

By Jim O'Connor

The magnificence of the script of Julius Caesar is that it allows us to look at a 400-year old play concerned with events that happened 2,000 years ago in order to speculate about our future.

Although we certainly live in a world different from Shakespeare's of the late fourteenth century and Caesar's of the first century B.C., our basic fears and motivations have not changed significantly. We continue to fret about what might happen, and we act based on suspicion rather than fact. We, like the characters in Shakespeare's play and Caesar's world, continue to wreak havoc on our society while providing little positive outcome. During the last twenty years we have seen hysterical masses rioting, looting, and marauding. We have and unfortunately continue to have violent civil strife in all parts of the globe. We have had our share of radical change brought about by a single cowardly but murderous action against a government or leader. Country after country has teetered between tyranny and anarchy.

When one approaches Shakespeare it is always amazing to see that he somehow knew so much about the behaviors of societies, history, mythology, and human psychology long before there were computers to process the material or grants to sponsor the research. His uncanny ability to see the workings of the human soul is astonishing. His ability to serve as an early warning system to his culture and each succeeding culture is unique to say the least.

Julius Caesar is constructed with characters not only in conflict with their environment, but each are also in conflict with themselves. The fully fleshed characters are doing battle first with themselves to find out where they stand in a critical situation, and then attacking others who disagree once the positions are clearly defined. These battles lead to the destruction of individuals and groups and bring a society from its relative high point back to a very primitive state. The victims have been individual people, but the larger society itself has lost its vibrant face. This is the lesson of Julius Caesar, and it is one we must keep repeating. How wonderful it would be to live in a world where Julius Caesar is a quaint relic of a time long gone, 400 or 2,000 or more years ago.