

["Overview: *The Ides of March*."](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRG&u=mmlin_s_ccreg) Gale Online Encyclopedia. Detroit: Gale, Literature Resources from Gale. Gale. Cape Cod Regional Technical High School. 4 Jan. 2011 <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRG&u=mmlin_s_ccreg>.

Title: Overview: *The Ides of March*

Novel, 1948

American playwright (1897 - 1975)

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The Ides of March is set in ancient Rome. The emperor, Julius Caesar, is aware that many people are conspiring to have him assassinated, including friends and members of his own family, and he understands that some of the conspirators believe his rule is damaging Rome. Caesar acknowledges that he limits freedom, but contends that people do not want to be accountable for all of their deeds. Aware that he will be killed one day, Caesar states his hope that his death will be by the hand of someone who respects the glory of Rome.

Several people involved with plots against Caesar are introduced. The first of these is the mother of Marcus Brutus, who may have bore Caesar's illegitimate son. Her hatred of Caesar goes back many years, and she wants her son to replace the Roman emperor. Brutus himself wavers between being Caesar's enemy and his friend. Clodia Pulcher, a beautiful, wealthy, ambitious and lustful woman, is another female enemy of Caesar's. Clodia has two co-conspirators—Clodius, her brother, and Catullus, a young Roman poet of some note. Catullus, hopelessly in love with Clodia, is totally in her command. To please her, he writes and publishes many works criticizing Caesar, but Clodia continues to treat him with indifference, which only makes Catullus want her more.

The scene switches to Egypt, where Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, is planning a visit to Rome. Back in Rome, Caesar and the city make preparations appropriate for receiving royalty. Cleopatra's infamy—she is known for having had many lovers, including Caesar—precedes her. The society women of Rome and even Caesar's wife, Pompeia, agree to receive her only because Caesar has commanded them to. Caesar suspects that Cleopatra might be involved in a plot against him, perhaps with his loyal minion, Marc Antony. Caesar was nearly assassinated during a previous secret visit to Cleopatra. Cleopatra arrives safely in Rome just in time for a festival, The Mysteries of the Good Goddess, an annual celebration held on December 11 with the Vestal Virgins and every virtuous, high born Roman woman taking part.

Because of Clodia's many treacheries, some believe she will not be allowed to participate in the festival as a "virtuous" woman. Petitions asking for her rejection are sent to one of the festival's directors, Lady Julia Marcia, Caesar's aunt. Caesar intervenes on Clodia's behalf, knowing that Clodia believes the gods and fate dictate her actions. A compromise is reached: Clodia will be allowed to attend the ceremonies only until the Vestal Virgins make their appearance. Cleopatra is given the same restriction, but she chooses not to attend. Clodia, not satisfied with the compromise, devises a ruse. During the Mysteries, Clodius dressed like a woman and participates with her, but the ruse is exposed. A man's attendance at the sacred rite causes outrage among the people of Rome. Clodia and her brother are placed under arrest, but Caesar promptly

pardons them, much to the public's dismay. Both Cleopatra and Pompeia are suspected of having known of the ruse, which leads Caesar to divorce Pompeia.

Caesar marries Calpurnia. When Catullus dies, Caesar ruminates on the poet's death and his own convictions about the gods, becoming more uncertain of the role the gods play in the events of the world and suspecting that each person controls their own fate at times. However, Caesar cannot free himself from superstition, continuing to use diviners and magicians and to look for good omens each day. On a day he does not find positive omens, one of his soothsayers cautions Caesar about upcoming days that promise to be dangerous. When these days pass without incident, Caesar becomes more lax and prepares for his March 17 departure to conduct a battle on the Pathian front. He requests Brutus and his wife to look after Calpurnia while he is at war, believing that Brutus is his loyal friend. Brutus agrees to care for Caesar's wife.

Despite more omens and warnings about danger—with ominous portents for March 15, The Ides of March—Caesar continues his normal activities. On the 15th of March, he walks to the Senate, intending to give a speech before he leaves for war, but Caesar never makes it to the building. Conspirators circle him, and one man stabs him in the throat. Then Caesar is stabbed 23 more times. Accepting his fate, Caesar gathers his toga around him. During the conclusion a rumor passes that Caesar accepted his fate after seeing Brutus among the assassins and approving of him as his killer.

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