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The Business Affairs of Mr Julius Caesar

Bertolt Brecht

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Bertolt Brecht's extraordinary historical novel presents an aspiring scholar's efforts to write an idealized life of Julius Caesar twenty years after his death. But the historian abandons his planned biography, confronted by a baffling range of contradictory views. Was Caesar an opportunist, a permanently bankrupt businessman who became too big for the banks to allow him to fail – as his former banker claims? Did he stumble into power while trying to make money, as suggested by the diary of his former slave? Across these different versions of Caesar's career in the political and economic life of Rome, Brecht wryly contrasts the narratives of imperial progress with the reality of grasping self-interest, in a sly allegory that points to the Weimar Republic and perhaps even to our own times.

Brecht reminds his readers of the need for constant vigilance and critical suspicion towards the great figures of the past. In an echo of his dramatic theories, the audience is confronted with its own task of active interpretation rather than passive acceptance -- we have to work out our own views about Mr Julius Caesar.

This edition is translated by Charles Osborne and features an introduction and editorial notes by Anthony Phelan and Tom Kuhn.

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