead.

**Analysis**

Antony, Octavius and Lepidus differ significantly from the original conspirators. They wish only to avenge Caesar's death and are willing to murder each of them, stating "These many, then, shall die; their names are pricked" (4.1.1). In their counter-conspiracy, they are willing to include relatives and friends on the list of those to die, demonstrating they are most serious and dedicated to the task of eradicating those who conspired against Caesar. Antony’s statement, "He shall not live. Look, with a spot I damn him" (4.1.6) brings to the forefront the calculating nature of the new rulers.

Brutus stands out as an example of Republican stoicism on the battlefield. He describes the cause of Portia's death as, "Impatience of my absence" (4.2.204). His calmness when speaking about his wife's death frightens even Cassius, who remarks that, "How scaped I killing when I crossed you so?" (4.2.202). He is further taken aback by the ease with which Brutus dismisses the topic when Titinius and Messala arrive. Brutus immediately changes the subject, forcing Cassius to take him aside and ask, "Portia, art thou gone?" (4.2.218). Brutus tells him not to speak of her anymore. Later, when Messala asks Brutus if he has heard anything about Portia, Brutus replies, "Nothing, Messala" (4.2.236). Stoicism and honor mean everything to Brutus, and like Hotspur in Henry IV, Brutus refuses to show weakness to his troops.

Letters and poetry appear a great deal throughout this play, possibly more than in any other of Shakespeare's plays. In the first act, Cassius writes anonymous letters to Brutus to convince him to joint he conspiracy, Artemidorus writes an ignored letter warning Caesar of the plot against him, and Cinna the poet is murdered. In this act, a poet again takes the stage, but Brutus orders him removed from his tent. In addition, both Brutus and Messala have letters regarding the state of Rome after Antony’s speech. Brutus states, "Mine [a letter] speaks of seventy senators that died / By their proscriptions, Cicero being one" (4.2.229-230). This mention of perhaps the greatest orator Cicero, a man identified closely with words, is almost an afterthought. Even Brutus, when trying to read his book, is unable to continue reading because the ghost of Caesar interrupts him. We therefore see first the manipulative power, and then the destruction and dismissal of literature and poetry after Caesar's death.

**Act 5**
Act Five, Scene One

Octavius and Antony, located on a battlefield in Philippi, have just learned that Brutus and Cassius are marching towards them. A messenger arrives and tells both generals that the enemy is so close that they must do something quickly. Antony orders Octavius to, "lead your battle softly on / Upon the left hand of the even field" (5.1.16-17). Octavius contradicts him, and decides to march on the right hand side. Antony is annoyed by this, asking, "Why do you cross me in this exigent?" (5.1.19). Octavius replies, "I do not cross you, but I will do so" (5.1.20).

Brutus and Cassius arrive at the head of their army. Octavius asks if he should give the sign of battle, and Antony says, "No, Caesar, we will answer on their charge" (5.1.24). The generals all meet and converse, but only to insult each other. Antony accuses Brutus and Cassius of being "villains," whereas Cassius tells Brutus that they would not have to listen to Antony now if he had been allowed to kill him as he originally wanted to. The men refuse to back down and are forced to return to their armies and prepare for battle.

Cassius calls Messala over and tells him that this battle is similar to the one Pompey fought and lost against Caesar. He points out that although not normally superstitious, he is upset by the fact that two eagles who accompanied the army all the way from Sardis have been replaced by crows and ravens, symbols of bad things to come. He ends his speech by stating, "Our army lies ready to give the ghost" (5.1.88).

Cassius then talks to Brutus and asks him what he will do if they should lose the battle. Brutus rejects suicide, but also tells Cassius that he will never be dragged through the streets of Rome as a bound prisoner. The two generals say a dramatic farewell and return to their respective armies to prepare for battle.

Act Five, Scene Two

The battle begins and Brutus gives Messala orders to bring to Cassius. He tells Messala to inform Cassius that he needs to advance faster in order to catch Octavius' flank which is not fighting very well.

Act Five, Scene Three

Cassius is upset because he is afraid his men are running away from the field of battle. He tells Titinius that he personally killed his standard-bearer who was trying
to run away and took up the banner himself. Titinius informs him that Brutus "gave the word too early" (5.3.5) and that his soldiers quickly started looting the enemy camp once they captured it. In the meantime, Antony's army has been able to surround Cassius.

Pindarus arrives and tells Cassius to run further away. He informs his general that the tents have been taken and are burning in the distance. Cassius sends Titinius to check on some soldiers and find out if they are his men or not, and simultaneously sends Pindarus up a hill to watch and see what happens. Pindarus misinforms him, telling him Titinius is captured and killed by the troops.

Cassius calls Pindarus back down from the hill and hands him the sword with which he stabbed Caesar. He tells Pindarus to take the sword and stab him with it. Pindarus obeys, kills Cassius on the spot, and runs away.

Titinius and Messala return to where Cassius is lying. Titinius has a wreath of laurels on his head, a sign of victory, and is telling Messala that Brutus has defeated Octavius but Antony has conquered Cassius' army. He sees Cassius on the ground and realizes that Cassius misunderstood what happened on the battle field. Titinius sends Messala to Brutus to tell him what has happened. He then turns to Cassius' body and says, "Alas, thou hast misconstrued everything" (5.3.83). Titinius then picks up Cassius' sword and kills himself.

Brutus arrives and sees the two dead bodies lying on the ground. He remarks, "Oh Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet" (5.3.93). Brutus quickly recovers from the loss of his confederate and immediately orders the soldiers to prepare for another battle, this time against Antony.

**Act Five, Scene Four**

Brutus appears again, still leading his troops. He tells his men to continue fighting and leaves them in the midst of battle. Cato valiantly fights but is killed. Lucillius pretends to be Brutus and challenges the soldiers, but is quickly captured. The soldiers send for Antony, thinking they have finally captured Brutus. Antony arrives and recognizes Lucillius and tells his soldiers that although they did not get Brutus, they still captured a nobleman. He orders his soldiers to continue fighting.

**Act Five, Scene Five**

Brutus arrives accompanied by several stragglers from his defeated army. He first asks Clitus and then Dardanius to kill him so that he will not be captured. They
both refuse and stand away from him. He then asks Volumnius to kill him as a friend, but Volumnius tells him, "That's not the office for a friend, my lord" (5.5.29). At the sound of another call to battle, Brutus hastily gets up and orders his men to flee ahead of him. He keeps Strato with him, and finally convinces Strato to hold the sword while he impales himself on it.

Antony and Octavius arrive with their army. They find Brutus dead on the ground and Strato nearby. Strato informs them how Brutus died, and Antony states, "This was the noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.67). He says that of all the conspirators only Brutus believed that he was killing Caesar to uphold the Roman Republic; the others were simply jealous and power hungry. Antony continues, saying, "his life was gentle, and the elements / So mixed in him that nature might stand up / And say to all the world 'This was a man'" (5.5.74). Octavius orders the body placed in his tent and to cease fighting. The play ends with Octavius stating, "So call the field to rest, and let's away / To part the glories of this happy day" (5.5.79-80).

**Analysis**

For the first time in the play Octavius emerges as a new leader. It has been said that each act of the play belongs to a different man. Thus the first act belongs to Cassius, the second to Brutus, the third to Caesar, the fourth to Antony, and the last act to Octavius. When Antony orders Octavius to, "lead your battle softly on / Upon the left hand of the even field" (5.1.16-17), he is contradicted for the first time. Octavius decides to march on the right hand side instead. Antony, annoyed by this challenge to his power, asks, "Why do you cross me in this exigent?" (5.1.19). Octavius replies, "I do not cross you, but I will do so" (5.1.20). This statement also foreshadows how Octavius will eventually cross Antony by removing him from of power. By the end of Act 5, Octavius rules singly. Unlike Caesar, with whom the audience saw a personal side, Octavius is depicted as ruthless, barely human, and a politician without moral scruples or emotional conflict.

This shift in power from Antony to Octavius is signified through the use of names. Up until the point where Octavius challenges Antony, he is referred to as "young Octavius". Only after Octavius asserts his authority is he referred to without the demeaning modifier. After asking Antony if he should give the sign of battle, Antony replies to Octavius, "No, Caesar, we will answer on their charge" (5.1.24). For the first time, Octavius is called only "Caesar", and for the rest of the play is referred to similarly, even by Cassius.

The omens first seen in Act 1 reappear here as well. In fact, Cassius is so
overwhelmed by the omens that he compares this battle to the one that Pompey fought and lost. Cassius speaks of the noble eagles being replaced by kites and ravens, a change considered to be a very bad sign. This superstition leads him to believe that he will lose the battle, and he remarks, "Our army lies ready to give the ghost" (5.1.88). The ghost, of course, is that of Caesar, whose presence and memory is the reason for battle.

The deaths of Cassius and Brutus demonstrate that Caesar, even in death, is as strong as ever. His spirit dominates in the battle. Cassius' last words are, "Caesar, thou art revenged, / Even with the sword that killed thee" (5.3.44-45). Brutus also invokes the image of Caesar, not only when dying, but also when he sees Cassius dead on the ground. He says, "Oh Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet" (5.3.93). As he commits suicide he again mentions Caesar, saying, "Caesar, now be still. / I killed not thee with half so good a will." (5.5.50-51).

Titinius, when he discovers Cassius, recalls the words of Cicero in the beginning about men construing the plot as they saw fit. He speaks to Cassius and says, "Alas, thou hast misconstrued everything" (5.3.83). This remark, meant to imply that Cassius killed himself because he was too quick to assume defeat, also is a comment on the fact that Cassius killed Caesar. It can easily be interpreted as stating that Cassius misconstrued the facts about Caesar, allowing him to convince Brutus to join the conspirators through his plots. This further implies that even the necessity of killing Caesar was misconstrued, thus giving it a literal meaning, "thou hast misconstrued everything."

At Brutus' death, Strato comments, "For Brutus only overcame himself" (5.5.56). This represents the fact that for Brutus this play is a tragedy, a play about dealing with the internal struggle of whether to support Caesar as a friend or kill him as a dictator. It is this internal struggle which causes the civil war between Brutus and Antony, and the deaths of so many Romans.

Brutus' inability to overcome his internal struggle allows Antony to say, "This was the noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.67). He is implying that only Brutus really believed that he was killing Caesar to uphold the Roman Republic. However, the audience must remember how easily Cassius manipulated Brutus into murdering Caesar. Despite his seeming eagerness to achieve power, Brutus is the only conspirator to maintain his humanity and dignity throughout the play. He stands as a symbol of honor against the dishonorable Cassius who lies, manipulates, and wishes to take bribes, and Brutus' rhetoric implies that he would never have killed Caesar except to defend the Roman Republic. Thus Antony continues his epilogue
for Brutus, saying, "his life was gentle, and the elements / So mixed in him that nature might stand up / And say to all the world 'This was a man'" (5.5.74)

Brutus' tragic ending is, however, mirrored by the ascension of Octavius. Thus, the play's conclusion combines the sad defeat of the "noblest Roman" with the victorious emergence of a new Caesar. It is therefore Octavius, not Antony, who ends the play with the lines, "So call the field to rest, and let's away / To part the glories of this happy day" (5.5.79-80). Happy is hardly the words the audience would use to describe what has taken place. Yet, for Octavius, this is the day that begins his rule over Rome and is worthy of celebration.