

# ShakesDownE3

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Hi, I'm Bryn Boice, and this is The ShakesDown, a podcast where I explore meaning and hidden clues within Shakespeare's text in a fun and accessible way. The ShakesDown is for Shakespeare lovers and haters, students, teachers, aficionados and really anyone who likes a little language puzzle from time to time. Let's get started.

This month's episode explores one of Cassius' famous monologues in *Julius Caesar*. Act one, scene two, lines 142 through 170. As mentioned on the last episode, The Shakedown Podcast is most satisfying when you have the text in front of you, and it's even better if you have a pencil to mark that bit of text up. I should also mention that you'll probably hear me shuffling papers and grabbing books off my bookshelf, because I'm doing the work live as we record. So forgive the shuffles, I pray you.

Okay, so first let's talk context. The historical events depicted in *Julius Caesar* took place from about 44 BC to 42 BC, and specifically the assassination of Julius Caesar on March 15th, 44 BC, a date known as the Ides of March. You can look into this more, but for a kind of eerie fun's sake—the Roman calendar was a lunar based calendar, the Ides being the first full moon of their year—but also when all debts for the year should be paid. Kind of like our tax day. So. Ooh, right before this monologue is delivered by Cassius—who's a Roman senator—to fellow Senator Brutus, a Soothsayer has entered the public square and warned Julius Caesar, “Beware the Ides of March.” That's where that comes from! Caesar scoffs at this seemingly crazy person and continues on to the feast of Lupercal, where Caesar is offered, by the citizenry, a makeshift crown – three times. Now, I want to give you a little more context here for this speech, because these guys just got back from a civil war, and Caesar has returned in triumph over his political rival, Pompey. He's welcomed back into the city as a hero. And there is now, um, a significant lack of any kind of opposition; opposition party, basically. Like checks and balances, to his power now. And this deeply concerns the senators of the Roman Republic, who just got done fighting for, at least in the play, a republic versus an empire run by one man—like a king, and emperor, right? They're looking for Senate rule. For rule by the people. Not tyranny, not a king. Okay. Important to keep in mind.

The play itself, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, it was written around 1599 to 1600 and something to just keep in mind, while you're reading all of *Caesar* and in just this piece, was the national worry of Queen Elizabeth the First, dying at the height of her power without an heir, and this possibly plunging England into civil war. So it's an important and powerful allegory that Shakespeare has chosen here. It's kind of cool. Okay, so let's read this piece. Um, and just before Cassius speaks, Brutus exclaims at the fact the citizen crowd keeps shouting for Caesar. So Brutus says, “Another general shout, I do believe that these applauses are for some new honours that are heaped on Caesar.” Okay, so there's, the citizens have shouted and Brutus is like, wow, another one. Um, looks like they're honoring, or they're heaping on honors on Caesar. Okay, so Cassius says... monologue begins. 1s

Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world like a Colossus. And we petty men walk under his huge legs. And peep about to find ourselves dishonourable graves. Men sometime are masters of

their fates. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings. Brutus and Caesar. What should be in that Caesar? Why should that name be sounded more than yours? Write them together. Yours is as fair a name. Sound them. It doth become the mouth as well. Weigh them. It is as heavy. Conjure with them. Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar. Now in the names of all the gods at once, upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed that he has grown so great? Age, thou art shamed! Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods. When went there by an age since the great flood, but it was famed with more than with one man. When could they say till now that talked of Rome, that her wide walls encompassed but one man? Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough, when there is in it but one only man. Oh, you and I have heard our fathers say there was a Brutus once that would have brooked the eternal devil to keep his state in Rome as easily as a king. *1s* Then. Shout. Shout. Trumpet, trumpet. A short line filled with the the stage directions of another general shout.

Okay, so let's paraphrase. That feels pretty clear, but let's break it down into a paraphrase so we really know what's going on with all of these images that Cassius has brought up. Okay, so man, oh man, it's like we have, we've had this general shout. Brutus is a little concerned. And Cassius says, oh, man, he's... it's like he's straddling the narrow world like some kind of giant. So just sort of imagine this, this big Colossus, this giant, and the world is like, beneath him, between his legs, practically. And we petite men walk under his huge legs and peek out to just find our graves. As if we are his servants or we are his slaves. Right? *1s* And then he says, men, though, can be masters of their fate—of their destiny. *1s* Brutus, our problem is not destiny. Not fate (the stars) not fate, but ourselves, like, we are the problem. Brutus and Caesar. He compares them side by side. What's so special about Caesar? Why should that, why should the name Caesar be shouted, like those guys are doing right now, more than yours? Brutus, write the names together on a page. Yours looks just as good. *1s* Say them both aloud. Yours is just as pleasant to say. Weigh the names! Weigh the names and people. It's just as heavy. They're an equal weight, the names of the people. They're equal weight. You want to do magic with them? Fine. Brutus will call up a spirit, the ghosts, just as well as Caesar could. So now he's saying, now, in the name of God, can you tell me what kind of meat? What kind of meals is Caesar feeding on that has made him grow so mighty? *1s* And then he says, Age thou art shamed. He's saying, the people of our time, our moment, should be ashamed. But Rome has lost the ability to raise noble men. It's really, um, talking about the age and the country right now. Ah, they should be ashamed of themselves. And then he says, when was there a time since the great flood, meaning Noah's flood, right? So when was there a time since Noah's flood that didn't contain more than one big famous man? When could anyone, speaking of Rome, say before this time, right now, that just one man ruled the entire city? That Rome is only, only Caesar. Right? *1s* It says indeed, now, it's like Rome only has room for one man. And then he says an interesting thing. Yeah. Something to remember is that *Brutus* is Brutus' last name. He was Marcus Junius Brutus. So he says, oh, you and I have heard our fathers say, our ancestors, other Brutuses, right? Our ancestors would have let the devil rule the Roman Republic before he would allow a king. A freaking monarchy? No. Right. Oh, okay. It's intense. *2s* Our ancestors would have let the devil rule this country before we would have had a monarch. Yuck. An emperor? No, this is a republic, right? Oh, that was intense. Okay, I need a breather. Maybe a joke break. Um, I'm going to tell you the joke, we're going to take a tiny break, and then we're going to come back. *1s* Why did the Roman woman never win at hide and seek? We'll be right back. *9s* And we're back. And here's the answer to our fun Caesar joke. Why did the Roman woman never win at hide and seek? Because Julius Caesar.

Ahhh, okay. Great. Sorry I had to do that. Um, there are so many. There are so many fun Caesar jokes. I might tell another one at the end of this. Okay, so welcome back here in this monologue,

Cassius, as you can see, was trying to gauge Brutus' feelings about Caesar and the seeming reach of his power now that he's back from the Civil War.

So how does verse help the actor playing Cassius? So let's look, we're just going to go through like we've done in the last two episodes. We're going to go through and we're going to beat out the iambic pentameter. We're going to force this verse into iambic pentameter to find out where Shakespeare has left. Clues and irregularities and all irregularities are clues to the actor. *1s* They're super important for actors to do that homework because you find out all these treasures that he left for his actors because they didn't rehearse like we do. Okay. So let's do it. We're going to force it into iambic pentameter. Find those irregularities. Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world. Perfect line of iambic pentameter. Like a colossus. And we petty men. Okay, so there. I would probably put a trochee at the top of that one. So it's: LIKE a Colossus, and we petty men. Feel that, LIKE, is more important than A. *1s* Walk under his huge legs and peep about. Okay. To find ourselves dis-hon-or-a-ble graves. Okay, so we see how dishonorable, we've talked in other episodes about eliding and shortening words when we can. Um, and so in some other sentences, you might see dishonorable, dishonorable being four syllables to kind of shorten it. But here it is elongated. It is an important word. So it gets all five of its possible syllables. Right, to find ourselves dishonorable graves. *1s* Okay. Next sentence. Men at some time are masters of their fates. Again, there's a nice trochee sort of throwing that little, that little stab, a sort of love. The idea of the trochee there is just a little, just a little like step men at some time are masters of their fates, right? Little tricky at the top. *1s* The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars. Perfect line. Gets back to gets back to that perfect iambic. But in ourselves that we are underlings. Okay, perfect. Here's a fun sentence. Brutus and Caesar. What should be in that? Caesar? Whoa. Okay. Whoa. So long. Right? Um, so this is one of those great examples of what, um, one of the books that I've talked about in the last, uh, few episodes is Giles Blocks speaking the speech he calls this, and I've actually never heard it called this elsewhere, but he's the RSC guy, and I, I love the term because it really is awesome. It's called an epic caesura. And, um, it basically what it is, is a is a moment that the Shakespeare has written in that is actually a bit of a pause or a place for a tiny stage direction. And, um, there in, in Shakespeare, we don't like to put in too many pauses because we're supposed to be acting on the line. Um, you may be able to hear my dog. That's Phoebe. Hi, Phoebe. Okay. Um, so, Brutus and Caesar, there's a colon there. You'll see. Brutus and Caesar's. We already are starting with a tricky Brutus. Brutus and Caesar, two of them right in a row. And then a colon. And then a line that goes on too long and is. And that doesn't fit in the iambic pentameter. And the last word of that is super important. So it's almost like starting a new set, like a new moment of meter. So Brutus and Caesar. Oh. What should be in that Caesar. So that moment there, that oh, that breath, that epic caesura is there. And that is a clue to the actor. That is a moment to really, um, to kind of milk to take stock of that. And this is the beginning of a grand list. So he's giving a clue to his actor, hey, something is coming. So let's look at that. Why should that name be sounded more than yours? Perfect. It gets back on track a little bit, but then we get. We start our list *1s* right them together. Yours is as fair a name. Oh, did you hear that? Little, that little yours is as fair a name. So we have a *dactyl* – that is a stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. These are very, very rare, but they do occur. And then that sentence “write them together” it also it begins with a trochee. So even just that. So we had that epic caesura. We had a perfect line of iambic pentameter following. And then. Let me start. Let me tell you how awesome you are, Brutus. Think of yourself. Write them together. Yours is as fair a name. *1s* And then we're going to go back to iambic, forcing that: Sound them. It doth become the mouth as well. You hear that? Sound THEM? We would say SOUND them. It doth become the mouth as well. Great. See that very next sentence? We're going to do the same thing. Another trochee to start. *1s* If not, it would sound like this: Weigh THEM it is as heavy: conjure with them.

Okay, so we have a feminine ending. Remember we talked about, um, the leftover syllable at the end of a sentence that is in an unstressed place. So let's look at that again. Weigh them. It is as heavy. Conjure with 'em: hear that 11th syllable, the 'em is not a super important word or stressed word, so it's a feminine ending—meaning that he's getting a little bit emotional here. He's like letting that bit of emotionality sort of eke out over the end of that meter, which otherwise was perfect, except for that trochee at the top. “Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with them,” right? It's really fun. So he's like, laying out this list. Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar. We hear “spirit” as one syllable. It's very common in Shakespeare's verse to have a couple of words that are always sort of squished. Spirit is one of them. You don't usually do it in two syllables, like we say spirit. “Speert”. It's the same with words like heaven. Many times heaven is heav'n, one syllable. So if we're looking at this and we don't allow the spirit to be one syllable, listen to how it sounds. “Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar” —hear how that doesn't quite work? But if we squish it, if we elide spirit to one syllable we have Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar. So that's feminine, but it's not OFF. Right? And then we don't say BruTUS. So we have another beautiful top of line ‘initial trochee’ —that’s what that's called. So Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar again feminine. So he has two feminine endings in a row! So he's like—and Cassius is known as a hothead—so him having a couple of lines at the end of his list, those two feminine endings, show you that we're supposed to be building, building his emotion here. And then his next line shows you that he IS, he is building an emotion, “Now in the name of all the gods at once.” Okay. So we can also make that an initial trochee. Now, in the names of all the gods at once, that now is also a sort of a fun stabby word there at the top of that sentence, making it a trochee. Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed? Gets himself back, back to normal. Right. Upon what meat that this our Caesar feed. Next line that he is grown so great. Age, thou art shamed. Okay, let's do that one again. That he is grown so great age thou art shamed. Oh, okay. So that is a great place for a ‘medial trochee’ so that he has grown so GREAT. AGE, thou art shamed. We really want to think about that word age, because it is the subject of the rest of this monologue, The Age, the times we live in. We probably want to make that another one of those fun, sort of stabby sounding trochees. Let's listen to this one more time. “That he has grown so GREAT. AGE, thou art SHAMED.” Right. We don't really want to hit that pronoun as much as we want to hit age, because we're so mad about this age, right? 1s

Rome THOU hast lost the breed of noble bloods. Same thing here. Trochee at the top. ROME, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods. 1s Okay, “When went there by an age since THE Great flood. We probably make a trochee there too, SINCE the Great Flood. Right on, “But it was famed with more than with one man.” Right back to perfect. When could they say till now that talked of Rome. That her wide walls encompassed but one man. Okay, so I want you to just take a look now, before we keep, before we move too far. He's getting, um, he's getting more, EVEN. And back to iambic and back to the perfect ten syllables. And he's also repeating the idea, the repetition of ‘one man’-- and repetition is a huge rhetorical device, uh, a favorite of Shakespeare. So this one is great. He's going to say one man, one man, one man, many, many times at the end of this. So just take a look at that repetition. “But it was famed with more than with one man.” “When could they say till now that talked of Rome,” “that her wide walls encompassed but one man,” “now is it Rome indeed and room enough,”-- do you hear how regular that is? And how almost staccato we're starting to get now? Now is it Rome indee and room enough, when there is in but one only man?” All of those are perfect, right? 2s

“Oh, you and I have heard our father say,” “there was a Brutus once that would have brooked”.

Okay, now HERE's a fun sentence. Okay. I'm going to go ahead and do this. I'm going to like, force it into iambic so you can hear how odd it is. The ETerNAL deVIL to KEEP his STATE in ROME. Whoa. Okay, so this is one that you could elide and it is in some instances written as t-h apostrophe eternal, making it th'eternal. Basically, just asking the actor not to do a huge glottal stop there, not to say the eternal e, th'eternal devil to keep his state in Rome. The other thing is, is that the way that devil is actually spelled in the folio, it is d I u e l l. So this probably, in the time that Shakespeare was doing this particular piece, that devil was also said with one syllable. So let's just imagine that it's pronounced 'dyul'. Okay. But we all know what it *means*. Th'eternal dyul to keep his state in Rome. See how that's a perfect line? If we elide the top and we take an archaic form, it's perfect—actors today don't say that—but it probably is supposed to be a perfect line. It's not supposed to be an imperfect, irregular, like, 'clue line' like other lines are. Th'eternal devil to keep his state in Rome. We're going to just take that as a perfect line. We're not taking any oddities from that. Then the next line is the short line, because there are stage directions! There is another shout and a trumpet sound. Right. So "as easily as a king shout, shout, trumpet trumpet." Okay? So that short line is filled with sound, and they share that line together—the sound, and as easily as a king. Pretty cool.

So what do we get from this? Right. We get the verse mimicking the sound of nature more. There are fits and starts of discovery. Cassius discovering what he's going to say. But the interesting thing about that is that Cassius has sort of planned this, right? Right after this scene, Cassius has a soliloquy where he's talking to the audience. "Okay, I've begun to prime Brutus for the task ahead. He needs to be talked to a certain way." Right. So to me, the fits and starts in the series of trochees and then getting back on track, it tells me that Cassius is a *good actor*. Like he is upset, but he's also, like perfectly tempering his temper for Brutus because he knows he needs to be talked to a certain way. Cassius is a good actor. He is manipulative in a very surgical way. And it's for the good of the country, he thinks. But in the following scene, upon Caesar's entrance, he actually, Caesar says, "yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look. He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous." So what's cool I think about the verse, and what we found, was that in Shakespeare's time, the person playing Cassius wouldn't have that awesome clue from Caesar. It wouldn't be in his script. He only gets his lines and then his cue, just like the couple words of cue pickup. So he would not have that awesome clue. "Lean hungry, thinks too much." Um, he wouldn't have that until the rehearsal where they're putting it all together, so the rhythm of the verse is helpful. These fits and starts. Shakespeare has thrown the rhythm in a few places that could clue the actor into those traits. The verse has helped him create the character, right? He is an actor. He has a list. He has a repetition. He has worked this all out. But the fits and starts, the sincerity and the 'sound of reason' that blank verse gives you. <sup>1s</sup> All of those fits and starts means that he's maybe making some of this up, OR he's *planned* the sound of this. I think that's a really interesting thing. <sup>2s</sup>

Okay, so I'm going to do this one more time with all these clues unlocked and see what we found. <sup>2s</sup> Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world like a Colossus. And we petty men walk under his huge legs. And peep about to find ourselves dishonourable graves. Men at some time are masters of their fates. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings. Brutus and Caesar. What should be in that Caesar? Why should that name be sounded more than yours? Write them together. Yours is as fair a name. Sound them. It does become the mouth as well. Weigh them. It is as heavy. Conjure with them, Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar. Now in the names of all the gods at once, upon what meat does this our Caesar feed that he has grown so great. Age, thou art shamed. Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods when went there by an age since the great flood but it was famed with more than with one man? When could they say till now that talked of Rome, that her wide walls encompassed but one man. Now is it Rome indeed, and

room enough, when there is in it but one only man. Oh, you and I have heard our fathers say there was a Brutus once that would have brooked the eternal devil to keep his state in Rome as easily as a king. *1s* Ah! *1s* that's such a fun one.

Okay, one more Caesar joke to celebrate the Ides of March. “According to historians, Julius Caesar was quite *religious* in his later years. Near the end of his reign, he became a HOLE-Y man. *1s* Okaaay. Great. Thanks!

That's it for this episode of The ShakesDown. As you can see, there's so much to shake down in even one small passage in a Shakespeare play. This is Bryn Boice. Thanks for joining me. Please remember to support the show by following or subscribing wherever you listen to podcasts. And stay tuned for our next episode where I'll be breaking down a bit of *1s* Henry V. *1s* Good night, sweet pod!