



Et Tu, Brute?: A Short History of Political Murder (Profiles in History)

Greg Woolf

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Why did Caesar have to die--and why did his death solve nothing? The plot was confused, the execution bungled, and within hours different versions of the event were circulating. It was the end of republican Rome and the beginning of the Roman Empire--and yet everything about it remains somewhat mysterious.

Beginning with this legendary political assassination, immortalized in art and literature through the ages, Greg Woolf delivers a remarkable meditation on Caesar's murder as it echoes down the corridors of history, affecting notions and acts of political violence to our day.

Assassins Brutus and Cassius dined with their fiercest enemies within days of the murder--and were then hunted down and killed. After the murder neither conspirators nor Caesar's partisans knew how to react. From these beginnings this book follows the normalization of assassination at Rome, cataloguing the murder of Caesar after Caesar and recording the means, methods, and motives of the perpetrators. How was the Roman Empire so untouched by these events? And how had the Republic contained such violence between friends for so long? Woolf shows how Caesar's death--and the puzzled reactions to it--points back to older ethics of tyrannicide.

When is it justified to kill a head of state? Does extra-judicial execution provide answers worth the cost of the ensuing chaos? Ranging among texts by Cicero, Suetonius, and Seneca, plays by Shakespeare and Corneille, and the ideas of Michel Foucault and Francis Fukuyama, Woolf pursues these questions through the ages. His book tells us not only how, but why, Caesar's Vast Ghost still holds us spellbound.

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