

Analyzing Literature: Julius Caesar

Use what you've learned about Shakespearean drama to analyze this scene from the beginning of *Julius Caesar*. In the scene, Cassius finally persuades Casca to join the conspiracy against Caesar. It is night, and a thunderstorm is raging. When Cinna, another conspirator, enters, they discuss winning over Brutus. Notice how Cassius manipulates the others.

Act 1, scene 3, lines 103-164

Cassius. And why should Caesar be a tyrant then?*

Poor man! I know he would not be a wolf
105 But that he sees the Romans are but sheep;
He were no lion, were not Romans hinds.
Those that with haste will make a mighty fire
Begin it with weak straws. What trash is Rome,
What rubbish and what offal, when it serves
110 For the base matter to illuminate
So vile a thing as Caesar! But, O grief,*
Where hast thou led me? I perhaps, speak this
Before a willing bondman. Then I know
My answer must be made. But I am armed,
115 And dangers are to me indifferent.

Casca. You speak to Casca, and to such a man
That is no fleering telltale. Hold, my hand.*
Be factious for redress of all these griefs,*
And I will set this foot of mine as far
120 As who goes farthest.

Cassius. There's a bargain made.
Now I know you, Casca, I have moved already
Some certain of the noblest-minded Romans
To undergo with me an enterprise
Of honorable-dangerous consequence;
125 and I do know, by this they stay for me*
In Pompey's Porch; for now, this fearful night,
There is no stir or walking in the streets,
And the complexion of the element*
In favor's like the work we have in hand,
130 Most bloody, fiery, and most terrible.

[Enter Cinna]

Casca. Stand close awhile, for here come one in haste.

Cassius. 'Tis Cinna. I do know him by his gait.*
He is a friend. Cinna, where haste you so?

103-111 Cassius says the only reason for Caesar's strength is the weakness of the Romans, who are female deer (**hinds**) and trash (**offal**) for allowing such a person as Caesar to come to power.

111-114 Cassius says that he will have to pay the penalty for his words if Casca is a submissive slave (**willing bondman**).

117 fleering telltale: sneering tattletale

118-120 Be factious . . . farthest.
Form a group or faction, to correct (redress) these wrongs, and I will go as far as any other man.

125-126 by this . . . Porch: Right now, they wait (**stay**) for me at the entrance to the theater Pompey built.

128-130 the complexion . . . terrible: the sky (**element**) looks like the work we have ahead of us—bloody, full of fire, and terrible.

132 gait: manner of walking

Cinna. To find out you. Who's that? Metellus Cimber?

135 **Cassius.** No, it is Casca, one incorporate*
To our attempts. Am I not stayed for, Cinna?

Cinna. I am glad on't. What a fearful night is this!
There's two or three of us have seen strange sights.

Cassius. Am I not stayed for? Tell me.

Cinna. Yes, you are.
140 O Cassius, if you could
But win the noble Brutus to our party—

Cassius. Be you content. Good Cinna, take this paper*
And look you lay it in the praetor's chair,
Where Brutus may but find it, and throw this
145 In at his window. Set this up with wax
Upon old Brutus' statue. All this done,
Repair to Pompey's Porch, where you shall find us.
Is Decius Brutus and Trebonius there?

Cinna. All but Metellus Cimber, and he's gone
150 To seek you at your house. Well, I will hie*
And so bestow these papers as you bade me.

Cassius. That done, repair to Pompey's Theater.

[*Exit Cinna*]

Come, Casca, you and I will yet ere day
See Brutus at his house. Three parts of him*
155 Is ours already, and the man entire
Upon the next encounter yields him ours.

Casca. O, he sits high in all the people's hearts,*
And that which would appear offense in us,
His countenance, like richest alchemy,
160 Will change to virtue and to worthiness.

Cassius. Him and his worth and our great need of him
You have right well conceited*. Let us go,
For it is after midnight, and ere day
We will awake him and be sure of him.
[*Exeunt*]

135-136 It is . . . stayed for: This is Casca, who is now part of our plan (**incorporate/To our attempts**). Are they waiting for me?

142-146: Cassius tells Cinna to place letters for Brutus at several locations, including the seat of the praetor, a position held by Brutus.

150-151 I will . . . bade me: I'll hurry (**hie**) to place (**bestow**) these papers as you instructed me.

154-156 Three parts . . . yields him ours: We've already won over three parts of Brutus. The next time we meet him, he will be ours completely.

157-160 he sits . . . worthiness: The people love Brutus. What would seem offensive if we did it will, like magic (**alchemy**), become good and worthy because of his involvement.

162 conceited: judged

Answer the following questions on your own paper, using complete sentences and specific details from the text.

1. Find examples of rhetorical questions and parallelism that Cassius uses in lines 103-115. What ideas does he want Casca to accept?
2. Reword the exchange between Cassius and Casca in lines 111-120 to sound like modern speech. Use the sidenotes to help you.
3. Review the boxed details. What might the thunderstorm foreshadow about the conspirator's plans?
4. What qualities of Brutus make him so valued by the conspirators?
5. How would you describe the character of Cassius judging by his words and actions in this scene? Support your answer with specific details from the text.