

**SHAKESPEARE:
SELECT PLAYS.
JULIUS CAESAR**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649125715

Shakespeare: Select plays. Julius Caesar by William Aldis Wright

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WILLIAM ALDIS WRIGHT

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Clarendon Press Series

ENGLISH CLASSICS

JULIUS CÆSAR

W. A. WRIGHT

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LONDON, EDINBURGH
NEW YORK AND TORONTO

17
5520/11 Clarendon Press Series

SHAKESPEARE

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JULIUS CÆSAR

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Oxford

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

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OXFORD
PRINTED AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
BY HORACE HART, M.A.
PRINTED TO THE UNIVERSITY

P R E F A C E.

THE Tragedy of Julius Cæsar appeared for the first time in the folio edition of Shakespeare's Works which was brought out by Heminge and Condell the players in 1623. If it was printed earlier than this no copies are known to survive. But the play was probably written at least twenty years before. Malone fixed upon 1607 as the date, mainly on the ground that a play called *The Tragedie of Iulius Cæsar* was in that year published by William Alexander of Menstrie, afterwards Earl of Stirling, who he thinks would have been unlikely to attempt such a subject if it had been already handled by Shakespeare. On the other hand he considers that Julius Cæsar was written before *Antony and Cleopatra*, which was entered at Stationers' Hall, May 2, 1608. 'Not to insist,' he says, 'on the chronology of the story, which would naturally suggest this subject to our author before the other, in Julius Cæsar Shakespeare does not seem to have been thoroughly possessed of Antony's character. He has indeed marked one or two of the striking features of it, but Antony is not fully delineated till he appears in that play which takes its name from him and Cleopatra. The rough sketch would naturally precede the finished picture.' (Shakespeare, ed. Boswell, 1821; ii. 447, 448.) According to Mr. Collier (Shakespeare, vii. 5) there was an earlier edition of Lord Stirling's tragedy in 1604, but I have only been able to see that of 1607. The fact, however, is of no importance as regards the date of our play, to which Lord Stirling's work has not the smallest resemblance. Mr. Collier maintains that there is good ground for believing

that Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* was acted before 1603. In that year Drayton published his *Barons' Wars*, a development of an earlier work which, under the title of *Mortimeriados*, had appeared in 1596. In his description of Mortimer, Book III, the following stanza occurs, which has some points of resemblance to Mark Antony's character of Brutus in the last scene of the play. I quote from the edition of 1605, not having had access to that of the earlier date :

'Such one he was, of him we boldely say,
 In whose rich soule all soueraigne powres did sute,
 In whome in peace th' elements all lay
 So mixt, as none could soueraignty impute ;
 As all did governe, yet all did obey,
 His liuely temper was so absolute,
 That t' seemde when heauen his modell first began,
 In him it shewd perfection in a man.'

Of this there is no trace in the *Mortimeriados*. Mr. Collier continues, 'Drayton afterwards changed the title from "*Mortimeriados*" to "*The Barons' Wars*," and remodelled the whole historical poem, altering the stanza from the English ballad form to the Italian *ottava rima*. This course he took before 1603, when it came out in octavo, with the stanza first quoted, which contains so marked a similarity to the lines from "*Julius Cæsar*." We apprehend that he did so because he had heard or seen Shakespeare's tragedy before 1603; and we think that strong presumptive proof that he was the borrower, and not Shakespeare, is derived from the fact, that in the subsequent impressions of "*The Barons' Wars*," in 1605, 1608, 1610, and 1613, the stanza remained precisely as in the edition of 1603; but that in 1619, after Shakespeare's death and before "*Julius Cæsar*" was printed, Drayton made even a nearer approach to the words of his original, thus :

"He was a man, then boldly dare to say,
 In whose rich soul the virtues well did suit;
 In whom so mix'd the elements all lay,
 That none to one could sovereignty impute;

As all did govern, yet did all obey:
 He of a temper was so absolute,
 As that it seem'd, when *Nature* him began,
 She meant to show all that might be in man.*

We have been thus particular, because the point is obviously of importance, as regards the date when Julius Cæsar was brought upon the stage. . . . That Drayton had not remodelled his "Mortimeriados" as late as 1602, we gather from this circumstance, that he reprinted his poems in that year without "The Barons' Wars" in any form or under any title.' (Shakespeare, ed. Collier, 1843, vol. vii. p. 4.) In the note to v. 5. 73-75, reasons are given why too much weight should not be attached to this apparent resemblance between the passages in Shakespeare and Drayton, and I am glad to find myself supported in this view by Mr. Grant White, whose note I had not consulted at the time of writing my own. Speaking of the resemblance between Drayton and Shakespeare in the passages which have been quoted, he remarks, 'But this resemblance implies no imitation on either side. For the notion that man was composed of the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, and that the well-balanced mixture of these produced the perfection of humanity, was commonly held during the sixteenth, and the first half, at least, of the seventeenth century, the writers of which period worked it up in all manner of forms.'

The point, however, is of no very great importance, for if Shakespeare, as is not improbable, referred to his own play when he makes Polonius say (Hamlet iii. 2. 108, 109), 'I did enact Julius Cæsar: I was killed in the Capitol; Brutus killed me,' this carries us back at least to 1602. But Mr. Halliwell (Phillips) has quoted a passage from Weever's *Mirror of Martyrs*, which seems to contain a direct reference to Shakespeare's work, and would thus place it before 1601, when Weever's poem was published. The passage is as follows:

*The many headed multitude were drawne
 By Brutus speech, that Cæsar was ambitious,