

Julius Caesar

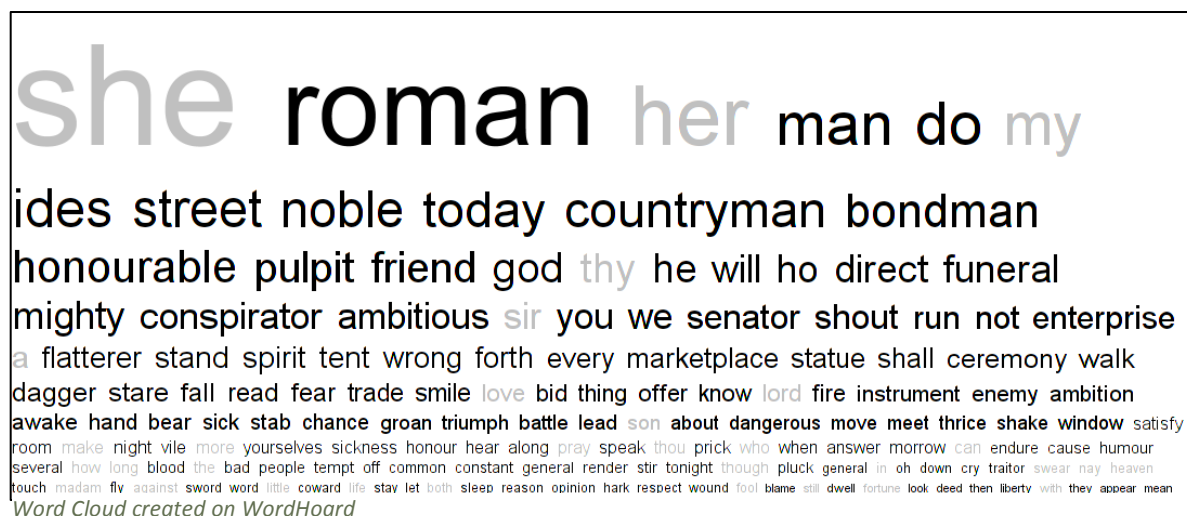
A new take on the language of Shakespeare

WOMEN

“Portia is Brutus’ harlot, not his wife”

Julius Caesar, Act 2, Scene 1

Using a tool called WordHoard, we can view the words that appear in Julius Caesar more or less than would be expected, compared to the rest of Shakespeare’s plays. The words in black appear more frequently in Julius Caesar than in other plays; words in grey appear less frequently.



It’s not surprising that words like “Roman” and “Ides” are more prevalent in this play, that’s something that we could easily have guessed, but this word cloud can show us other differences that may not be as obvious to the naked eye.

We can see from this word cloud that the words “she” and “her” appear a lot less in Julius Caesar than in Shakespeare’s other plays. But we know that there *are* female characters in this play, Calphurnia and Portia. So what does this decrease in usage tell us about the role of women in this play? Are they

developed as characters in their own right or are they defined solely by the men to whom they are married?

To give us some context, in the diagram below we can see how often the word “she” comes up in Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth and Othello respectively.

Occurrence of the word “she” in Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth and Othello



Concordance Plots made with AntConc

These plots don't only show how often the word “she” comes up in the four plays, but also when. Each vertical line is one occurrence of the word, and where it appears in the bar tells us how far in to the play the word is spoken. For example, we can see that “she” appears approximately a third of the way through Julius Caesar and another few times about three quarters of the way through. In comparison, this same word occurs 47 times in Macbeth, and is spread relatively evenly throughout the play.

The absence of masculine pronouns (e.g. he, him, and his) from the word cloud above tells us that they are used a “normal” amount in Julius Caesar compared to Shakespeare's other plays. That doesn't tell us much, but when we compare masculine and feminine pronouns in Julius Caesar, this huge discrepancy becomes even more apparent.

Occurrence of the word “he” in Julius Caesar



So, the word “he” comes up 199 times in Julius Caesar, while the word “she” only appears 7 times which further illustrates the obvious disparity between genders.

ASSERTIVE LANGUAGE

“When Caesar says ‘do this,’ it is perform’d”

Julius Caesar, Act 1, Scene 2

Using an operating system called Linux, we can take the entire play of Julius Caesar and find the most common pairs of words (called bi-grams or 2-grams). The number indicates how many times each pair of words appeared in the play.

It is unsurprising that phrases like “my lord” and “Mark Antony” come up frequently but what *is* interesting is that the most common word pairs are “I will” and “I am”. So what does this show about the characters and their characterization?

Be careful before you make any sweeping generalizations based on this list of word pairs, though. If we look at the most common triplets of words (also called tri-grams or 3-grams), we can see that some of the instances of “I will” in the first list are actually part of the longer phrase “I will not”. Does this change our findings or tell us something more?

2-grams

50 I will
48 I am
40 my lord
40 in the
37 it is
36 I have
34 to the
34 I do
32 that I
24 of the
24 Mark Antony
23 and I
22 you are
22 he is
21 I know

3-grams

9 there is no
9 and I will
8 I will not
8 I know not
8 I do not
7 the ides of
7 Ides of March
6 to the Capitol
6 I do know
5 you are not
5 will not come
5 the noble Brutus
5 the market place
5 know not what
5 it is not

CAESAR

Using AntConc again, we can separate the times when Caesar's name is used in dialogue and when it is used in stage directions. This can show us (roughly) how often Caesar talks, and how often he is talked *about*.

Julius Caesar – name mentioned in dialogue



Julius Caesar – name mentioned in stage directions



Concordance Plots made with AntConc

These plots show us that Caesar is mentioned in dialogue 219 times, and yet he only speaks and/or is mentioned in stage directions 51 times.

Caesar is killed almost half way through the play (sorry, spoiler alert) so it makes sense that he stops appearing as much in the stage directions (only appearing a few times after his death as a ghost), but he continues to be talked about for the rest of the play.

We can also see, however, that while Caesar is referred to a lot in the time surrounding his death, he stops being talked about as often as the play comes to a close.

So what does this say about the other characters and their attitude towards Caesar?

Bear in mind that these numbers don't necessarily always depict someone talking about Caesar *behind his back*. It may be the case that Caesar is talking about himself or other characters are addressing him directly.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

ROLE OF WOMEN – What does the lack of feminine pronouns tell us about Julius Caesar as a play?

How are the female characters represented? Are they defined only by their husbands?

ASSERTIVE LANGUAGE – what does the use of assertive language tell us about the characters?

WHAT'S IN A NAME? – what can we conclude from the use of Caesar's name in this play?

- Does it tell us anything about the characters and their attitudes towards Caesar and his eventual death?