

Julius Caesar haunts with moral ambiguity

By [Colin Thomas](#)

This Equity co-op mounting of Julius Caesar takes a difficult play and streamlines it; watching this production, I felt like I was zipping through ancient Rome on a Vespa-and missing very little.

Julius Caesar is hard to figure. Brutus, the protagonist, murders Caesar, who is his best friend, for no clearly defined reason. Cassius goads Brutus into the crime by appealing to his ambition, but it's all pretty vague, and, even after Brutus has assassinated Caesar, Marc Antony, who loved the victim, refers to his killer as a virtuous man.

You could argue that Brutus's lack of clear motivation implicates us all; his selfishness can't be explained away by specific psychology. If a good person can be this venal, surely everyone can. Antony is also contradictory-perhaps in a more explicable way. For the most part, he pretends to honour Brutus's pack of supporters while secretly plotting against them. But Antony, who embodies the virtue of love, also knowingly provokes the bloody chaos of civil war.

However you cut it, Julius Caesar's combination of ruthlessness, moral ambiguity, and superstition provides a clear mirror for our capitalist age, which can seem so spiritually bankrupt despite the many loud protestations of faith.

So I'm glad to see this play and I'm glad to see it dressed in business suits, as it is here.

Director Jack Paterson and his collaborators have done such an efficient job of cutting the script that the story flies by without ever losing its clarity. Paterson takes liberties-members of the funeral crowd chant and heckle Antony in ways that aren't indicated in the text-but it all works. And the director is deft in his use of stylized movement. In one passage, Caesar's ghost saunters through a field of warriors, casually felling every one of them with his mere presence.



Just that succinctly, an entire battle is represented.

Most importantly, the actors all know what they're saying. In a compelling performance, Craig Erickson digs deep into Antony's rage, intelligence, and grief. Lucia Frangione is sexy and smart as Brutus's wife, Portia. And, in a scene that's all too brief, Teryl Rothery draws a compelling portrait of Calpurnia, Caesar's prescient wife.

Craig March's Brutus is more problematic: the actor gets trapped by his own affable stage presence. I clearly saw Brutus the Good, but March didn't persuade me that there was another, more sinister side; the actor doesn't fully embody the character's paradox. Still, he's worth watching, and so is almost everybody else.

The night I attended, the small but appreciative audience couldn't have outnumbered the cast by more than two to one. This show deserves bigger crowds.

URL Source: <http://www.straight.com/article/caesar-haunts-with-moral-ambiguity>