

The assassination of Julius Caesar serves as a watershed moment in the metanarrative of Western history. Its prominence in cultural representations, however, is not due to the political significance of the action in the transformation of Roman power; rather, it is assigned meanings that touch on larger elements of the human experience. The HBO series *Rome* follows in this tradition by depoliticizing the assassination, using both story arc and cinematic technique to reveal the metaphoric weight of the death of Caesar.

Recent television serials play out the assassination in variety of ways. In *Xena: Warrior Princess*, Caesar is established as a traitor who has cast aside friends and ideals for the sake of ruthless ambition. The assassination itself, however, is contextualized within a wealth of Christian references, visually paralleled to Xena’s self-sacrifice for the sake of “good” in the world. In ABC’s *Empire*, Caesar is a true-hearted populist, championing Rome’s commons against the greed of the aristocrats. Caesar’s murder, however, is explicitly compared to the gladiator Tyrannus’ back-alley fight with the thugs who have stolen his small son; in both, fatherly love struggles desperately against agents of underhanded corruption, bereft of human feeling.

*Rome*’s treatment of Roman politics is nuanced, subtle. There is much emphasis on perception, on the management of public image to create legitimacy in the eyes of the targeted audience. The miniseries also reveals the manipulation going on behind the scenes, the “truth” of politics with its corruption, chance occurrences, and unidealized pragmatism. Caesar’s assassination depends, however, on personal relationships. The murder is embedded in a series of betrayals and their counterparts – dramatic expressions of loyalty – that culminate in the final episode. The success of the assassination is guaranteed by Caesar’s acts of personal treachery: his betrayal of his love for Servilia to his political aims and his betrayal of his friendship with Brutus, his willingness to exploit Brutus as a tool for his own purposes. Visually, however, the assassination is clumsy, brutal, an act of butchery that fails as a declaration of Roman honor. The traditional, familiar “script” of the event is absent or deliberately undermined, further problematizing its meaning for the audience. The scene is intercut with Vorenus’ confrontation with the adulterous Niobe; in both, the claims of outraged honor are muted by the high emotional cost of its restoration. Home and State are stained with blood and there can be no real justification or resolution.