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Julius Caesar

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Omens

The presence of omens and prophecies in Julius Caesar lends an air of the supernatural to the cold political machinery of Rome. From the Soothsayer's warning, to the storm, to the birds that presage Cassius's defeat, major events in the play seem inevitable, as if decreed by the Gods. Then again, things may not be as fixed as they seem—does knowing that the next day is the ides of March help make up Brutus's mind? And Cassius bases his suicide on a mistake—the bad omen was not accurate until he made it so by killing himself.

Women and Wives

While one could try to analyze Calpurnia and Portia as full characters in their own right, they function primarily not as sympathetic personalities or sources of insight or poetry but rather as symbols for the private, domestic realm. Both women plead with their husbands to be more aware of their private needs and feelings (Portia in Act II, scene i; Calpurnia in Act III, scene ii). Caesar and Brutus rebuff the pleas of their respective wives, however; they not only prioritize public matters but also actively disregard their private emotions and intuitions. As such, Calpurnia and Portia are powerless figures, willing though unable to help and comfort Caesar and Brutus.

Body, Blood, & Pain

In Julius Caesar, the human body echoes the body politic: the conspirators call Caesar's autocracy a sickness that must be cured; the sleepless Brutus speaks of a rebellion in his body

mirroring the rebellion he plans; and Calpurnia's dream about Caesar's bleeding statue is reinterpreted to mean that Rome draws its life from Caesar, as if his health were synonymous with the city's. Physical strength and weakness is important too. Portia courts pain as a means of proving her worth, and Caesar's great power is contrasted by infirmity—he's epileptic and partially deaf.

Poets and Teachers

These purveyors of words aren't central to any of the play's action, but they do stand out because of how widely they're disregarded, even when they have important things to say. While Shakespeare's work was considered important enough to get him royal patronage from King James I, poetry during Caesar's time was decidedly different. The most important pieces of literature from that time, whether poetic or not, focus on history and tradition. Livy's *History of Rome*, Caesar's own *Gallic Wars,* Tacitus' *Histories*, and Virgil's *Aeneid* had history at their core. The idea of writing for writing's sake wasn't popular.

Within that context, the presentation of the men of letters in *Julius Caesar* makes a little more sense. The first and only person who can explicitly warn Caesar in detail of the plot to kill him is a teacher of rhetoric, Artemidorius. Caught up in his affairs of state, Caesar ignores this learned man's teaching, which costs him his life.

Next we see Cinna the poet torn to shreds for having the wrong name. Even after the mob realizes he's not *that* Cinna, they kill him anyway as punishment for his "bad verses." (That the mob is ignorant enough to be this blood-lusty casts some doubt on whether they're qualified to be literary critics.)

The final poet we encounter shows up outside Brutus and Cassius's tent after their quarrel. He asks them to love each other as brothers and suggests that they shouldn't be alone together. (Probably a good idea, considering that they almost killed each other.) The poet points out that he has lived longer than they have and might have something to teach them. They just laugh at him, threaten him, and finally dismiss him.

In all three instances, men of words seem pretty randomly inserted into the play. There's no real reason to have a scene solely devoted to killing Cinna, or for the strange little exchange with the poet at the end. None of those instances move the plot along.

But think about it: Shakespeare is a writer. He can't just insert important poets into history, but he *can* do his best to argue within the play that poets and learning should be central to politics.

RECENT SITE ACTIVITY

The poets we meet are on innocent and important missions, all of which are deterred or slighted with not-so-awesome results. So perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting that men of state should also be men of learning; to ignore poets and what they have to teach is to court doom. It's a jab against both ancient Rome and Elizabethan England, but mostly it's an example of Shakespeare using a little of his own influence to promote his craft.

Rome

Because of its advanced culture and military might, Rome represented the world in microcosm. The lives of its most prominent citizens represented all human actions, and had far-reaching consequences for all of Western Civilization. In Julius Caesar, the principal characters seem conscious of this, scrutinizing their own actions as if the balance of history upon them were palpable. At times, they seem deliberately to make their speech or actions overly dramatic—even hammy—as if they were aware of their presence on a stage that the whole world would turn to for all time.

Northern Star: Julius Caesar Superstar?

During Caesar's famous "I'm the brightest star in the sky" speech, he claims to be the most "constant" (steady) guy in the universe because he can't be swayed by the personal appeals of other men. While this is one of the most arrogant diatribes ever, it's also full of some snazzy literary devices and reveals a lot about Caesar's character. Let's take a look at Caesar's speech so we can think about how his elaborate galaxy metaphor creates meaning in the play:

I am Constant as the Northern Star
I could be well moved, if I were as you;
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me;
But I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks;
They are all fire and every one doth shine;
But there's but one in all doth hold his place.
So in the world, 'tis furnish'd well with men,
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;
Yet in the number I do know but one

That unassailable holds on his rank,
Unshaked of motion; and that I am he,
Let me a little show it, even in this;
That I was constant Cimber should be banish'd,
And constant do remain to keep him so. (3.1.7)

The first thing to notice is that when Caesar aligns himself with the "Northern Star," he attempts to *elevate* himself above all other men. Even though there are other stars (men) in the sky (Rome), "there's but one in all doth hold his place." In other words, Caesar claims that he's the only guy solid enough to rule Rome (as evidenced by his refusal to relent after having banished Cimber).

The irony here is that Caesar delivers this big, fancy speech mere seconds before he's assassinated. Just as our *superstar* is declaring how "unshak[able]" and immovable he is, the conspirators surround him and stab him to death, unseating him from power.

As a side note, it's not uncommon for Shakespeare's powerful political leaders to align themselves with celestial bodies. Prince Hal, for example, compares himself to the sun in *Henry IV Part 1*. And Hal's dad, Henry IV, compares himself to a comet.

Antony's Goatskin Whip

During the feast of the Lupercal, Caesar orders Antony to spank Calphurnia (Caesar's "barren" wife) with his goatskin whip so she might become pregnant. Weird? Yes. But before your imagination runs too far, let us explain what's going on here.

Historically, during Lupercal festivities, it was traditional for young men to run naked through the streets, whipping everyone in sight. The idea was that touching women with the special whip would help them give birth to healthy babies. (We're not kidding. If you don't believe us, you can read Plutarch's biography of Julius Caesar, which describes in detail the kind of aforementioned whippings that went down at Lupercal festivals.)

So when Caesar tells Antony not to forget to "touch Calphurnia" when he's running through the streets, it's because the "elders say, / The barren, touched in the holy chase, shake off their sterile curse" (1.2.4). In other words, Caesar is hoping that Calphurnia will bear him children. This seems pretty random, don't you think? Why does Shakespeare go out of his way to include this bizarre moment in the play? Here are a few ideas:

1. Although Caesar blames Calphurnia's for being "barren," it's *possible* that Caesar could be

the one who's impotent or sterile. (After all, it's not like they had fancy fertility doctors at the time.) We can't know for sure, but Shakespeare may be trying to plant the idea in the audience's mind that Caesar isn't as perfect as he thinks he is. There are lots of other references to Caesar's "shortcomings" in the play. In Act 1, Scene 2, Casca tells us how Caesar fainted when he was offered the crown (1.2.8), and Cassius happily reports that when Caesar was younger he became ill and acted like a "sick girl" (1.2.8).

2. When Caesar asks Antony to whip "barren" Calphurnia, we know that he's anxious about not having kids. For a guy who might become a king, it's important to have an heir to inherit the throne, right? Remember, Caesar pretends he doesn't want to be crowned king in Act 1, Scene 2, but he's lured to the Capitol in Act 2, scene 2 by Decius's promise that the Senate wants to crown him king. So the play raises the possibility that Caesar really does have dynastic ambitions. It's not only possible that Caesar wants to be a monarch; it also seems like he wants a little baby Caesar to inherit the throne.

3. Finally, this could be a not-so-subtle reference to the childless Queen Elizabeth I, who was way too old to have kids and hadn't yet named an heir to England's throne when Shakespeare wrote the play.

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themes

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Power

When it seems evident to the conspirators in Shakespeare's play that Julius Caesar is headed for absolute power, he becomes a threat to the ideals and values of the Roman Republic. They assassinate Caesar before he can be crowned king. The irony is that Caesar's death results in civil war. As two factions with questionable motives grab for power, chaos ensues and the Republic is never the same again.

By dramatizing the historical circumstances surrounding Caesar's assassination, Shakespeare asks a series of questions relevant to his 16th-century audience and readers today: How should cities and countries be governed? What makes a good leader? What happens when a political leader's power is unchecked? And, what happens when the leader dies without a suitable

replacement lined up?

Fate versus Free Will

Julius Caesar raises many questions about the force of fate in life versus the capacity for free will. Cassius refuses to accept Caesar's rising power and deems a belief in fate to be nothing more than a form of passivity or cowardice. He says to Brutus: "Men at sometime were masters of their fates. / The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (I.ii.140–142). Cassius urges a return to a more noble, self-possessed attitude toward life, blaming his and Brutus's submissive stance not on a predestined plan but on their failure to assert themselves.

Ultimately, the play seems to support a philosophy in which fate and freedom maintain a delicate coexistence. Thus Caesar declares: "It seems to me most strange that men should fear, / Seeing that death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come" (II.ii.35–37). In other words, Caesar recognizes that certain events lie beyond human control; to crouch in fear of them is to enter a paralysis equal to, if not worse than, death. It is to surrender any capacity for freedom and agency that one might actually possess. Indeed, perhaps to face death head-on, to die bravely and honorably, is Caesar's best course: in the end, Brutus interprets his and Cassius's defeat as the work of Caesar's ghost—not just his apparition, but also the force of the people's devotion to him, the strong legacy of a man who refused any fear of fate and, in his disregard of fate, seems to have transcended it

Persuasion

Persuasion is a concept at the center of this play. Everyone seems to be trying to convince someone else of something: Caesar tries to create an image in the public's mind of his crowing (an ancient form of spin doctoring); Cassius finds the best way to manipulate each man he seeks to bring to his side; and Brutus, whom the reader hopes will refuse to participate, takes longer than the others to respond to Cassius' manipulations, but eventually does respond and even finishes the job for him by persuading himself (see his soliloquy in Act II, Scene I). This pivotal scene, when Brutus joins the conspirators, is also interesting because Portia, Brutus' wife, serves as the voice of Brutus' conscience.

Public Self versus Private Self

Much of the play's tragedy stems from the characters' neglect of private feelings and loyalties in favor of what they believe to be the public good. Similarly, characters confuse their private selves with their public selves, hardening and dehumanizing themselves or transforming themselves into ruthless political machines. Brutus rebuffs his wife, Portia, when she pleads with him to confide in her; believing himself to be acting on the people's will, he forges ahead with the murder of Caesar, despite their close friendship. Brutus puts aside his personal loyalties and shuns thoughts of Caesar the man, his friend; instead, he acts on what he believes to be the public's wishes and kills Caesar the leader, the imminent dictator. Cassius can be seen as a man who has gone to the extreme in cultivating his public persona. Caesar, describing his distrust of Cassius, tells Antony that the problem with Cassius is his lack of a private life—his seeming refusal to acknowledge his own sensibilities or to nurture his own spirit. Such a man, Caesar fears, will let nothing interfere with his ambition. Indeed, Cassius lacks all sense of personal honor and shows himself to be a ruthless schemer.

Ultimately, neglecting private sentiments to follow public concerns brings Caesar to his death. Although Caesar does briefly agree to stay home from the Senate in order to please Calpurnia, who has dreamed of his murder, he gives way to ambition when Decius tells him that the senators plan to offer him the crown. -Caesar's public self again takes precedence. Tragically, he no longer sees the difference between his omnipotent, immortal public image and his vulnerable human body. Just preceding his death, Caesar refuses Artemidorus's pleas to speak with him, saying that he gives last priority to his most personal concerns. He thus endangers himself by believing that the strength of his public self will protect his private self.

Friendship

Male bonds are funny things in *Julius Caesar.* Men in the play must to choose between loyalty to their friends and loyalty to the Roman Republic, which leads to some of the most famous examples of manipulation and violent betrayal in Western literature. This is especially true for Brutus, who chooses to join the conspirators' assassination plot when it seems clear to him that his BFF, Julius Caesar, is headed for absolute power.

Leadership

Shakespeare took the potential for upheaval in *Julius Caesar* and used it to examine a leadership theme. Concentrating on the responsibilities of the ruling class, he looked at what could happen if that class no longer had a unified vision and hand lost sight of what it meant to be Roman. In fact, the characters of the play lose touch with the tradition, glory, integrity, and stoicism of their past. As you read the play, note the way that Cassius use the memory of that glorious past to persuade men to become conspirators, and the way the actions of the conspirators do or do not return Rome to its golden age.

Misinterpretations and Misreadings

Much of the play deals with the characters' failures to interpret correctly the omens that they encounter. As Cicero says, "Men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves" (I.iii.34–35). Thus, the night preceding Caesar's appearance at the Senate is full of portents, but no one reads them accurately: Cassius takes them to signify the danger that Caesar's impending coronation would bring to the state, when, if anything, they warn of the destruction that Cassius himself threatens. There are calculated misreadings as well: Cassius manipulates Brutus into joining the conspiracy by means of forged letters, knowing that Brutus's trusting nature will cause him to accept the letters as authentic pleas from the Roman people.

The circumstances of Cassius's death represent another instance of misinterpretation. Pindarus's erroneous conclusion that Titinius has been captured by the enemy, when in fact Titinius has reunited with friendly forces, is the piece of misinformation that prompts Cassius to seek death. Thus, in the world of politics portrayed in *Julius Caesar,* the inability to read people and events leads to downfall; conversely, the ability to do so is the key to survival. With so much ambition and rivalry, the ability to gauge the public's opinion as well as the resentment or loyalty of one's fellow politicians can guide one to success. Antony proves masterful at recognizing his situation, and his accurate reading of the crowd's emotions during his funeral oration for Caesar allows him to win the masses over to his side

Defining Masculinity

While gender itself is not a central issue to this play, questions of Masculinity and effeminacy are. Caesar's weakness — his effeminacy — makes him vulnerable. On the other hand, the incorporation of the so-called feminine traits of compassion and love into the friendship

between Brutus and Cassius paradoxically allows the men to show greater strength and allows the audience to have greater sympathy

Inflexibility versus Compromise

Both Brutus and Caesar are stubborn, rather inflexible people who ultimately suffer fatally for it. In the play's aggressive political landscape, individuals succeed through adaptability, bargaining, and compromise. Brutus's rigid though honorable ideals leave him open for manipulation by Cassius. He believes so thoroughly in the purpose of the assassination that he does not perceive the need for excessive political maneuvering to justify the murder. Equally resolute, Caesar prides himself on his steadfastness; yet this constancy helps bring about his death, as he refuses to heed ill omens and goes willingly to the Senate, into the hands of his murderers.

Antony proves perhaps the most adaptable of all of the politicians: while his speech to the Roman citizens centers on Caesar's generosity toward each citizen, he later searches for ways to turn these funds into cash in order to raise an army against Brutus and Cassius. Although he gains power by offering to honor Caesar's will and provide the citizens their rightful money, it becomes clear that ethical concerns will not prevent him from using the funds in a more politically expedient manner. Antony is a successful politician—yet the question of morality remains. There seems to be no way to reconcile firm moral principles with success in politics in Shakespeare's rendition of ancient Rome; thus each character struggles toward a different solution.

Principles

Honor is one of the central conundrums in *Julius Caesar*. Some actions are done in the name of honor, others in spite of it. National honor challenges personal honor, and obligations and desires put honor at stake. All these layers of honor, which often conflict with each other, ultimately lead back to the issue of perspective. Each character has to decide what's best for him and act on it accordingly. In the end, they can only do honor to their own judgment, as they hav

Manipulation

In *Julius Caesar*, manipulation seems like a professional sport. Politicians use their rhetorical skills to gain power and to influence large, fickle crowds, and seeming friends lie outright to each other. Persuasion and suggestion are rhetorical skills that play central roles in *Julius Caesar*, but they also highlight the willingness of individuals in hard times to hear what they want to hear (remind you at all of our own day and age?). It's often unclear whether characters are manipulated by others, or do they simply find in the speech of others an inspiration to do what they might otherwise have been too afraid to do.

Pride

When it comes to pride, Julius Caesar is the star of the show, as he's the most outwardly arrogant. Caesar's total lack of humility seems to be his tragic flaw. His prideful arrogance is a blinding force that prevents him from seeing the harm he's doing and the harm being planned against him. When Brutus is humble about what others call his greatness, he sets himself up in sympathetic contrast to Caesar. We like Brutus because he isn't all fatheaded. He also seems wiser than Caesar for being more aware of the world around him and genuinely more concerned for it.

Art and Culture

Just about all of Shakespeare's works contain self-referential, or "metatheatrical" moments, but in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare takes it to a whole new level by forging a relationship between the theater and politics. In the play, politicians know they're like actors performing on a very public stage, and they measure their speeches and actions accordingly. At other times, characters even seem aware that their historical actions will be dramatized over a thousand years later on the Elizabethan stage. The play is also full of self-conscious references to the kinds of public and political roles that poets (like Shakespeare) can play in the world.

summary

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Act I, scene i

Two tribunes, Flavius and Murellus, enter a Roman street, along with various commoners. Flavius and Murellus derisively order the commoners to return home and get back to work: "What, know you not, / Being mechanical, you ought not walk / Upon a labouring day without the sign / Of your profession?" (I.i.2–5). Murellus engages a cobbler in a lengthy inquiry about his profession; misinterpreting the cobbler's punning replies, Murellus quickly grows angry with him. Flavius interjects to ask why the cobbler is not in his shop working. The cobbler explains that he is taking a holiday from work in order to observe the triumph (a lavish parade celebrating military victory)—he wants to watch Caesar's procession through the city, which will include the captives won in a recent battle against his archrival Pompey.

Murellus scolds the cobbler and attempts to diminish the significance of Caesar's victory over Pompey and his consequent triumph. "What conquest brings he home? / What tributaries follow him [Caesar] to Rome / To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?" Murellus asks, suggesting that Caesar's victory does not merit a triumph since it involves no conquering of a foreign foe to the greater glory of Rome (I.i.31–33). Murellus reminds the commoners of the days when they used to gather to watch and cheer for Pompey's triumphant returns from battle. Now, however, due to a mere twist of fate, they rush out to celebrate his downfall. Murellus scolds them further for their disloyalty, ordering them to "pray to the gods to intermit the plague / That needs must light on this ingratitude" (I.i.53–54).

The commoners leave, and Flavius instructs Murellus to go to the Capitol, a hill on which rests a temple on whose altars victorious generals offer sacrifice, and remove any crowns placed on statues of Caesar. Flavius adds that he will thin the crowds of commoners observing the triumph and directs Murellus to do likewise, for if they can regulate Caesar's popular support, they will be able to regulate his power ("These growing feathers plucked from Caesar's wing / Will make him fly an ordinary pitch" [I.i.71–72]).

Analysis

Although the play opens with Flavius and Murellus noting the fickle nature of the public's devotion—the crowd now celebrates Caesar's defeat of Pompey when once it celebrated Pompey's victories—loyalty to Caesar nonetheless appears to be growing with exceptional force. Caesar's power and influence are likewise strong: Flavius and Murellus are later punished for removing the decorations from Caesar's statues.

It is interesting to note the difference between the manner in which Flavius and Murellus

conceive of the cobbler and that in which Shakespeare has created him. The cobbler is a typically Shakespearean character—a host of puns and bawdy references reveal his dexterity with language ("all that I live by is with the awl. I meddle / with no tradesman's matters, nor women's matters" [I.i.21–22]). The tribunes, however, preoccupied with class distinctions, view the cobbler as nothing more than a plebeian ruffian. Flavius's reproach of the cobbler for not having his tools about him on a workday reveals his belief that a laborer can be good for one thing and one thing only: laboring. Murellus similarly assumes the cobbler is stupid, although, ironically, it is Murellus himself who misunderstands the cobbler's answers to his questions. Murellus is unwilling to interpret the cobbler's shift in allegiance from Pompey to Caesar as anything but a manifestation of dim-witted forgetfulness.

Flavius and Murellus's concern about Caesar's meteoric rise to power reflects English sentiment during the Elizabethan age about the consolidation of power in other parts of Europe. The strengthening of the absolutist monarchies in such sovereignties as France and Spain during the sixteenth century threatened the stability of the somewhat more balanced English political system, which, though it was hardly democratic in the modern sense of the word, at least provided nobles and elected representatives with some means of checking royal authority. Caesar's ascendance helped to effect Rome's transition from republic to empire, and Shakespeare's depiction of the prospect of Caesar's assumption of dictatorial power can be seen as a comment upon the gradual shift toward centralization of power that was taking place in Europe.

In addition, Shakespeare's illustration of the fickleness of the Roman public proves particularly relevant to the English political scene of the time. Queen Elizabeth I was nearing the end of her life but had neither produced nor named an heir. Anxiety mounted concerning who her successor would be. People feared that without resort to the established, accepted means of transferring power—passing it down the family line—England might plunge into the sort of chaotic power struggle that had plagued it in the fifteenth century, during the Wars of the Roses. Flavius and Murellus's interest in controlling the populace lays the groundwork for Brutus's and Antony's manipulations of public opinion after Caesar's death. Shakespeare thus makes it clear that the struggle for power will involve a battle among the leaders to win public favor with displays of bravery and convincing rhetoric. Considering political history in the centuries after Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar*, especially in the twentieth century, when Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler consolidated their respective regimes by whipping up in the masses the overzealous nationalism that had pervaded nineteenth-century Italy and Germany, the play is remarkably prescient.

Act I, scene ii

Caesar enters a public square with Antony, Calpurnia, Portia, Decius, Cicero, Brutus, Cassius,

Casca, and a Soothsayer; he is followed by a throng of citizens and then by Flavius and Murellus. Antony, dressed to celebrate the feast day, readies himself for a ceremonial run through the city. Caesar urges him to touch Calpurnia, Caesar's wife, as he runs, since Roman superstition holds that the touch of a ceremonial runner will cure barrenness. Antony agrees, declaring that whatever Caesar says is certain to become fact.

The Soothsayer calls out from the crowd to Caesar, telling him to beware the Ides of March. (The "ides" refers to the fifteenth day of March, May, July, and October and the thirteenth day of the other months in the ancient Roman calendar.) Caesar pauses and asks the man to come forward; the Soothsayer repeats himself. Caesar ultimately dismisses the warning, and the procession departs. Brutus and Cassius remain. Cassius asks Brutus why he has not seemed himself lately. Brutus replies that he has been quiet because he has been plagued with conflicting thoughts. But he assures Cassius that even though his mind is at war with itself, he will not let his inner turmoil affect his friendships.

Cassius and Brutus speak together. Cassius asks Brutus if Brutus can see his own face; Brutus replies that he cannot. Cassius then declares that Brutus is unable to see what everyone else does, namely, that Brutus is widely respected. Noting that no mirror could reveal Brutus's worthiness to himself, Cassius offers to serve as a human mirror so that Brutus may discover himself and conceive of himself in new ways.

Brutus hears shouting and says that he fears that the people want to make Caesar their king. When Cassius asks, Brutus affirms that he would rather that Caesar not assume the position. Brutus adds that he loves Caesar but that he also loves honor, and that he loves honor even more than he fears death. Cassius replies that he, too, recoils at the thought of kneeling in awe before someone whom he does not consider his superior, and declares, "I was born as free as Caesar, so were you. / We both have fed as well, and we can both / Endure the winter's cold as well as he" (I.ii.99–101). Cassius recalls a windy day when he and Caesar stood on the banks of the Tiber River, and Caesar dared him to swim to a distant point. They raced through the water, but Caesar became weak and asked Cassius to save him. Cassius had to drag him from the water. Cassius also recounts an episode when Caesar had a fever in Spain and experienced a seizure. Cassius marvels to think that a man with such a feeble constitution should now stand at the head of the civilized world.

Caesar stands like a Colossus over the world, Cassius continues, while Cassius and Brutus creep about under his legs. He tells Brutus that they owe their underling status not to fate but to their own failure to take action. He questions the difference between the name "Caesar" and the name "Brutus": why should Caesar's name be more celebrated than Brutus's when, spoken together, the names sound equally pleasing and thus suggest that the men should hold equal power? He wonders in what sort of age they are living when one man can tower over the rest of the population. Brutus responds that he will consider Cassius's words. Although unwilling to be further persuaded, he admits that he would rather not be a citizen of Rome in such strange times

as the present.

Meanwhile, Caesar and his train return. Caesar sees Cassius and comments to Antony that Cassius looks like a man who thinks too much; such men are dangerous, he adds. Antony tells Caesar not to worry, but Caesar replies that he prefers to avoid Cassius: Cassius reads too much and finds no enjoyment in plays or music—such men are never at ease while someone greater than themselves holds the reins of power. Caesar urges Antony to come to his right side—he is deaf in his left ear—and tell him what he thinks of Cassius. Shortly, Caesar and his train depart.

Brutus and Cassius take Casca aside to ask him what happened at the procession. Casca relates that Antony offered a crown to Caesar three times, but Caesar refused it each time. While the crowd cheered for him, Caesar fell to the ground in a fit. Brutus speculates that Caesar has "the falling sickness" (a term for epilepsy in Elizabethan times). Casca notes, however, that Caesar's fit did not seem to affect his authority: although he suffered his seizure directly before the crowd, the people did not cease to express their love. Casca adds that the great orator Cicero spoke in Greek, but that he couldn't understand him at all, saying "it was Greek to me" (I.ii.278). He concludes by reporting that Flavius and Murellus were deprived of their positions as civil servants for removing decorations from Caesar's statues. Casca then departs, followed by Brutus.

Cassius, alone now, says that while he believes that Brutus is noble, he hopes that Brutus's noble nature may yet be bent: "For who so firm that cannot be seduced?" he asks rhetorically (I.ii.306). He decides to forge letters from Roman citizens declaring their support for Brutus and their fear of Caesar's ascent to power; he will throw them into Brutus's house that evening.

Analysis

While the opening scene illustrates Caesar's popularity with the masses, the audience's first direct encounter with him presents an omen of his imminent fall. Caesar's choice to ignore the Soothsayer's advice proves the first in a series of failures to heed warnings about his fate. Just as Caesar himself proves fallible, his power proves imperfect. When Caesar orders Antony to touch Calpurnia, Antony replies that Caesar need merely speak and his word will become fact—that is, Caesar's authority is so strong that his word immediately brings about the requested action. However, while the masses may conceive of Caesar's power thus, Caesar's order to Antony alerts us to the reality that he and his wife have been unable to produce a child. The implication that Caesar may be impotent or sterile is the first—and, for a potential monarch, the most damaging—of his physical shortcomings to be revealed in the play.

This conversation between Brutus and Cassius reveals the respective characters of the two men, who will emerge as the foremost conspirators against Caesar. Brutus appears to be a man at war with himself, torn between his love for Caesar and his honorable concern for Rome. He worries that it is not in Rome's best interest for Caesar to become king, yet he hates to oppose his friend.

Cassius steps into Brutus's personal crisis and begins his campaign to turn Brutus against Caesar, flattering Brutus's pride by offering to be his mirror and thus relaying to him the ostensible high regard in which the citizens hold him.

Cassius compounds Brutus's alarm about Caesar's growing power with references to his weak physical state: he lacks stamina and is probably epileptic. But Cassius observes only Caesar's frail human body, his private self. When he urges Brutus to consider that the name of Brutus should be as powerful as the name of Caesar, he fails to understand that Caesar's real power is not affected by private infirmities but rather rests in his public persona, whose strength is derived from the goodwill and good opinion of the populace.

Caesar, on the other hand, shows much more perceptiveness in his analysis of Cassius; he observes both Cassius's private and public personas and notices a discord. He is made uneasy by what appears to be Cassius's lack of a private life—Cassius's seeming refusal to acknowledge his own sensibilities or nurture his spirit suggest a coldness, a lack of human warmth. Caesar comments to Antony, "He loves no plays, / As thou dost, Antony; he hears no music. / Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort / As if he mocked himself, and scorned his spirit / That could be moved to smile at anything" (I.ii.204–208). Cassius remains merely a public man, without any suggestion of a private self. Such a man, Caesar properly recognizes, is made uncomfortable by others' power.

The question of Caesar's own ambition is raised in Casca's account of the triumphal procession. In describing how Antony offered Caesar a crown three times, Casca makes sure to point out Caesar's reluctance in refusing the crown. Since the incident is related from Casca's anti-Caesar perspective, it is difficult to ascertain Caesar's true motivations: did Caesar act out of genuine humility or did he merely put on a show to please the crowd? Nevertheless, Casca's mention of Caesar's hesitation suggests that, no matter how noble his motivations, Caesar is capable of being seduced by power and thereby capable of becoming a dictator, as Brutus fears.

At the close of the scene, when Cassius plots to turn Brutus against Caesar by planting forged letters in Brutus's house, Cassius has shrewdly perceived that Brutus's internal conflict is more likely to be influenced by what he believes the populace to think than by his own personal misgivings. Cassius recognizes that if Brutus believes that the people distrust Caesar, then he will be convinced that Caesar must be thwarted. Cassius aims to take advantage of Brutus's weakest point, namely, Brutus's honorable concerns for Rome; Brutus's inflexible ideals leave him open for manipulation by Cassius. Cassius, in contrast, has made himself adaptable for political survival by wholly abandoning his sense of honor.

Act I, scene iii

Casca and Cicero meet on a Roman street. Casca says that though he has seen many terrible

things in the natural world, nothing compares to the frightfulness of this night's weather. He wonders if there is strife in heaven or if the gods are so angered by mankind that they intend to destroy it. Casca relates that he saw a man with his hands on fire, and yet his flesh was not burning. He describes meeting a lion near the Capitol: bizarrely, the lion ignored him and walked on. Many others have seen men on fire walking in the streets, and an owl, a nocturnal bird, was seen sitting out in the marketplace during the day. When so many abnormal events happen at once, Casca declares, no one could possibly believe that they are natural occurrences. Casca insists that they are portents of danger ahead. Cicero replies that men will interpret things as they will: "Indeed it is a strange-disposèd time; / But men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves" (I.iii.33–35). Cicero asks if Caesar is coming to the Capitol the next day; Casca replies that he is. Cicero departs, warning that it is not a good atmosphere in which to remain outside.

Cassius enters. He has been wandering through the streets, taking no shelter from the thunder and lightning. Casca asks Cassius why he would endanger himself so. Cassius replies that he is pleased—he believes that the gods are using these signs to warn the Romans about a "monstrous state," meaning both an abnormal state of affairs and an atrocious government (I.iii.71). Cassius compares the night to Caesar himself, who

like this dreadful night,
. . . thunders, lightens, opens graves, and roars
As doth the lion in the Capitol. (I.iii.72–74)

He also calls Caesar "prodigious grown, / And fearful, as these strange eruptions are" (I.iii.76–77).

Casca reports to Cassius that the senators plan to make Caesar king in the Senate the following day. Cassius draws his dagger and swears to the gods that if they can make a weak man like Caesar so powerful, then they can empower Cassius to defeat a tyrant. He declares that Rome must be merely trash or rubbish to give itself up so easily to Caesar's fire. Casca joins Cassius in his censure of Caesar, and Cassius reveals that he has already swayed a number of high-powered Romans to support a resistance movement.

A conspirator named Cinna enters. Cassius now divulges his latest scheme in his plot to build opposition against Caesar: the conversion of Brutus. Cassius gives Cinna the letters he has forged to place in Brutus's chair in the Senate, and others to throw through Brutus's window and place on Brutus's statue. Cassius claims that Brutus has already come three-quarters of the way toward turning against Caesar; he hopes the letters will bring him the rest of the way around. Casca comments that the noble Brutus's participation in their plot will bring worthiness to their schemes, for "he sits high in all the people's hearts, / And that which would appear offence in us / His countenance, like richest alchemy, / Will change to virtue and to worthiness" (I.iii.157–60).

Analysis

This scene demonstrates the characters' inability to interpret correctly the signs that they encounter. The night is full of portents, but no one construes them accurately. Cassius asserts that they signify the danger that Caesar's possible coronation would bring to the state, while they actually warn of the destruction that Cassius himself threatens. Meanwhile, Cassius plots to win Brutus to his cause by misleading him with letters; he knows that Brutus will take the written word at face value, never questioning the letters' authenticity.

The juxtaposition of Cicero's grave warning about not walking in this night's disturbing weather with Cassius's self-satisfied mood upon meeting with Casca (he labels the night "very pleasing . . . to honest men" [I.iii.43]) aligns Cassius with the evil that the omens portend. Further, this nexus suggests a sort of pathetic fallacy—an artistic device by means of which an inanimate entity assumes human emotions and responses (Shakespeare was especially fond of employing pathetic fallacy with nature in moments of turmoil, as in *Macbeth*, when the night grows increasingly eerie until Macbeth observes that "Nature seems dead" right before he goes to murder King Duncan [II.i.50]). In *Julius Caesar,* the terrifying atmosphere of supernatural phenomena reflects Cassius's horrific plan to murder Caesar.

Furthermore, Cassius not only walks about freely in the atmosphere of terror but relishes it: "And when the cross blue lightning seemed to open / The breast of heaven, I did present myself / Even in the aim and very flash of it" (I.iii.50–52). He insinuates that the "monstrous state" of which the heavens warn refers to Caesar and his overweening ambition, yet he himself has become something of a monster—obsessed with bringing Caesar down, brazenly unafraid of lethal lightning bolts, and haughty about this fearlessness (I.iii.71). As Casca notes, "It is the part of men to fear and tremble" at such ill omens; Cassius seems to have lost his humanity and become a beast (I.iii.54).

The various omens and portents in *Julius Caesar* also raise questions about the force of fate versus free will. The function and meaning of omens in general is puzzling and seemingly contradictory: as *announcements* of an event or events to come, omens appear to prove the existence of some overarching plan for the future, a prewritten destiny controlled by the gods. On the other hand, as *warnings* of impending events, omens suggests that human beings have the power to alter that destiny if provided with the correct information in advance.

Act II, scene i

Brutus paces back and forth in his garden. He asks his servant to bring him a light and mutters to himself that Caesar will have to die. He knows with certainty that Caesar will be crowned king; what he questions is whether or not Caesar will be corrupted by his power. Although he

admits that he has never seen Caesar swayed by power in the past, he believes that it would be impossible for Caesar to reach such heights without eventually coming to scorn those lower in status. Brutus compares Caesar to the egg of a serpent “which, hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous”; thus, he determines to “kill him in the shell” (II.i.33–34).

Brutus’s servant enters with a letter that he has discovered near the window. Brutus reads the letter, which accuses him of sleeping while Rome is threatened: “Brutus, thou sleep’st. Awake, and see thyself” (II.i.46). Brutus interprets the letter as a protest against Caesar: “Thus must I piece it out: / Shall Rome stand under one man’s awe?” (II.i.51–52). Believing the people of Rome are telling him their desires through this single letter, he resolves to take the letter’s challenge to “speak, strike, redress” (II.i.47). A knock comes at the door. Brutus’s servant announces Cassius and a group of men—the conspirators. They include Casca, Decius, Cinna, Metellus, and Trebonius.

Cassius introduces the men, then draws Brutus aside. The two speak briefly before rejoining the others. Cassius suggests that they swear an oath, but Brutus demurs. They have no need of oaths, he says, since their cause should be strong enough to bind them together. The group discusses whether it should try to bring the esteemed Cicero into the conspiracy, for he would bring good public opinion to their schemes, but Brutus dissuades them, pointing out that Cicero would never follow anyone else’s ideas. Cassius then suggests that they would do well to kill Antony in addition to Caesar, but Brutus refuses, saying that this would make their plan too bloody. According to Brutus, they only stand against the spirit of Caesar, which he wishes could be destroyed without the necessity of killing the man himself. He says that they should kill him boldly, but not viciously, so that they might be perceived as purging the state rather than as murderers. Cassius replies that he still fears Antony, but Brutus assures him that Antony will be rendered harmless once Caesar is dead.

Cassius states that no one knows whether Caesar will come to the Capitol that day, since the warnings of augurs (seers or soothsayers) after this brutal evening might keep him at home. But Decius assures the others that he will be able to convince Caesar to ignore his superstitions by flattering his bravery. The conspirators depart, Brutus suggesting that they try to behave like actors and hide their true feelings and intentions.

Brutus’s wife, Portia, enters the garden. She wonders what has been worrying Brutus, for his behavior has been strange. He says that he has felt unwell. She asks why he refuses to tell her his concerns, insisting that, as his wife, she should be told about his problems and assuring him that she will keep his secrets. Brutus replies that he wishes he were worthy of such an honorable wife. They hear a knock at the door, and Brutus sends her away with a promise to talk to her later.

Ligarius enters, looking sick. He says he would not be sick if he could be sure that Brutus was involved in a scheme in the name of honor. Brutus says that he is. Ligarius rejoices and

accompanies Brutus offstage to hear more of the plan.

Analysis

Cassius's words to Brutus in Act I, scene ii have proved powerful in turning him against Caesar: while alone in his garden, Brutus has come to the conclusion that Caesar must be killed. The forged letter has secured this conversion; though it has appeared so mysteriously in his house and tells him exactly what he wants to hear, Brutus never questions its authenticity. He immediately construes the message's cryptic meaning according to his preconceived inclinations: "Thus must I piece it out," he concludes hastily, allowing for no other interpretation of the words (II.i.51). He displays a tragic naïveté, trusting unquestioningly that the letter speaks for the entire Roman populace.

We see now that once Brutus arrives at a belief or proposition, he throws himself into it wholeheartedly. Upon joining Cassius's conspiracy, he takes control of it. He provides his own garden as the conspirators' meeting place and convinces the gathered men not to take an oath, though Cassius would prefer that they do so. Brutus is the one who sends Decius to speak to Caesar at the end of the scene, and it is he who speaks the final words to the conspirators as they depart. So, too, does Brutus overrule Cassius when he suggests that they assassinate Antony along with Caesar. This position, like all of Brutus's actions, stems from a concern for public opinion: Brutus wants the death of Caesar to appear an honorable gesture; if the scheme became too violent, the conspirators would sacrifice any semblance of honor. He insists rather excessively on preserving honor in the conspiracy, saying that in a noble cause one has no need to swear an oath to others: "Do not stain / The even virtue of our enterprise, / Nor th'insuppressive mettle of our spirits, / To think that or our cause or our performance / Did need an oath" (II.i.131–135). Men swear oaths only when they doubt the strength of each other's devotion; to take up oaths now would be to insult the current undertaking and the men involved. It is a rather ironic proposition from Brutus, who has declared loyalty and friendship to Caesar and now casts those commitments aside. Notably, Brutus asks the men not to "stain" the virtue of their scheme, a word that evokes blood; ultimately, they will not be able to avoid staining themselves with Caesar's blood.

Yet, although Brutus appears completely determined in his interactions with the conspirators, his inability to confess his thoughts to Portia signifies that he still harbors traces of doubt regarding the legitimacy of his plan. Portia is a symbol of Brutus's private life—a representative of correct intuition and morality—just as Calpurnia is for Caesar in the next scene. Her husband's dismissal of her intuitions, like Caesar's of Calpurnia's, leads to folly and points to his largest mistake: his decision to ignore his private feelings, loyalties, and misgivings for the sake of a plan that he believes to be for the public good

Act II, scenes ii–iv

Act II, scene ii

Caesar wanders through his house in his dressing gown, kept awake by his wife Calpurnia's nightmares. Three times she has called out in her sleep about Caesar's murder. He sends a servant to bid the priests to offer a sacrifice and tell him the results. Calpurnia enters and insists that Caesar not leave the house after so many bad signs. Caesar rebuffs her, refusing to give in to fear. But Calpurnia, who has never heeded omens before, speaks of what happened in the city earlier that night: dead men walked, ghosts wandered the city, a lioness gave birth in the street, and lightning shattered the skies. These signs portend true danger, she says; Caesar cannot afford to ignore them.

Caesar counters that nothing can change the plans of the gods. He deems the signs to apply to the world in general and refuses to believe that they bode ill for him personally. Calpurnia says that the heavens proclaim the death of only great men, so the omens must have to do with him. Caesar replies that while cowards imagine their death frequently, thus dying in their minds several times over, brave men, refusing to dwell on death, die only once. He cannot understand why men fear death, which must come eventually to all.

The servant enters, reporting that the augurs recommend that Caesar stay home. They examined the entrails of an animal and were unable to find a heart—a bad sign. But Caesar maintains that he will not stay home out of fear. Danger cannot affect Caesar, he says. Calpurnia begs him to send Antony to the Senate in his place; finally Caesar relents.

Decius enters, saying that he has come to bring Caesar to the Senate. Caesar tells him to tell the senators that he will be absent that day. Calpurnia tells him to plead illness, but Caesar refuses to lie. Decius then asks what reason he should offer. Caesar states that it is simply his will to stay home. He adds that Calpurnia has had a dream in which she saw his statue run with blood like a fountain, while many smiling Romans bathed their hands in the blood; she has taken this to portend danger for Caesar.

Decius disputes Calpurnia's interpretation, saying that actually the dream signifies that Romans will all gain lifeblood from the strength of Caesar. He confides that the Senate has decided to give Caesar the crown that day; if Caesar were to stay at home, the senators might change their minds. Moreover, Caesar would lose public regard if he were perceived as so easily swayed by a woman, or by fear. Caesar replies that his fears now indeed seem small. He calls for his robe and prepares to depart. Cassius and Brutus enter with Ligarius, Metellus, Casca, Trebonius, and Cinna to escort him to the Senate. Finally, Antony enters. Caesar prepares to depart.

Act II, scene iii

Artemidorus comes onstage, reading to himself a letter that he has written Caesar, warning him

to be wary of Brutus, Casca, and the other conspirators. He stands along the route that Caesar will take to the Senate, prepared to hand the letter to him as he passes. He is sad to think that the virtue embodied by Caesar may be destroyed by the ambitious envy of the conspirators. He remains hopeful, however, that if his letter gets read, Caesar may yet live.

Act II, scene iv

Portia sends Brutus's servant to the Senate to observe events and report back to her how Caesar is faring. A Soothsayer enters, and Portia asks him if Caesar has gone to the Capitol yet. The Soothsayer replies that he knows that Caesar has not yet gone; he intends to wait for Caesar along his route, since he wants to say a word to him. He goes to the street to wait, hoping Caesar's entourage will let him speak to the great man.

Analysis: Act II, scenes ii–iv

These scenes emphasize the many grave signs portending Caesar's death, as well as his stubborn refusal to heed them. Initially, Caesar does agree to stay home in order to please Calpurnia, showing more concern for his wife than Brutus did for Portia in the previous scene. In appreciating Calpurnia's fear, Caesar demonstrates an ability to pay attention to his private matters, albeit a muffled one. But when Decius tells him that the senators plan to offer him the crown that day, Caesar's desire to comfort his wife gives way to his ambition, and his public self again prevails over his private self.

Increasingly and markedly in these scenes, Caesar refers to himself in the third person, especially when he speaks of his lack of fear ("Yet Caesar shall go forth, for these predictions / Are to the world in general as to Caesar" [II.ii.28–29]). Tragically, he no longer sees the difference between his powerful public image and his vulnerable human body. Even at home in his dressing gown, far from the senators and crowds whose respect he craves, he assumes the persona of "Caesar," the great man who knows no fear. Caesar has displayed a measure of humility in turning down the crown the day before, but this humility has evaporated by the time he enters into his third-person self-commentary and hastens to the Senate to accept the crown at last.

Perhaps this behavior partially confirms the conspirators' charges: Caesar does seem to long for power and would like to hold the crown; he really might become a tyrant if given the opportunity. Whether this speculation constitutes reason sufficient to kill him is debatable. Indeed, it seems possible that the faults that the conspirators—with the possible exception of Brutus—see in Caesar are viewed through the veil of their own ambition: they oppose his kingship not because he would make a poor leader, but because his leadership would preclude their own. In explaining the noble deed to be performed to Ligarius, Brutus describes it as "a piece of work that will make sick men whole." Ligarius responds, "But are not some whole that we must make sick?" (II.i.326–327). Whereas Brutus's primary concern is the well-being of the

people, Ligarius's is with bringing down those above him.

Calpurnia's dream of the bleeding statue perfectly foreshadows the eventual unfolding of the assassination plot: the statue is a symbol of Caesar's corpse, and the vague smiling Romans turn out, of course, to be the conspirators, reveling in his bloodshed. Yet, to the end, Caesar remains unconvinced by any omens. If one argues that omens serve as warnings by which individuals can avoid disaster, then one must view Caesar's inflexibility regarding these omens as an arrogance that brings about his death. On the other hand, Shakespeare also imparts Caesar's stubbornness with dignity and a touch of wisdom, as when Caesar professes that since the gods decide the time of one's death, death cannot be averted: if it is fated for the conspirators to kill him, perhaps to die bravely is the most honorable, worthy course of action he can take.

ct III, scene i

But I am constant as the Northern Star,
Of whose true fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.

Artemidorus and the Soothsayer await Caesar in the street. Caesar enters with Brutus, Cassius, Casca, Decius, Metellus, Trebonius, Cinna, Ligarius, Antony, and other senators. Artemidorus approaches with his letter, saying that its contents are a matter of closest concern for Caesar. Caesar responds, "What touches us ourself shall be last served"—that is, his personal concerns are his last priority (III.i.8). Artemidorus tells him to read it instantly, but Caesar dismisses him as crazy.

The group enters the Senate, and Cassius worries that the assassination plot has been discovered. Trebonius draws Antony away from the Senate room. Metellus approaches Caesar to request that his brother, Publius Cimber, who has been banished from Rome, be granted permission to return. Caesar answers that since Publius was banished by lawful decree, there is not just cause for absolving his guilt. Brutus and Cassius kneel at Caesar's feet and repeat Metellus's plea; Caesar answers that he will not change his mind now, declaring himself as "constant as the Northern Star" (III.i.60). When Cinna comes forward and kneels to plead further, Caesar adds another comparison, suggesting that they might as well hope to "lift up Olympus," the mountain where the gods were believed to dwell, as to sway Caesar in his convictions (III.i.74).

Decius and Ligarius, followed by Casca, come forward to kneel at Caesar's feet. Casca stabs Caesar first, and the others quickly follow, ending with Brutus. Recognizing that Brutus, too, has joined with the conspirators, Caesar speaks his last words: "*Et tu, Brute?*—Then fall Caesar" (III.i.76). He then yields and dies. The conspirators proclaim the triumph of liberty, and many exit in a tumult, including Lepidus and Artemidorus. Trebonius enters to announce that

Antony has fled.

Brutus tells the conspirators that they have acted as friends to Caesar by shortening the time that he would have spent fearing death. He urges them to bend down and bathe their hands in Caesar's blood, then walk to the marketplace (the Roman Forum) with their bloodied swords to proclaim peace, freedom, and liberty. Cassius agrees, declaring that the scene they now enact will be repeated time and again in the ages to come as a commemorative ritual.

Antony's servant enters with a message: Antony, having learned of Caesar's death, sends word that he loved Caesar but will now vow to serve Brutus if Brutus promises not to punish him for his past allegiance. Brutus says that he will not harm Antony and sends the servant to bid him come. Brutus remarks to Cassius that Antony will surely be an ally now, but Cassius replies that he still has misgivings.

Antony enters and sees Caesar's corpse. He marvels how a man so great in deed and reputation could end as such a small and pathetic body. He tells the conspirators that if they mean to kill him as well, they should do it at once, for there would be no better place to die than beside Caesar. Brutus tells Antony not to beg for death, saying that although their hands appear bloody, their hearts have been, and continue to be, full of pity; although they must appear to him now as having acted in cruelty, their actual motives stemmed from sympathy and love for the Roman populace. Brutus tells Antony to wait until the conspirators have calmed the multitude; then they will explain fully why they have killed Caesar. Antony says he does not doubt their wisdom and shakes each of their bloody hands, staining the not-yet-bloodied hands of Trebonius, who has returned from leading Antony astray, in the process.

Antony now addresses Caesar's departed spirit, asking to be pardoned for making peace with the conspirators over his dead body. After Antony praises Caesar's bravery, Cassius questions his loyalty. Antony assures Cassius that he indeed desires to be numbered among their friends, explaining that he merely forgot himself for a moment upon seeing Caesar's body. He emphasizes that he will gladly ally himself with all of the former conspirators, as long as they can explain to him why Caesar was dangerous.

Brutus assures Antony that he will find their explanation satisfactory. Antony asks if he might bring the body to the Forum and speak a funeral oration. Brutus consents, but Cassius urges him against granting permission. He tells Brutus that Antony will surely move the people against them if he is allowed to speak. Brutus replies that he will preface Antony's words, explaining to the public the reason for the conspirators' deed, and then explain that Antony has been allowed to speak only by Brutus's consent. He believes that the people will admire his magnanimity for allowing Antony, a friend of Caesar's, to take part in the funeral, and that the episode will benefit the conspiracy's public image. Cassius remains displeased, but Brutus allows Antony to take Caesar's body, instructing him to speak well of them since they are doing him a favor by permitting him to give the oration.

All depart; Antony remains alone onstage. He asks Caesar to pardon him for being gentle with his murderers. Antony prophesies that civil strife will follow Caesar's death and lead to much destruction. As long as the foul deed of Caesar's death remains unavenged, he predicts, Caesar's spirit will continue to seek revenge, bringing chaos to Rome.

Octavius's servant enters and sees the body on the ground. Antony tells him to return to Octavius, who had been traveling to Rome at Caesar's behest, and keep his master out of the city; Rome is now dangerous for Octavius, Caesar's adopted son and appointed successor. But Antony urges the servant to come to the Forum and hear his funeral speech. Once they see how the public responds to the conspirators' evil deed, they can decide how Octavius should proceed.

Analysis

Just preceding his death, Caesar refuses Artemidorus's pleas to speak with him, saying that he gives last priority to his nearest, most personal concerns. He thus again demonstrates a split between his public and private selves, endangering himself by believing that his public self is so strong that his private self cannot be harmed. This sense of invulnerability manifests itself clearly when Caesar compares himself to the North Star, which never moves from its position at the center of the sky: "constant as the Northern Star, / Of whose true fixed and resting quality / There is no fellow in the firmament. / [the] one in all [that] doth hold his place" (III.i.60–65). He not only considers himself steadfast but also infallible, beyond the questioning of mortal men, as he compares the foolish idea of him being persuaded of something to the impossible act of hefting the weight of Mount Olympus. In positioning himself thus as a divine figure (the Romans deified certain beloved figures, such as popular leaders, and believed that, upon dying, these figures became ensconced in the firmament), Caesar reveals his belief that he is truly a god. His refusal to pardon Metellus's banished brother serves to show that his belief in the sanctity of his own authority is unwavering up to the moment that he is killed.

Cassius suggests that future generations will remember, repeat, and retell the conspirators' actions in the years to come. The statement constitutes a self-referential moment in the play, since Shakespeare's play itself is a retelling of a retelling: the historical murder of Caesar had been treated earlier by Plutarch (46–119? a.d.), whose *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* served as Shakespeare's source. It was Plutarch who asserted that Caesar ceased to defend himself upon recognizing Brutus among the conspirators, and Plutarch who first gave Caesar his famous last words, which Shakespeare preserves in the original Latin, "*Et tu, Brute?*" ("And you, Brutus?" [III.i.76]). With these words, Caesar apprehends the immensity of the plot to kill him—a plot so total that it includes even his friends—and simultaneously levels a heartbroken reproach at his former friend. By Shakespeare's time, Plutarch's lines had already achieved fame, and an Elizabethan audience would likely have anticipated them in the murder scene.

It is Shakespeare's deft hand of creation, however, that brings Antony to the scene. Despairing

over Caesar's death, Antony knows that he poses a danger to the conspirators and that he must pretend to support them if he wants to survive. He assures them that they have his allegiance and shakes their hands, thus smearing himself with Caesar's blood and marking Trebonius with blood as well. By marking Trebonius, Antony may be silently insisting on Trebonius's guilt in the murder, even if his part was less direct than that of the other conspirators. Yet he does so in a handshake, an apparent gesture of allegiance. While the blood on Trebonius's hands marks him as a conspirator, the blood on Antony's hands, like war paint, marks him as the self-appointed instrument for vengeance against Caesar's killers.

Cassius's worries about Antony's rhetorical skill prove justified. The first scene of the play clearly illustrates the fickleness of the multitude, which hastens to cheer Caesar's triumph over a man whom it once adored. Surely the conspirators run a great risk by letting such a fickle audience listen to the mournful Antony. Yet, blinded by his conception of the assassination as a noble deed done for the people and one that the people must thus necessarily appreciate, Brutus believes that the masses will respond most strongly not to Antony's words but to the fact that the conspirators have allowed him to speak at all. Because he feels that he himself, by helping to murder a dear friend, has sacrificed the most, Brutus believes that he will be respected for giving priority to public matters over private ones. We will see, however, that Brutus's misjudgment will lead to his own downfall: he grossly underestimates Antony's oratorical skill and overestimates the people's conception of virtue

ct III, scenes ii–iii

He was my friend, faithful and just to me.
But Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.

Act III, scene ii

Brutus and Cassius enter the Forum with a crowd of plebeians. Cassius exits to speak to another portion of the crowd. Brutus addresses the onstage crowd, assuring them that they may trust in his honor. He did not kill Caesar out of a lack of love for him, he says, but because his love for Rome outweighed his love of a single man. He insists that Caesar was great but ambitious: it was for this reason that he slew him. He feared that the Romans would live as slaves under Caesar's leadership.

He asks if any disagree with him, and none do. He thus concludes that he has offended no one and asserts that now Caesar's death has been accounted for, with both his virtues and faults in life given due attention. Antony then enters with Caesar's body. Brutus explains to the crowd that Antony had no part in the conspiracy but that he will now be part of the new commonwealth. The plebeians cheer Brutus's apparent kindness, declaring that Brutus should

be Caesar. He quiets them and asks them to listen to Antony, who has obtained permission to give a funeral oration. Brutus exits.

Antony ascends to the pulpit while the plebeians discuss what they have heard. They now believe that Caesar was a tyrant and that Brutus did right to kill him. But they wait to hear Antony. He asks the audience to listen, for he has come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. He acknowledges Brutus's charge that Caesar was ambitious and maintains that Brutus is "an honourable man," but he says that Caesar was his friend (III.ii.84). He adds that Caesar brought to Rome many captives, whose countrymen had to pay their ransoms, thus filling Rome's coffers. He asks rhetorically if such accumulation of money for the people constituted ambition. Antony continues that Caesar sympathized with the poor: "When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept" (III.ii.88). He reminds the plebeians of the day when he offered the crown to Caesar three times, and Caesar three times refused. Again, he ponders aloud whether this humility constituted ambition. He claims that he is not trying to disprove Brutus's words but rather to tell them what he, Antony, knows; he insists that as they all loved Caesar once, they should mourn for him now.

Antony pauses to weep. The plebeians are touched; they remember when Caesar refused the crown and wonder if more ambitious people have not stepped into his place. Antony speaks again, saying that he would gladly stir them to mutiny and rebellion, though he will not harm Brutus or Cassius, for they are—again—honorable men. He then brings out Caesar's will. The plebeians beg him to read it. Antony says that he should not, for then they would be touched by Caesar's love for them. They implore him to read it. He replies that he has been speaking too long—he wrongs the honorable men who have let him address the crowd. The plebeians call the conspirators traitors and demand that Antony read the will.

Finally, Antony descends from the pulpit and prepares to read the letter to the people as they stand in a circle around Caesar's corpse. Looking at the body, Antony points out the wounds that Brutus and Cassius inflicted, reminding the crowd how Caesar loved Brutus, and yet Brutus stabbed him viciously. He tells how Caesar died and blood ran down the steps of the Senate. Then he uncovers the body for all to see. The plebeians weep and become enraged. Antony says that they should not be stirred to mutiny against such "honourable men" (III.ii.148). He protests that he does not intend to steal away their hearts, for he is no orator like Brutus. He proclaims himself a plain man; he speaks only what he knows, he says—he will let Caesar's wounds speak the rest. If he were Brutus, he claims, he could urge them to rebel, but he is merely Antony.

The people declare that they will mutiny nonetheless. Antony calls to them to let him finish: he has not yet read the will. He now reads that Caesar has bequeathed a sum of money from his personal holdings to every man in Rome. The citizens are struck by this act of generosity and swear to avenge this selfless man's death. Antony continues reading, revealing Caesar's plans to make his private parks and gardens available for the people's pleasure. The plebeians can take no more; they charge off to wreak havoc throughout the city. Antony, alone, wonders what will

come of the mischief he has set loose on Rome. Octavius's servant enters. He reports that Octavius has arrived at Caesar's house, and also that Brutus and Cassius have been driven from Rome.

Act III, scene iii

Cinna the poet, a different man from Cinna the conspirator, walks through the city. A crowd of plebeians descends, asking his name. He answers that his name is Cinna, and the plebeians confuse him with the conspirator Cinna. Despite Cinna's insistence that they have the wrong man, the plebeians drag him off and beat him to death.

Analysis: Act III, scenes ii–iii

Act III, scene ii evidences the power of rhetoric and oratory: first Brutus speaks and then Antony, each with the aim of persuading the crowd to his side. We observe each speaker's effect on the crowd and see the power that words can have—how they can stir emotion, alter opinion, and induce action. Brutus speaks to the people in prose rather than in verse, presumably trying to make his speech seem plain and to keep himself on the level of the plebeians. He quickly convinces the people that Caesar had to die because he would have become a tyrant and brought suffering to them all. He desires to convey that this message comes from the mouth of a concerned Roman citizen, not from the mouth of a greedy usurper.

Antony's speech is a rhetorical tour de force. He speaks in verse and repeats again and again that Brutus and the conspirators are honorable men; the phrase "Brutus says he was ambitious, / And Brutus is an honourable man" accrues new levels of sarcasm at each repetition (III.ii.83–84). Antony answers Brutus's allegation that Caesar was "ambitious" by reminding the crowd of the wealth that Caesar brought to Rome, Caesar's sympathy for the poor, and his refusal to take the throne when offered it—details seeming to disprove any charges of ambition. Pausing to weep openly before the plebeians, he makes them feel pity for him and for his case.

Antony's refined oratorical skill enables him to manipulate the crowd into begging him to read Caesar's will. By means of *praeteritio*, a rhetorical device implemented by a speaker to mention a certain thing while claiming not to mention it, Antony alerts the plebeians to the fact that Caesar cared greatly for them: "It is not meet [fitting] you know how Caesar loved you . . . 'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs" (III.ii.138–142). Under the pretense of sympathetically wanting to keep the plebeians from becoming outraged, Antony hints to them that they should become outraged. He thus gains their favor.

Further demonstrating his charisma, Antony descends from the pulpit—a more effective way of becoming one with the people than Brutus's strategy of speaking in prose. In placing himself physically among the crowd, Antony joins the commoners without sacrificing his rhetorical influence over them. First he speaks of Caesar's wounds and his horrible death; he shows the body, evoking fully the pity and anger of the crowd. He claims, with false modesty, that he is

not a great orator, like Brutus, and that he doesn't intend to incite revolt. Yet in this very sentence he effects the exact opposite of what his words say: he proves himself a deft orator indeed, and although he speaks against mutiny, he knows that at this point the mere mention of the word will spur action.

Having prepared the kindling with his speech, Antony lights the fire of the people's fury with his presentation of Caesar's will. Caesar had intended to share his wealth with the people of Rome and had planned to surrender his parks for their benefit. Antony predicts and utilizes the people's sense of injustice at being stripped of so generous a ruler. The people completely forget their former sympathy for Brutus and rise up against the conspirators, leaving Antony to marvel at the force of what he has done.

In the ensuing riot, the killing of Cinna the Poet exemplifies the irrationality of the brutality that has been unleashed; since Caesar's murder, Rome has become so anarchic that even a poet finds himself in grave danger. This murder of the wrong man parallels the conspirators' more metaphoric murder of the wrong man: although Brutus and Cassius believe that they have brought an end to Caesar's charisma and authority, they have merely brought an end to the mortal body that he inhabited. While the body may lie dead, the true Caesar, the leader of the people, lives on in their hearts—as he does in the anxious minds of the conspirators: Brutus will soon encounter Caesar's ghost near the battlefield. The populace will now seek a man who can serve as their "Caesar"—the word has now become a synonym for "ruler"—in his place; Caesar has instilled in the Romans a desire to replace the old republic with a monarchy.

Act IV, scenes i–ii

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He must be taught, and trained, and bid go forth—
A barren-spirited fellow . . .
. . . a property.

Act IV, scene i

Antony meets Octavius and Lepidus at his house. They review a list of names, deciding who must be killed. Lepidus agrees to the death of his brother if Antony will agree to allow his nephew to be killed. Antony suggests that, as a way of saving money, they examine Caesar's will to see if they can redirect some of his funds. Lepidus departs, and Antony asks Octavius if Lepidus is a worthy enough man to rule Rome with him and Octavius. Octavius replies that he trusts him, but Antony harbors doubts. Octavius points out that Lepidus is a "tried and valiant soldier," to which Antony responds, "So is my horse": he goes on to compare Lepidus to a mere animal, calling him a "barren-spirited fellow" and a mere tool (IV.i.28–36). Antony now turns the conversation to Brutus and Cassius, who are reportedly gathering an army; it falls to

Octavius and Antony to confront them and halt their bid for power.

There is a tide in the affairs of men
. . .
And we must take the current when it serves . . .

Summary: Act IV, scene ii

Meanwhile, Brutus waits with his men in camp and meets with Lucillius, Titinius, and Pindarus. Lucillius bears a message from Cassius and steps aside to speak to Brutus. He says that Cassius is becoming more and more displeased with Brutus, and Brutus worries that their ties may be weakening. Cassius arrives with his army and accuses Brutus of having wronged him. Brutus replies that he would not wrong him, as he considers him his brother, and insists that they continue the discussion privately in Brutus's tent.

Cassius charges Brutus with having condemned one of their men for taking bribes, even though Cassius sent letters asking him not to, since Cassius knew the man. Brutus responds by accusing Cassius of having taken bribes himself at times. Brutus tells him to recall the Ides of March, when they killed Caesar because they believed that he was corrupt. He asks Cassius if they should now allow themselves to descend into the very corruption that they tried to eliminate. Cassius tells Brutus not to bait him any more, for Cassius is a soldier and will fight.

The two men insult each other, and Brutus expresses the reasons for his disappointment in Cassius. Because he claims to be so honest himself that he cannot raise money by ignoble means, he was forced to ask Cassius for money, but Cassius ignored him. Cassius claims that he did not deny Brutus, but that the messenger misreported Brutus's words. Cassius accuses Brutus of having ceased to love him. He hopes that Antony and Octavius will kill him soon, for, having lost his closest ally and friend, he no longer desires to live. He offers his dagger to Brutus to kill him, declaring, "Strike as thou didst at Caesar; for I know / When though didst hate him worst, thou loved'st him better / Than ever thou loved'st Cassius" (IV.ii.159–161).

Brutus tells Cassius to put his dagger away and says that they both are merely ill-tempered. The two men embrace and forgive each other. Outside, Lucillius is attempting to prevent a poet from entering the tent, but the poet squeezes past him and scolds Brutus and Cassius for arguing: "Love and be friends, as two such men should be, / For I have seen more years, I'm sure, than ye" (IV.ii.183–184). But, having already repledged their friendship, the two generals laugh together at the poet's presumptuousness and send him away.

Cassius and Brutus drink wine together. Cassius expresses his surprise at Brutus's earlier rage. Brutus explains that he has been under many emotional burdens lately, the foremost of which has been the death of his wife, Portia; he recently received news that she killed herself by

swallowing fire. Titinius and Messala enter with news from Rome; Messala says that the triumvirate of Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus has put a hundred senators to death. Messala asks Brutus if he has had word from Portia, and when Brutus answers negatively, Messala comments that this seems strange. When Brutus inquires if Messala knows something, Messala replies that he does not. But Brutus insists that Messala tell him the truth, and Messala reports that Portia is dead.

Brutus suggests that they march to Philippi to meet the enemy. Cassius says that he would rather let the enemy come to them. Brutus protests that they are at the peak of their readiness and should seize the opportunity. Cassius relents and agrees to march. The others depart, leaving Brutus in his tent with his servant Lucius. Brutus summons Varro and Claudio to sleep in his tent until they are needed for early morning messages.

The others fall asleep while Brutus lies awake trying to read. A spectral image enters (identified in the text as “Ghost of Caesar”). Brutus wonders if he is dreaming; he asks the form to identify himself. The Ghost replies that he is “thy evil spirit” (IV.ii.333). After telling Brutus that they will see each other again at Philippi, the Ghost disappears, and Brutus wakes his attendants. He asks them if they saw anything strange, but they reply that they did not.

Analysis: Act IV, scenes i–ii

These scenes deal with the events that take place in the vacuum of power left by Caesar’s death. Antony’s speech to the Roman citizens in Act III, scene ii centers on the fact that Caesar had set aside money for each citizen. Now, ironically, he searches for ways to turn these funds into cash in order to raise an army against Brutus and Cassius. Although he has gained his current power by offering to honor Caesar’s will and provide the citizens with their rightful money, we now see that he apparently has no intention of fulfilling this promise. In a strange dialogue with Octavius, he also badly insults Lepidus, explaining how, just as his horse has been taught to fight, turn, stop, and move his body according to Antony’s will, so, too, must Lepidus now be trained. Antony declares Lepidus “a barren-spirited fellow, one that feeds / On objects, arts, and imitations”; he reproaches Octavius, saying, “Do not talk of him / But as a property,” that is, as a mere instrument for the furtherance of their own goals (IV.i.36–40). Lepidus proves an effective tool for them in that he is malleable and apparently not intelligent enough to devise his own motives. While Shakespeare may have inserted this string of insults simply for comic relief, this abuse serves as another illustration of Antony’s sense of political expediency: while he does not respect Lepidus, he still uses him for his own purposes.

Meanwhile, questions of honor plague the conspirators as well, as Cassius and Brutus exchange accusations. Their argument seems to arise partially from a misunderstanding but also partially from stubbornness. Though Brutus claims that his honor forbids him from raising money in unscrupulous ways, he would still use such money as long as it was not he himself, but rather Cassius, who raised it. We see that Brutus speaks against corruption, but when he has no other

means of paying his army, he quickly consents to unscrupulousness, if only indirectly.

Portia's death is reported twice in scene ii (Plutarch's telling, upon which Shakespeare based his play, describes Portia's death more explicitly: she put hot coals in her mouth and choked herself to death). Some argue that the repetition of the announcement of Portia's suicide reveals the effect of revision on Shakespeare's part; perhaps, while adding in one section of the scene, he forgot to remove another. Other scholars suggest that Brutus's two separate comments regarding Portia's death show two separate sides of his personality—again, the private versus the public. That is, alone with Cassius, he admits that his distress at the loss of his wife, but before his men, he appears indifferent or dispassionate. Perhaps the latter reaction is merely a facade, and Brutus simply has too much pride to show his true feelings in public.

Brutus's words to Cassius proclaiming their readiness for battle are significant in that they emphasize Brutus's belief in the power of the will over fate:

We at the height are ready to decline.
There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures. (IV.ii.269–276)

Throughout the play, the theme of fate versus free will proves important: here, Brutus suggests that both exist and that one should take advantage of fate by asserting one's will. While subsequent events demonstrate that the force of fate (or perhaps just Antony and Octavius's superior maneuvering) is stronger than Brutus's individual actions, his speech still makes for a graceful, philosophic axiom, showing Brutus to be a man of deep reflection.

Brutus cannot sleep—perhaps because he is brooding internally on his guilt; in any case, this guilt is soon manifested externally in the form of the Ghost of Caesar. This phantom's identification of himself to Brutus as "thy evil spirit" could mean either that the Ghost is an evil spirit appearing to Brutus's eyes only—a spirit that is "his" alone—or that the Ghost represents Brutus's own spirit, which is secretly evil (IV.ii.333). However one interprets the arrival of the specter, the event can only bode ill for Brutus in the battle to come.

Act V, scenes i–iii

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Act V, scene i

Octavius and Antony enter the battlefield at Philippi with their armies. A messenger arrives to

report that the enemy is ready for battle. Antony, the more experienced soldier, tells Octavius to attack from the left. Octavius refuses and replies that he will attack from the right and Antony can come from the left. Antony asks Octavius why he questions his authority, but Octavius stands firm.

The enemy factions—consisting of Brutus, Cassius, and their armies—enter; Titinius, Lucillius, and Messala are among them. Octavius asks Antony if their side should attack first, and Antony, now calling Octavius "Caesar," responds that they will wait for the enemy to attack. Antony and Octavius go to meet Brutus and Cassius. The leaders exchange insults. Octavius draws his sword and calls for Caesar's death to be avenged; he swears that he will not lay the sword down again until another Caesar (namely himself) adds the deaths of the traitors to the general slaughter. The leaders insult each other further before parting to ready their armies for battle.

After the departure of Antony and Octavius, Brutus calls Lucillius to talk privately. Cassius calls Messala to do the same. Cassius tells the soldier that it is his birthday and informs him of recent bad omens: two mighty eagles alighted on the foremost banners of their army and perched there, feeding from the soldiers' hands; this morning, however, they are gone. Now ravens, crows, and other scavenger birds circle over the troops as if the men were diseased and weak prey. Cassius walks back to join Brutus and comments that the future looks uncertain; if they lose, they may never see each other again. Cassius asks Brutus if Brutus would allow himself to be led through Rome as a captive should they lose. Brutus replies that he would rather die than go to Rome as a defeated prisoner; he declares that this day "must end that work the ides of March begun"—that is, the battle represents the final stage in the struggle for power that began with the murder of Caesar (V.i.114). He bids Cassius "for ever and for ever farewell" (V.i.117). Cassius echoes these sentiments, and the men depart.

Act V, scene ii

The battle begins between the scenes, and the next scene, comprising a scant total of six lines, depicts the two sides' first surge against each other. Brutus sends Messala to Cassius to report that he senses a weakness in Octavius's army and will push forward to exploit it.

Act V, scene iii

The next scene finds Cassius standing on a hill with Titinius, watching the battle and lamenting its course. Though Brutus was correct in noting Octavius's weakness, he proved overeager in his attack, and the tide of battle has turned against him. Pindarus now runs up to Cassius with a report: Antony's troops have entered Cassius's camp. He advises Cassius to flee to some more distant spot. Cassius refuses to move but, catching sight of a group of burning tents, asks if those tents are his. Titinius confirms that they are. Cassius then notices a series of advancing troops in the distance; he gives Titinius his horse and instructs him to find out whose troops they are. Titinius obeys and rides off.

Cassius asks Pindarus to ascend a nearby hill and monitor Titinius's progress. Pindarus calls down his reports: Titinius, riding hard, is soon surrounded by the unknown men; he dismounts the horse and the unknown men cheer. Distraught at this news of what he takes to be his best friend's capture, Cassius tells Pindarus to watch no more. Pindarus descends the hilltop, whereupon Cassius gives Pindarus his sword, covers his own eyes, and asks Pindarus to kill him. Pindarus complies. Dying, Cassius's last words are that Caesar has now been revenged by the very sword that killed him.

Unexpectedly, Titinius now enters with Messala, observing that the battle rages on without sign of ending. Although Antony's forces defeated those of Cassius, Brutus's legions rallied to defeat those of Octavius. The men then discover Cassius's body. Titinius realizes what has happened: when he rode out to the unknown troops, he discovered the troops to be Brutus's; the men's embrace of Titinius must have appeared to Pindarus a capture, and Cassius must have misperceived their joyful cheers of reunion as the bloodthirsty roars of the enemy's men. Messala departs to bring the tragic news to Brutus. Titinius mourns over Cassius's body, anguished that a man whom he greatly admired died over such a mistake. Miserable, Titinius stabs himself and dies.

Brutus now enters with Messala and his men. Finding the bodies, Brutus cries, "O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet": even in death, Caesar is reaping revenge; he seems to turn events against his murderers from beyond the grave (V.iii.93). Brutus orders that Cassius's body be taken away, and the men set off to struggle again with the armies of Antony and Octavius.

Analysis: Act V, scene i–iii

When Octavius refuses to agree to Antony's strategic instructions before the battle, his obstinate resolution to follow his own will and his clarity of command echo Caesar's first appearance in the play. In Act I, scene ii, Antony comments, "When Caesar says 'Do this,' it is performed"; such authority is the mark of a powerful leader (I.ii.12). Octavius, Caesar's chosen successor, now has this authority too—his word equals action. Antony, noticing this similarity between adopted son and father, begins calling Octavius "Caesar." Just as Caesar transforms his name from that of a mere mortal into that of a divine figure, Antony converts "Caesar," once one man's name, into the generic title for the ruler of Rome. In at least one way, then, Caesar's permanence is established.

The exchange between the four leaders profits from close reading, as it compares the respective powers of words and swords to harm. When Brutus insists that "good words are better than bad strokes," Antony replies, "In your bad strokes, Brutus, you give good words. / Witness the hole you made in Caesar's heart, / Crying 'Long live, hail Caesar'" (V.i.29–32). Antony suggests that Brutus's use of rhetoric has been just as damaging to Rome as his physical blows, for by falsely swearing allegiance to Caesar he deceived and betrayed him—hypocritically, he murdered Caesar even as he cheered in support of him. Cassius returns the insult by comparing Antony's

words to an annoying bee's buzzing, and Antony condemns Cassius and Brutus as "flatterers" (V.i.45). The politicians engage in a skillful rhetorical skirmish, but, ultimately, their words have no effective power. Since Brutus's actions have proved his words treacherous and untrustworthy, the murder of Caesar can now be answered only in blood.

The tragic circumstances of Cassius's death represent another instance of misinterpretation. They refer strongly to Caesar's death: like Caesar, Cassius dies after failing to perceive the truth; and he dies from his own sword, the same sword that killed Caesar. Indeed, the entire scene attests to Caesar's continuing power of influence from beyond the grave: as Cassius dies, he credits the murdered leader with his defeat. Brutus, with the ghostly visitor of the previous night fresh in his mind, also interprets Cassius's death as the doings of a vengeful Caesar. In believing himself immortal, Caesar opened himself up to his murder by the conspirators, and his death seemed to disprove his faith in his own permanence. Yet now the power of Caesar appears to linger on, as events unfold in exact compliance with what Caesar would have wished.

Just as the misinformation that causes Cassius to commit suicide cheapens his death, so too do the manner and consequence of his death render it less noble. Cassius desires a virtuous death, and he believes that dying out of respect and sympathy for his captured friend will afford him just such an end: "O coward that I am, to live so long / To see my best friend ta'en before my face!" (V.iii.34–35). He cannot, however, bring himself to perform the necessary act; though he implies that his choice to die is brave, he does not possess the requisite bravery. Cassius's last line widens this gap between his conception and reality: "Caesar, thou art revenged, / Even with the sword that killed thee" (V.iii.44–45). Cassius attempts to situate his death as a righteous, even graceful, working of dignified fate, and perhaps even to compare himself to the great Caesar. Yet while the sword that kills both is, fatefully, the same, the hands that drive it are not, ruining Cassius's parallel. Immediately after Cassius's death, no dedicated friend delivers a praise-filled, tearful eulogy celebrating his life. Rather, the only witness, Pindarus, a lowly slave, flees to his freedom, "where never Roman shall take note of him" (V.iii.49). Pindarus's idea of escaping notice reflects upon Cassius and his ignoble deeds, for which history will not remember him kindly.

Act V, scenes iv–v

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Act V, scene iv

Brutus prepares for another battle with the Romans. In the field, Lucillius pretends that he is Brutus, and the Romans capture him. Antony's men bring him before Antony, who recognizes Lucillius. Antony orders his men to go see if the real Brutus is alive or dead and to treat their prisoner well.

Act V, scene v

Brutus sits with his few remaining men. He asks them to hold his sword so that he may run against it and kill himself. The Ghost of Caesar has appeared to him on the battlefield, he says, and he believes that the time has come for him to die. His men urge him to flee; he demurs, telling them to begin the retreat, and that he will catch up later. He then asks one of his men to stay behind and hold the sword so that he may yet die honorably. Impaling himself on the sword, Brutus declares that in killing himself he acts on motives twice as pure as those with which he killed Caesar, and that Caesar should consider himself avenged: “Caesar, now be still. / I killed not thee with half so good a will” (V.v.50–51).

Antony enters with Octavius, Messala, Lucillius, and the rest of their army. Finding Brutus’s body, Lucillius says that he is glad that his master was not captured alive. Octavius decides to take Brutus’s men into his own service. Antony speaks over the body, stating that Brutus was the noblest Roman of all: while the other conspirators acted out of envy of Caesar’s power, Brutus acted for what he believed was the common good. Brutus was a worthy citizen, a rare example of a real man. Octavius adds that they should bury him in the most honorable way and orders the body to be taken to his tent. The men depart to celebrate their victory.

Analysis: Act V, scenes iv–v

Brutus preserves his noble bravery to the end: unlike the cowardly Cassius, who has his slave stab him while he, Cassius, covers his face, Brutus decides calmly on his death and impales himself on his own sword. Upon giving up the ghost, Brutus, like Cassius, addresses Caesar in an acknowledgment that Caesar has been avenged; whereas Cassius closes with a factual remark about Caesar’s murder (“Even with the sword that killed thee” [V.iii.45]), Brutus closes with an emotional expression that reveals how his inextinguishable inner conflict has continued to plague him: “I killed not thee with half so good a will” (V.v.51). Additionally, whereas the dead Cassius is immediately abandoned by a lowly slave, the dead Brutus is almost immediately celebrated by his enemy as the noblest of Romans. Notably, Brutus is also the only character in the play to interpret correctly the signs auguring his death. When the Ghost of Caesar appears to him on the battlefield, he unflinchingly accepts his defeat and the inevitability of his death.

With Antony’s speech over Brutus’s body, it finally becomes clear who the true hero—albeit a tragic hero—of the play is. Although Caesar gives the play its name, he has few lines and dies early in the third act. While Octavius has proven himself the leader of the future, he has not yet demonstrated his full glory. History tells us that Antony will soon be ousted from the triumvirate by Octavius’s growing power. Over the course of the play, Cassius rises to some power, but since he lacks integrity, he is little more than a petty schemer. The idealistic, tormented Brutus, struggling between his love for Caesar and his belief in the ideal of a republic, faces the most difficult of decisions—a decision in which the most is at stake—and he

chooses wrongly. As Antony observes, Brutus's decision to enter into the conspiracy does not originate in ambition but rather in his inflexible belief in what the Roman government should be. His ideal proves too rigid in the political world of the play, in which it appears that one succeeds only through chameleonlike adaptability, through bargaining and compromise—skills that Antony masterfully displays.

Brutus's mistake lies in his attempt to impose his private sense of honor on the whole Roman state. In the end, killing Caesar does not stop the Roman republic from becoming a dictatorship, for Octavius assumes power and becomes a new Caesar. Brutus's beliefs may be a holdover from earlier ideas of statesmanship. Unable to shift into the new world order, Brutus misunderstands Caesar's intentions and mistakes the greedy ambition of the conspirators for genuine civic concern. Thus, Brutus kills his friend and later dies himself. But in the end, Antony, the master rhetorician, with no trace of the sarcasm that suffuses his earlier speech about Brutus, still honors him as the best Roman of them all.

motifs

posted Aug 3, 2013, 12:06 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 3, 2013, 12:06 PM]**

Omens and Portents

Throughout the play, omens and portents manifest themselves, each serving to crystallize the larger themes of fate and misinterpretation of signs. Until Caesar's death, each time an omen or nightmare is reported, the audience is reminded of Caesar's impending demise. The audience wonders whether these portents simply announce what is fated to occur or whether they serve as warnings for what might occur if the characters do not take active steps to change their behavior. Whether or not individuals can affect their destinies, characters repeatedly fail to interpret the omens correctly. In a larger sense, the omens in *Julius Caesar* thus imply the dangers of failing to perceive and analyze the details of one's world.

Letters

The motif of letters represents an interesting counterpart to the force of oral rhetoric in the play. Oral rhetoric depends upon a direct, dialogic interaction between speaker and audience: depending on how the listeners respond to a certain statement, the orator can alter his or her speech and intonations accordingly. In contrast, the power of a written letter depends more fully on the addressee; whereas an orator must read the emotions of the crowd, the act of reading is undertaken solely by the recipient of the letter. Thus, when Brutus receives the forged letter from Cassius in Act II, scene i, the letter has an effect because Brutus allows it to do so; it is he who grants it its full power. In contrast, Caesar refuses to read the letter that Artemidorus tries to hand him in Act III, scene i, as he is heading to the Senate. Predisposed to ignore personal affairs, Caesar denies the letter any reading at all and thus negates the potential power of the words written inside

Critical Essays

posted Aug 3, 2013, 12:05 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 3, 2013, 12:05 PM]**

Critical Responses

1Reflecting on the decisive transition from neo-classical to Romantic criticism of Shakespeare, Jonathan Bate cites T. S. Eliot's comment that while we can never be right about Shakespeare, "we should from time to time change our way of being wrong." Bate's point is that "the Romantics were especially good at driving out assorted errors of Voltaire and Dr Johnson with new errors of their own" (*Romantics*, 3). A corollary of Eliot's insight is that one benefit of recognizing how Shakespeare has been understood in the past is to recognize better how we understand him ourselves. Though more comfortable and seemingly more natural than anything else, our view is not the right view; it departs from what preceded it but only at the cost of introducing new distortions that will in turn need to be corrected. In the process old ideas will be rediscovered and sometimes even repeated, while genuinely new insights will be introduced. The following discussion of how *Julius Caesar* in particular has been interpreted bears out Eliot's observation and aims to assist understanding of the play by a critical summary of historical views.

2Criticism of Shakespeare began with a strong bias in favor of Renaissance Italian neo-classicism whose assumptions continued to dominate commentary for almost 200 years. *Julius Caesar* was assessed in light of criteria supposedly derived from the ancient critics, Aristotle

and Horace, and by those criteria the play was generally found wanting. A reaction against neo-classical poetry in the late eighteenth century, especially by Wordsworth and Coleridge, quickly led to a reaction against neo-classical criticism as well, and Shakespeare emerged as the model of an innovative style. Viewed in this way, *Julius Caesar* elicited much greater admiration, especially for its leading characters, and a debate ensued as to which was in fact the greatest character—Caesar or Brutus—and why. Character criticism extended into the early twentieth century with M. W. MacCallum's *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background*, which marked the end of a critical movement, even as it anticipated some of the twentieth century's most important insights about *Julius Caesar*. These included providential imperialism, developed influentially as the "Tudor myth" by E. M. W. Tillyard, and self-deception, an informing assumption of postmodern criticism. G. Wilson Knight's *The Imperial Theme* moved criticism of *Julius Caesar* in another influential direction: the analysis of symbol and theme, which also continues into postmodern criticism of the play, especially in understanding imagery of blood and the body.

1. Horace and *Julius Caesar*

3By a curious and unforeseeable coincidence, the critic who most strongly influenced the first two centuries of response to Shakespeare's writing in general, and to *Julius Caesar* in particular, was a Roman, Quintus Horatius Flaccus, who turned twenty-one in the year Julius Caesar was assassinated. Though Shakespeare could hardly have known it, Horace (the Roman critic's more familiar English name) joined Brutus and Cassius as a young officer after Julius Caesar's assassination and commanded a legion at the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C—the concluding event in Shakespeare's play. Eventually pardoned by Octavian for his opposition, Horace nonetheless withdrew from political life and became an influential literary figure after the senate declared Octavian "Augustus" in 27. Thus sidelined from military and political action, Horace unwittingly set the standard for later interpretation through a verse epistle, *Ars Poetica*, which he wrote early in the long political calm—eventually known as the *pax Romana*—following Augustus' defeat of Antony. Centuries later, Italian Renaissance critics came to regard *Ars Poetica* as a direct Latin equivalent to Aristotle's *Poetics* (Weinberg, 1.111-55), and the prestige of Italian criticism brought Horace to prominence in early seventeenth-century England. Shakespeare's contemporary, Ben Jonson rendered Horace's poem in English (published in 1640), probably from a copy of the *Ars Poetica* he owned in Latin, bound together with the Italian commentary of Bernardino Parthenio (1560), with "much of the second part . . . underlined" (Jonson, ed. Herford and Simpson, 1.266). (On Parthenio, see Weinberg, 1.145-47.) Moreover, Jonson largely followed *Ars Poetica* in the brief comments he penned on his fellow actor and playwright—the first critical response to Shakespeare and the first of many to interpret Shakespeare through a Renaissance Horatian lens.

4One of Jonson's most Horatian passages appears in his commendatory verses for the Folio of 1623, "To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare," where Jonson

acknowledges both nature and art in Shakespeare's writing. After praising nature, Jonson turns to art with emphasis:

5Yet must I not give nature all; thy art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the poet's matter nature be,
His art doth give the fashion; and that he
Who casts to write a living line must sweat
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
Upon the muse's anvil; turn the same,
And himself with it, and that he thinks to frame,
Or for the laurel he may gain a scorn;
For a good poet's made as well as born. (55-64)

6Horace's way of treating the *topos* of art vs. nature was especially influential in the Renaissance, and Jonson is indebted to *Ars Poetica*. The awkward parenthesis, "(Such as thine are)," in "To the Memory" (60) is deliberate. Referring back to "living line" (59), it inevitably refers to "sweat" as well, which it immediately follows—as if Jonson is saying that Shakespeare had to sweat out his lines. Indeed, that is precisely Jonson's claim, once the tangled syntax is straightened out: poetry did not come to Shakespeare merely by nature; he had to work for it, "For a good poet's made as well as born." Jonson's image of "the muse's anvil" is from Horace: "to the anvil bring / Those ill-turned verses to new hammering," in Jonson's translation (Herford and Simpson, 8.304-37, lines 627-8; 440-1 in the original Latin). That Shakespeare did not sweat or hammer out his verse on the anvil *enough* is a backhanded compliment in the commendatory poem, like the often-quoted qualifying clause, "though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek" (31). Horace's advice to Roman poets lies behind this clause: "Take you the Greek examples for your light / In hand, and turn them over, day and night" (396-7; 268-9). If Shakespeare had followed Horace's advice, Jonson implies, Shakespeare's poetry would have achieved a better balance between nature and art.

7Horace's comments on nature and art underlie Jonson's other extended critical comment on Shakespeare, in which he mentions *Julius Caesar* in particular. According to William Drummond of Hawthornden, Jonson complained that "Shakespeare wanted [i.e., lacked] art" (Herford and Simpson, 1.133), and the complaint explains Jonson's reminiscence in *Discoveries* (1640):

8His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things could not escape laughter, as when he said in the person of Caesar (one speaking to him, "Caesar, thou dost me wrong"), he replied, "Caesar did never wrong but with just cause" and such like, which were ridiculous. (Herford and Simpson, 8.584)

9Jonson uses "wit" in this passage with full awareness of its Latin counterpart, *ingenium*,

meaning something like "imaginative intelligence," which places it in the domain of nature, rather than art, and his usage therefore anticipates the high neo-classical contrast between "wit" and "judgment" (Lewis, 90-96). His point about undisciplined wit in *Julius Caesar* refers to the moments before Caesar's assassination, when Caesar refuses Metellus Cimber's appeal on behalf of his brother, Publius Cimber. As printed in the Folio, Caesar concludes his refusal with a self-righteous assertion: "Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause / Will he be satisfied" (TLN 1254-5). Jonson remembered that Metellus had objected, "Caesar, thou dost me wrong," to which Caesar had replied, "Caesar did never wrong but with just cause." In the late eighteenth century, Thomas Tyrwhitt conjecturally reconstructed Caesar's lines as Jonson might have heard them: "Know Caesar doth not wrong, but with just cause, / Nor without cause will he be satisfied" (Steevens 2, 8.59n. 1). Tyrwhitt surmised that Jonson's criticism of the lines had reached Shakespeare, who undertook to rewrite them in response before publication of *Julius Caesar* in the Folio.

10For present purposes, the point of Jonson's critique is its Horatian spirit, not the accuracy of Jonson's memory. (For further comments on that point, see the Textual Introduction). Jonson alludes to Horace again in his reminiscence to Drummond: "I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honor to Shakespeare that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand,'" citing the line from *Julius Caesar* as an instance. Jonson borrowed the metaphor of blotting from Horace, whose lines he had translated: "If you denied you had no better strain, / And twice or thrice had 'ssayed it, still in vain, / He'd bid, blot all" (625-27; 439-40). Jonson's whole critique of Shakespeare in *Discoveries* makes sense in light of the way Jonson had translated Horace's advice:

11A wise and honest man will cry out shame
On artless verse; the hard ones he will blame,
Blot out the careless with his turnèd pen,
Cut off superflouous ornaments, and when
They're dark, bid "Clear this," all that's doubtful wrote
Reprove, and what is to be changèd note,
Become an Aristarchus, and not say,
"Why should I grieve my friend this trifling way?"
These trifles into mischiefs lead,
The man once mocked and suffered wrong to tread. (633-42; 445-52)

12Aristarchus, a second-century B.C.E. Alexandrian and scholar of Homer, was famous for his incisive criticism, and Jonson images himself as such a critic to Shakespeare, assuming the Horatian persona of the supportive but alert reader—one whose art was required to curb the other's prolific nature (Martindale). If the players had not actually commended Shakespeare in the way Jonson claims they did, he would have had to invent them to create for himself the Horatian role he loved to play.

13Jonson was the first swallow in the spring of neo-classical criticism of Shakespeare on Horatian principles. For two centuries after Jonson, critics of Shakespeare positioned themselves on a Horatian continuum according to their preference for nature or art. Flatly contradicting Jonson's commendatory verses for the Folio that "a good poet's made as well as born," Leonard Digges asserts that "Poets are born, not made" in the opening line of his commendatory verses for Shakespeare's *Poems* (1640; Vickers 1.27-29), citing Shakespeare as proof that nature is more important than art. Digges thus originated in English an idea that was much later Latinized for the first time by Coleridge (Ringler 197n. 1). To make the point about Shakespeare, Digges compares him with Jonson, allusively contrasting Jonson's published *Works* (1616) with Shakespeare's book of poems, "where thou hast (I will not say, / Reader, his works—for to contrive a play / To him was none) the pattern of all wit, / Art without art unparalleled as yet" (7-10). Nature enabled Shakespeare to "play," not "work," Digges claims, and thereby to achieve the highest art—a commendation that has some similarities with Polixenes' evaluation of art and nature in *The Winter's Tale* (4.4.89-97), which is closer to Puttenham's *Art of English Poesie* (1589), as Harold Wilson argues, than to Horace. Digges subsequently contrasts Shakespeare and Jonson again with specific reference to *Julius Caesar*:

14So have I seen, when Caesar would appear,
And on the stage at half-sword parley were
Brutus and Cassius, oh, how the audience
Were ravished, with what wonder they went thence. (41-44)

15This, in contrast to Jonson's classical tragedies:

16When some new day they would not brook a line
Of tedious (though well-labored) *Catiline*.
Sejanus too was irksome; they prized more
Honest Iago or the jealous Moor. (45-48)

17"Well-labored" is a backhanded tribute to Jonson's art in his two classically correct and learnedly glossed tragedies. They are indeed "works," Digges implies, suggesting that Jonson had sweated at the anvil of the muses for too long.

18Digges had been thinking about these issues for several years. His commendatory verses for Shakespeare's *Poems* in 1640 twice echo his earlier commendatory verses for the Folio of 1623: "half-sword parley" and "wit-fraught book." His praise of Shakespeare as "the pattern of all wit" uses "wit" in the same way Jonson uses it but draws the opposite conclusion—not that Shakespeare's wit needed curbing but that it was a model to every poet. Digges thus anticipates Milton's contrast in "L'Allegro" (1631) between "Jonson's learned sock" and "sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child / Warbl[ing] his native woodnotes wild" (132-4). Milton uses "fancy" to mean much the same thing Jonson and Digges mean by "wit" and thereby attributes Shakespeare's skill, again, to nature rather than art.

19Less combative than Digges, Margaret Cavendish drew on Horace to defend Shakespeare's characters in particular. "So well he hath expressed in his plays all sorts of persons," Cavendish writes, "as one would think he had been transformed into every one of those persons he hath described" (Vickers, 1.43). Taken alone, this praise might be misconstrued as an assertion of imaginative identification on a Romantic model, but Cavendish wrote in 1662, and what she has in mind is Horace's admonition concerning the decorum of character, in Jonson's somewhat opaque translation: "Or follow fame, thou that dost write, or feign / Things in themselves agreeing" (169-70; 119-20). Jonson aimed to capture Horace's point about self-consistency, as the translator's subsequent lines make clear:

20If something strange that never yet was had
Unto the scene thou bring'st, and dar'st create
A mere new person, look he keep his state
Unto the last, as when he first went forth,
Still to be like himself, and hold his worth. (178-82; 125-7)

21"Keep his state" and "hold his worth" accurately reflect Horace's concern with identity conceived in broadly stoic and social-class terms (Miles 31)—a point Cavendish makes in defending Shakespeare's "ingenious" and "witty" ability to create compelling clowns as well as kings (Vickers 1.42). The poet's aim should be to keep each character "like himself," in Jonson's translation—consistent, that is, with expectation as established by the classical three levels of style (high, middle, and low) in their presumed decorous correspondence to levels of society. Jonson himself construed this expectation differently, as his plays make clear, avoiding the mingling of social classes that is one of Shakespeare's hallmarks. Jonson, in short, would not have agreed with Cavendish, and later neo-classical critics agreed with Jonson.

22Whereas Horace cites examples of self-consistent characters from classical epic and tragedy, Cavendish cites examples from Shakespeare, singling out those in *Julius Caesar* for particular admiration: "Certainly Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, and Antonius did never really act their parts better, if so well, as he hath described them, and I believe that Antonius and Brutus did not speak better to the people than he hath feigned them" (Vickers 1.43). Cavendish's praise of Shakespeare's characterization as "witty" and "ingenious" identifies it as the product of nature, rather than art, yet Cavendish argues that Shakespeare's characters meet Horace's requirements of artful self-consistency ("act their parts"). Her praise, in short, is very close to Digges's, without challenging Jonson as forthrightly as Digges had.

23By the later seventeenth century, the Italian Renaissance conflation of Horace with Aristotle had become a widespread critical assumption in England: "Of that book which Aristotle hath left us," wrote John Dryden in 1668, "Horace his *Art of Poetry* is an excellent comment, and, I believe, restores to us that second book of his concerning comedy, which is wanting in him" (*An Essay of Dramatic Poesie*, *Works* 17.17). Horace was so familiar to Dryden that he seems to have quoted *Ars Poetica* from memory, judging from the slight alterations he sometimes

introduces (Hammond). As a practicing dramatist himself, Dryden could not help admiring Shakespeare and others in "the giant race before the flood" (i.e., the dramatists before the civil war), as he writes in "To My Dear Friend, Mr. Congreve" (line 5; *Works* 4.432), but he was aware that the "giants" did not conform to neo-classical theory, and he was therefore inclined to defend them as inspired more by nature than by art. Indeed, Dryden's allusion to the "giant race" may actually be as arch as it is appreciative, judging from an allusion to the same giants thirty years earlier, in *Astraea Redux*, written to celebrate the coronation of Charles II. There Dryden had impugned anti-Royalists as antediluvian giants, who "own'd a lawless savage liberty / Like that our painted ancestors so priz'd / Ere empire's arts their breasts had civiliz'd" (lines 46-8, *Works* 1.23). The contrast between "savage liberty" and imperial "arts" is a political judgment informed by the esthetic contrast between nature and art, and given Dryden's consistent political conservatism, the same judgment still seems to cling to Dryden's much later allusion to giants, including Shakespeare.

24As the best of seventeenth-century critics, it is unfortunate that Dryden had little to say about *Julius Caesar*. (Some editors ascribe the prologue to a Restoration revival of *Julius Caesar* to Dryden [Vickers 1.141], and the ascription has in its favor the poem's praise of "artless beauty" that "lies in Shakespeare's wit.") Writing about himself in the third person, as Jonson habitually does in his dramatic prologues, Dryden glances allusively at the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius (4.3) in the Prologue to *Aureng-Zebe*, acknowledging his awe at Shakespeare's "nature," which nonetheless lacks art:

25But spite of all his pride, a secret shame
Invades his breast at *Shakespear's* sacred name:
Aw'd, when he hears his Godlike *Romans* rage,
He, in a just despair, would quit the Stage;
And to an Age less polish'd, more unskill'd,
Does, with disdain, the foremost Honours yield. (*Works* 12.159)

26If Dryden had written about *Julius Caesar* at greater length, he would likely have praised the plot, despite its failure to achieve the three "unities" of time, place, and action that were prized by Italian theorists and French dramatists, but Dryden would almost certainly have decried the mingling of plebeians with patricians, because it was perceived to violate Horatian decorum of character: "each subject should retain / The place allotted it, with decent thews" (124-25; 89). (Jonson uses "thews" to mean "traits" or "attributes," and he knew that "decent" and "decorous" have the same Latin root.) If Dryden had written a version of the play, it would almost certainly have had no commoners, i.e., no witty Cobbler, no rowdy plebeians, and no Lucius.

27While trying to refine the rude manners of pre-Restoration drama in his own plays, i.e., to create more artful drama, Dryden was also trying to protect himself from the judgment of a strict neo-classical critic, Thomas Rymer, whose censure of *Julius Caesar* is included in his *Short View of Tragedy* (1693). Dryden clearly stated his disagreement with Rymer in his draft

"Heads of an Answer to Rymer," including notes for replying to Rymer's earlier book, *The Tragedies of the Last Age Considered and Examined* (1678), but the notes remained unpublished (*Works* 17:185-93). Rymer was formidable not only for the narrow certitude of his theory but even more for his vituperative style. With Horace's decorum of character in mind, Rymer heaped scorn on the indignity with which Shakespeare "treats the noblest Romans. But there is no other cloth in his wardrobe. Everyone must be content to wear a fool's coat who comes to be dressed by him" (156). This reverses Margaret Cavendish's assessment and outflanks the objection that Shakespeare mingles patricians and plebeians by denying noble status even to his patricians. "For indeed that language which Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Brutus would not suit or be convenient unless from some son of the shambles or some natural off-spring of the butchery" (151). So indignant is Rymer with Shakespeare on the question of character decorum that he does not even address Shakespeare's violation of the three unities. He reserves that censure for Jonson's *Catiline*, which he also savages: as a classically trained playwright, Jonson should have known better (161). Rymer's view of art was so extreme and so narrow that it denied any art to Shakespeare, asserting that he drew ignorantly on nothing but nature and his own commoner's imagination, which "was still running after his masters, the cobblers, and parish clerks, and Old Testament strollers" (156).

28Rymer's critical indignation had a large moral component, which he derived (or at any rate justified) from Horace's admonition that the best fictions mix "doctrine" (*utile*) with "delight" (*dulci*) (*Ars Poetica* 516; 360). Rymer was the first to infer that "doctrine" specifically required "poetic justice," that is, a presumed vindication of divine providence in a tragic plot by allotting a benign fortune to moral characters and a malign outcome to immoral ones. Using Rymer's criterion, all of Shakespeare's tragedies are failures, as John Dennis argued vigorously, if narrowly, concerning the "irreligious" *Julius Caesar* in particular. The killing of Caesar must be either "a murder or a lawful action." If it is lawful, then the deaths of Brutus and Cassius "are downright murder." But if Caesar's death is murder, then Brutus and Cassius "are justly punished for it," and Shakespeare is wrong not to show the other conspirators being punished as well, "which proceeding gives an occasion to the people to draw a dangerous inference from it, which may be destructive to government and to human society" (Vickers 2.147). Charles Gildon combined a critique of poetic justice in *Julius Caesar* with a complaint about its plot. "Brutus is plainly the shining and darling character of the poet," so the play is faulty either in its title or in not ending with Caesar's death, which would have made it "much more regular, natural, and beautiful. But then the moral must naturally have been the punishment or ill success of tyranny" (Vickers 2.256).

29No less Horatian (in the neo-classical view of Horace) are Dennis's comments about Shakespeare's classical learning, which also address the question of the play's length and focus. Jonson's slighting remark about Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek" was inspired by Horace's admonition to Latin poets to steep themselves in Greek models, and in turn it seems to have inspired Dennis to claim that the failures of *Julius Caesar* are attributable to deficiencies

in Shakespeare's classical learning: "Had Shakespeare read either Sallust or Cicero how could he have made so very little of the first and greatest of men, as that Caesar should be but a fourth-rate actor in his own tragedy?" (Vickers 2.288). Dennis certainly knew that Shakespeare drew his inspiration from Plutarch, so Dennis's complaint has less to do with Shakespeare's lack of reading than with his not reading the sources Dennis thought he should have read in order to write the play that Dennis thought he should have written. Applying similar strictures, Gildon complained that *Julius Caesar* failed to conform to the "unity of action, which can never be broke without destroying the poem." The play should have ended with Caesar's death; otherwise, the ending is arbitrary, and having thus failed to observe one unity, the play fails to observe others: "Natural reason indeed showed to Shakespeare the absurdity of making the representation longer than the time and the place more extensive than the place of acting" (Vickers 2.222). Awed by Rymer's extreme neo-classicism, Dennis and Gildon show how critical reason became increasingly naturalized to the particular strictures that critics had learned to associate with Horace and Aristotle.

30The topics of the Horatian debate concerning *Julius Caesar* were thus well established in England by the early eighteenth century, and high neo-classical criticism repeated those topics with variations. Critics who believed art should follow putatively Horatian and Aristotelian rules found Shakespeare's departure from the rules a problem in *Julius Caesar*, as Dennis and Gildon had. In this category are failures in the decorum of character (imagining plebeians in the same play with patricians; not making patricians speak and act like patricians) and violations of the three unities, especially the failure to unify action and time. If the play ended with the death of Caesar, it would be very nearly continuous in time over the course of not much more than twenty-four hours, and it would not entail "extraneous" action involving Brutus's defeat, as well as Caesar's. Shakespeare's failure to meet the requirements of art was due, moreover, to his ignorance of classical models—his failure to study Greek and Latin as assiduously as his critics had.

31On the other side, neo-classical defenders of *Julius Caesar* also used Horace as their authority, arguing that nature was Shakespeare's inspiration, rather than art, and thereby following (whether they knew it or not) the example of Leonard Digges. "Nature" came increasingly to mean not only superior imaginative intelligence, described as "wit" or "genius," but also an ability to understand and convey the feelings of characters and even the advantage derived from Shakespeare's being a relatively unlearned countryman. Richard Steele conceded in 1709 that Shakespeare introduces Julius Caesar in his nightgown, but this shows that "genius was above . . . mechanic methods of showing greatness" (Vickers 2.205). Shakespeare depicts the "great soul" debating subjects of ultimate importance, "without endeavoring to prepossess his audience with empty show and pomp." What would have been a scandal to Rymer is a stroke of genius to Steele. One of Shakespeare's best early editors, Lewis Theobald, maintained that "particular irregularities" in Shakespeare do not matter, because "it is not to be expected that a genius like Shakespeare should be judged by the laws of Aristotle and the other

prescribers to the stage" (Vickers 2.308). Theobald defends the quarrel of Brutus and Cassius by comparing it to aristocratic quarrels in *Iphigenia* by Euripides and in *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610) by John Fletcher, who had been generally regarded as more artful than Shakespeare since Dryden first said he was. Of the three, Theobald concludes, Shakespeare's treatment is "incomparably the best." Alexander Pope defended Shakespeare against the charge of being unlearned, observing that in *Julius Caesar* "not only the spirit but manners of the Romans are exactly drawn" (Vickers 2.407). Still, in his own edition of *Julius Caesar* Pope printed a dash for the word "hats" in the line, "their hats are plucked about their ears" (TLN 697), because Pope believed Roman patricians wore no hats. Theobald rejected the "hiatus" as "hypercritical": "Surely we make mad work with this or any other of our author's plays did we attempt to try them so strictly by the touchstone of antiquity" (Vickers 2.460).

32The most thoughtful and incisive neo-classical defense of Shakespeare as "the poet of nature" was by Samuel Johnson, in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1765). Johnson used the phrase to mean that Shakespeare "holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life" (7.62). Developing an argument he had first tried almost fifteen years earlier (Vickers 3.434), Johnson wittily and cogently demolished arguments for the unities of time and place (7.76-80) and asserted that Shakespeare "has well enough preserved the unity of action," in that his plays have discernible beginnings and middles, "and the end of the play is the end of expectation" (7.75). To be sure, Johnson finds fault with Shakespeare, and in this he follows neo-classical precedent, starting with Dryden, though Johnson's most influential example was Henry Home, Lord Kames (Vickers 4.471-97). Indeed, Johnson enumerates faults in Shakespeare that are "sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit" (7.71-74). Among them is the violation of poetic justice: "he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carried his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance" (7.71).

33This echo of Rymer repeats the familiar neo-classical complaint that Shakespeare lacked art, so it is hardly surprising that "nature" and "natural" recur throughout Johnson's preface as terms of guarded praise. Shakespeare's "adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of critics who form their judgments upon narrower principles" (7.65); Shakespeare "indulged his natural inclination"; comedy was "a mode of thinking congenial to his nature"; his characters "are natural, and therefore durable"; "his characters are praised as natural" (7.69-70); "his power was the power of nature" (7.73). Johnson is not far removed, in his assessment of Shakespeare and "nature," from Margaret Cavendish: both critics draw ultimately on Horace and on the decorum of character in particular. Closer in time to Johnson, a similar position had been staked out by Gildon in 1703: "But if [poets] would study nature as much as Shakespeare did, their errors would be less visible and more supportable. But there is nothing more familiar with the ignorant decriers of the rules than to instance Shakespeare's pleasing without them, as in his characters, passions, etc.—the rules being only nature methodized—for sure nobody (I mean of

sense) ever admired his conduct, the rules of which not being known in his time is his best plea for his offenses against them" (Vickers 2.8-9).

34Still, Johnson's Horatian thinking about Shakespeare and "nature" goes beyond character to include what might be called "untrained originality." "The English nation, in the time of Shakespeare, was yet struggling to emerge from barbarity" (7.81), Johnson believed, so for Shakespeare "the greater part of his excellence was the product of his own genius" (7.87), since he lacked the example of art. Johnson was easily persuaded by the conventional neo-classical argument that Shakespeare was "natural" in the same way as Homer: "Perhaps it would not be easy to find any author except Homer who invented as much as Shakespeare, who so much advanced the studies which he cultivated, or effused so much novelty upon his age or country" (7.90). With "genius" as the explanation of Shakespeare's accomplishment, Johnson's summary judgment about *Julius Caesar* in particular is easier to understand. Johnson was not moved by the play, and he therefore thought it exhibited less of Shakespeare's natural gifts than other tragedies did: "his adherence to the real story and to Roman manners seems to have impeded the natural vigor of his genius" (8.836). As the great poet of nature, in Johnson's estimation, Shakespeare did less well when it came to classical material, with its greater suitability to treatment as art, in which Shakespeare was deficient.

2. Romantic *Julius Caesar*

35The straitjacket that neo-classical critics had tied around themselves by means of Horace and Aristotle was at last thrown off by critics writing under the influence of Romanticism in the early nineteenth century. To be sure, neo-classical criticism is subtler and more various than Romantic critics made it out to be for their own polemical purposes, and their innovations sometimes seem continuous with it. Leonard Digges's deliberately anti-Horatian (and anti-Jonsonian) assertion that "Poets are born, not made" was given Latin form for the first time by S. T. Coleridge in the early nineteenth century: "*Poeta nascitur, non fit*" (Bate, *Romantics* 148; Ringler, "*Poeta*" 497). Moreover, the "organic form" championed by both A. W. von Schlegel and Coleridge was arguably a carry-over from neo-classical criticism—an attempt to assert unity in Shakespeare's plays where the three neo-classical unities were manifestly inapplicable. Again, the character criticism that became a hallmark of Romantic commentary had been anticipated by Margaret Cavendish, as noted above. Still, unlike Digges, Coleridge was not reacting against Jonson in his declaration about the poet being born, not made (though he undoubtedly knew the Horatian allusion, he had something else entirely in mind); the assertion of organic unity was not merely a repeated commonplace but was so new and so persuasive that it persisted as a critical assumption until the second half of the twentieth century; and the new character criticism was much more than Cavendish's variation on the Horatian decorum of character. In short, Romantic critics set off in a genuinely new direction, which made an impact on the understanding of *Julius Caesar*, as well as other plays.

36The new direction was marked by character criticism in particular, which became the favored means of understanding Shakespeare's plays until well into the twentieth century. "The unity of character pervades the whole of his dramas," Coleridge asserted, closely linking character with "the unity of feeling," in deliberate contrast to the neo-classical three unities (Bate, *Romantics* 129), which represent merely mechanical coherence, imposed from without, rather than "organic form" (128). Schlegel had earlier offered a version of this distinction (4-5), as Coleridge duly acknowledges. The Romantics were probably not indebted to Steele's contrast, noted above, between Shakespeare's "genius" and "mechanic methods," but Steele's comment suggests greater continuity between neo-classical and Romantic assumptions than the Romantics themselves wished to acknowledge. Coleridge applied his idea most influentially to *Hamlet*, where he saw the character of the Prince driving events, so that character actually determined the form of the play (136-7). "In all his [Shakespeare's] various characters," Coleridge observes, in his clearest linking between character and organic form, "we still feel ourselves communing with the same human nature, which is every where present as the vegetable sap in the branches, sprays, buds, blossoms, and fruits, their shapes, tastes, and odours" (159-60).

37The consequence of Shakespeare's "communing . . . with human nature," in Coleridge's estimation, is that Shakespeare was "myriad-minded" (147, 156), a point that especially impressed Hazlitt in his own assessment of Shakespeare's characters. In this point, too, Coleridge and Hazlitt were preceded by Schlegel, who observes of Shakespeare that "It is the capability of transporting himself so completely into every situation, even the most unusual, that he is enabled, as the plenipotentiary of the whole human race, without particular instructions for each separate case, to act and speak in the name of every individual" (97). Shakespeare "seemed scarcely to have an individual existence of his own," Hazzlitt maintains, "but to borrow that of others at will, and to pass successively through 'every variety of untried being'" (166). "Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind" (184). Margaret Cavendish had exclaimed of Shakespeare that "one would think he had been transformed into every one of those persons he hath described," and Hazlitt makes a similar claim: "The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies" (184). The difference is that Cavendish was thinking in terms of Horatian character decorum, while Hazlitt was thinking of Romantic feeling and the animating force of character in a plot that is character-driven. Even when Shakespeare imagines a wholly new character, like Caliban, Hazlitt argues, he creates a unified world around the character, and that world is the play's unity. "The whole 'coheres semblably together' in time, place, and circumstance" (182). In this point, too, Schlegel anticipated Hazlitt—even in using Caliban as an example: "These beings, though existing only in the imagination, nevertheless possess such truth and consistency, that even with such misshapen abortions as Caliban, he extorts the assenting conviction, that were such beings they

would so conduct themselves" (98).

38Though the Romantics' emphasis on character was continuous with neo-classical admiration for Shakespeare's characters, the Romantic argument linking characterization to a new conception of unity in the plays was genuinely innovative and influential. Indeed, it is still evident in the New Variorum Edition of *Julius Caesar*, published in 1913, which devotes the first two-thirds of its critical summary to "The Character of Caesar" and "The Character of Brutus" (386-420). Schlegel pointed the way in this direction with his declaration that "Caesar is not the hero of the piece, but Brutus" (Bate, *Romantics* 374), a point on which critics differed repeatedly, setting off a debate about the "hero" of the play. Neo-classical critics had noticed the imbalance of attention to Brutus in *Julius Caesar* (see Gildon's comment above, for example, that "Brutus is plainly the shining and darling character of the poet"), but the debate reflected in the New Variorum is rooted in nineteenth-century character criticism. Coleridge was frankly puzzled by Brutus: "I do not at present see into Shakespeare's motive, his rationale, or in what point of view he meant Brutus' character to appear" (Bate, *Romantics* 375). Hazlitt, however, thought "the whole design of the conspirators to liberate their country fails from the generous temper and overweening confidence of Brutus in the goodness of their cause and the assistance of others" (377)—in other words, Brutus's character drives the plot. William Watkiss Lloyd agreed that "it is Brutus on whom the interest and sympathy of the play converge and become continuous throughout its course, making him thus, in a certain sense, its hero" (Variorium 387), and Gustav Freytag agreed: "Brutus, the warm-hearted youth, the noble, the patriotic, is hero" (Variorium 427). "It is indeed true," echoed H. N. Hudson, "that Brutus is the hero" (234).

39Georg Gottfried Gervinus, argued, on the contrary, that the play "does not bear [Caesar's] name without a reason," because the civil war that commences with his death is carried on in his name (721), and variations on Gervinus' argument were offered by Albert Lindner and Edward Dowden. "As Caesar lives, he is a weakling," wrote Lindner, "a phantom with many infirmities; after his death, a spiritual power, more fearful than even in life" (Variorum 387). Dowden cited the acknowledgment of Antony, Cassius, and Brutus in *Julius Caesar* concerning the posthumus power of Caesar and concluded that "With strict propriety, therefore, the play bears the name of Julius Caesar" (288). These comments by no means settled the long-running debate; they merely illustrate how the debate originated in the Romantic assumption that the characters of Shakespeare's plays are the most important thing about them.

40The Romantics linked an innovative notion of dramatic unity not only to their emphasis on character but also to an idea about purpose in history that affected their criticism of *Julius Caesar* in particular, because Shakespeare's best known Roman play was thought to anticipate the historical teleology that Romantics themselves believed. Their own self-designation, "Romantic," derives from an understanding of European history that distinguished the "classic" heritage of Greece and Rome from the Germanic heritage that replaced it. Aiming to distinguish the supposedly timeless rules of neo-classical "art" from the art he admired, Coleridge

constructed a polemical history of Europe based on the commonplace that Latinate Germanic languages were called "romance" languages, "to which term, as distinguishing their Songs and Fabliaux, we owe the word and the species of *romance*—the romantic may be considered as opposed to the antique, and from this change of manners, those of Shakespear take their colouring. He is not to be tried by ancient and classic rules, but by the standard of his age. That law of unity which has its foundation, not in factitious necessity of custom, but in nature herself, is instinctively observed by Shakespear" (Bate, *Romantics* 129).

41In short, the reason Coleridge thought that the mechanical rules of neo-classical criticism were inapplicable to an artist like Shakespeare is that Shakespeare fulfilled the purpose of history by drawing on his "romantic" heritage. Schlegel similarly understood Jonson's Horatian response to Shakespeare not only as Leonard Digges had understood it but also as essentially foreign to Shakespeare: "Ben Jonson, a younger contemporary and rival of Shakespeare, who laboured in the sweat of his brow, but with no great success, to expel the romantic drama from the English stage, and to form it on the model of the ancients, gave it as his opinion that Shakespeare did not blot enough, and that as he did not possess much school-learning, he owed more to nature than to art" (Bate, *Romantics* 89). Hazlitt agreed that neo-classical critics "made criticism a kind of Procrustes' bed of genius"—Shakespeare's genius, in particular (Bate, *Romantics* 177). Behind this view is an unstated idea of history itself unfolding organically, with the "romantic," personified by Shakespeare, inevitably supplanting the "classic," despite the attempts of critics from Ben Jonson to Samuel Johnson to resist the supplanting by defining art narrowly in Horatian terms. Only with the Romantics had Shakespeare come into his own as the perfect flowering of English culture. "O what great men hast thou not produced," exclaimed Coleridge, "England! my country! truly indeed—" (Bate, *Romantics* 152).

42The Romantics' triumphalist idea of history has some continuity with the Enlightenment idea of progress, but it took on a life of its own, not only informing literary criticism but also anticipating nineteenth-century nationalism (as Coleridge's exclamation suggests), opposition to French cultural hegemony with attendant memories and fears of political rivalry (Bate, *Romantics* 10-13, 16-20, 24-25), the music of Richard Wagner, much of Tennyson's poetry, and even the teleology of biological and social evolution. The idea affected criticism of *Julius Caesar* in that Shakespeare was thought by some Romantics to have divined the nineteenth-century idea of history in his Roman history play. "One and the same thought is reflected by the fall of Caesar," wrote Hermann Ulrici, "in the deaths of Brutus and Cassius, and in the victory of Antony and Octavius," and this "thought" is "the course of history" (Variorum 429-30). Caesar was really overthrown not by the conspiracy but by a disembodied "oligarchical principle," represented by the triumvirate that replaced the conspirators. "It conquered because it had the right of the immediate present on its side" (430). Such an understanding of history sees whatever happens as happening by necessity, as the inevitable unfolding of an irresistible process, which produces "the right of the immediate present." Hegel's influence on this conception may be operating in D. J. Snider's claim that "Caesar is the real hero" in *Julius*

Caesar because he represents the "World Spirit" that finally triumphs: though opposed by Cassius, it is ultimately vindicated by "the restoration and absolute validity of the Caesarian movement" (Variorum, 432). "Spirit" is Hegel's term for historical movements, and Snider may have been thinking in quasi-Hegelian terms, seeing Caesar's thesis as opposed by Cassius' antithesis, ultimately to be replaced by a synthesis of both. Hegel's interpretation of tragedy explicitly informs A. C. Bradley's emphasis on "conflict or collision" in tragedy, in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (69-95), which is the likely source of A. R. Humphreys' assertion that *Julius Caesar* belongs to the category of "Hegelian tragedy" (Oxford 7, 34).

3. History and Providence

43Romantic assumptions about both character and history achieved their most magisterial expression early in the twentieth century in A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, which effectively culminated the Romantic tradition. Bradley attended to just four plays, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*, so he had little to say about *Julius Caesar*, but it was enough to register his view in the long-running debate about the hero: Shakespearean tragedy "is pre-eminently the story of one person, the 'hero,'" and in *Julius Caesar* "Brutus is the 'hero'" (7). Writing shortly after Bradley, M. W. MacCallum treated the three plays Shakespeare derived from Plutarch in the vein of Bradley's character criticism, though MacCallum struck a balance in the Romantic debate about the "hero" of *Julius Caesar* by proposing a solution akin to Snider's. On one hand, MacCallum agreed with those who thought the "spirit of Caesar" (TLN 800) is present from first to last (214), even when Julius Caesar himself is not, and this "spirit," which eventually prevails in Octavius, the future first emperor, is the Hegelian "spirit of Empire, the spirit of practical greatness in the domains of war, policy, organisation" (241). Brutus, on the other hand, is both "the model republican, the paragon of private and civic virtue" (233) and "the spirit of loyalty to duty" (241). Like Caesar, Brutus imperfectly represents the ideal he stands for, and the gap between spirit and human embodiment accounts both for personal inconsistencies on Caesar's and Brutus's parts and for Brutus's ultimate failure.

44Coming at the end of a critical tradition, MacCallum was easy to dismiss as old-fashioned and out of touch, as J. C. Maxwell made clear in his mid-century summary of writing about the Roman plays (6). MacCallum anticipated two major movements in twentieth-century criticism of *Julius Caesar*, however, and for that alone he deserves acknowledgment. For one thing, his perception of Caesar's place in history is consistent with a critical tradition concerning Shakespeare, history, and politics that gathered strength and endured well past the time of Maxwell's summary. MacCallum pointed to two passages in North's translation of Plutarch that supported a providentialist reading of Caesar's rise (215-16): Caesar represented "the absolute state of a monarchy and sovereign lord to govern" Rome (Plutarch 493), and Caesar seemed to be a "merciful physician, whom God had ordained of special grace to be governor of the empire of Rome and to set all things again at quiet stay" (Plutarch 864). MacCallum was impressed with these passages, because he thought they explained Shakespeare's view of Julius Caesar as

"the spirit of Empire." In retrospect, MacCallum's own historical situation in the British Empire in the first decade of the twentieth century (especially as an expatriate Scot in Australia) illuminates his reading of both Plutarch and *Julius Caesar* better than North's providentialist translation illuminates Shakespeare's play. Even the weaknesses that Shakespeare invented for Caesar, MacCallum maintains, are "spots in the sun." Shakespeare is not concerned with them but rather with "the plenary inspiration of Caesar's life, the inspiration that made him an instrument of Heaven and that was to bring peace and order to the world" (230). The plenary inspiration that MacCallum identifies would seem to have as much to do with the early twentieth-century British Empire and the Romantic idea of destined national self-fulfillment as with Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

45MacCallum's notion that Caesar was a divine instrument in history acquired increasing solidity in the first half of the twentieth century. Writing at about the same time as MacCallum (though he published his essay much later), F. C. Kolbe thought *Julius Caesar* embodied "some high moral teaching" concerning "the conception which the Greeks called *Nemesis*" (154). This conception involved "the embodiment of divine wrath and jealousy" in history, manifesting itself first in Brutus's reaction against Caesar's ambition and second in retribution by Caesar's spirit (156). Kolbe was less enamored of Caesarian imperialism than MacCallum, but Kolbe's providentialist reading of *Julius Caesar* complements MacCallum's, and Kolbe finds a classical precedent for it. Both imperialism and nemesis appear in Mark Hunter's essay, first read as a paper shortly after the general strike of 1926 and possibly in reaction against it. Shakespeare's attitude to politics, Hunter maintained, "was that of a Tory, the term being understood in a sense highly honourable," and in Shakespeare's plays "the principle which renders ordered society possible is said to be, not liberty, but obedience" (110-11). "The principle of the rule of the single person" was, for Shakespeare, "the norm of all manner of earthly power" (119). Hunter takes a dim view both of "the lower social orders" (117) in *Julius Caesar* and of those who conspire against Caesar. Providence enters Hunter's argument in his analysis of Antony "as the instrument of retributory nemesis" against the assassins (139). J. E. Phillips acknowledged both MacCallum and Hunter in outlining a theory of political order that Phillips thought Shakespeare shared with his contemporaries. This theory involves "a stratified, integrated political society in which all the parts function for the welfare of the whole under the administration of a single, sovereign governor" (4). Violation of this order inevitably results in political chaos, which Phillips argued is what happens in *Julius Caesar*: "we see, in the successful government of the title figure, the advantage of monarchy, and in the disastrous consequences of his assassination the evils of multiple sovereignty" (172). The assassins "function out of their degree and do violence to the state by taking justice into their own hands" (176). For Phillips, the "spirit of Caesar" is "the concept of unitary sovereignty," and it becomes "the nemesis against which Brutus' efforts, however highly motivated, are of no avail" (188).

46Perceptions of historical providentialism in *Julius Caesar* that go back to MacCallum received their greatest impetus from E. M. W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays* in 1944.

Tillyard was part of an influential reaction against Romantic character criticism, turning instead to the history of ideas and the presumed assumptions of Shakespeare's audience. Still, Tillyard's continuity with MacCallum on some points is evident. Henry VII and his dynasty fostered a "Tudor myth," Tillyard argued, concerning their progenitor's accession and marriage to Elizabeth of York as "the providential and happy ending of an organic piece of history" (29). Tillyard thought the driving force behind this myth was a sense of historical cause and effect that first appeared in the Tudor chronicler, Polydore Vergil (35). Henry IV's violation of divinely appointed royal rulership in his overthrow of Richard II more than a century before Henry VII's accession was an originating cause that "shows the justice of God punishing and working out the effects of a crime, till prosperity is re-established in the Tudor monarchy" (36). A dynamic historical principle thus complemented a static image of hierarchy, which Tillyard described with copious contemporary references in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, also published in 1944. The point of intersection for history and image was the idea of *order*, the title of Chapter Two in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, where Tillyard cites Ulysses' speech on "degree" in *Troilus and Cressida*, as Phillips had done earlier (5-6). Order manifests itself both in the smoothly running monarchy (including legitimate succession) and in the obedience, deference, and degree of cosmic and political hierarchy. As Graham Bradshaw notes (1-8), critics almost immediately pointed out that Tillyard represented only the outlook of privileged power; in effect, as Hunter claimed of Shakespeare himself, the attitude Tillyard described "was that of a Tory." It is hard to imagine Tillyard assuming any other attitude at a time when the British Empire was under severe strain from its conflict with Nazi Germany and Japan.

47Though Tillyard had little to say about *Julius Caesar*, his ideas soon became dominant in Shakespearean criticism, and their impact on subsequent interpretation of *Julius Caesar* is evident. Citing Phillips (765n. 1), Brents Stirling outlined a case against Brutus based on "a flouting of unitary sovereignty, that prime point of Tudor policy" (765). J. Leeds Barroll brought enormous erudition to the task of showing that Shakespeare's contemporaries inherited a tradition of seeing providence in Roman history in much the same way they saw it in English history. Augustus' "beneficial unification" of Rome after the civil wars was thus directly analogous to "the Tudor myth itself" (328). Derek Traversi agreed that Shakespeare saw "the necessity of order in public affairs" in both the English history plays and the Roman plays, and Traversi thought that "this order rests in some sense upon Caesar's exercise of power" (12). In *Julius Caesar* in particular, "a tragic sacrifice" produces chaos and mere calculation until "a new Roman order rises to replace that which has been so wilfully destroyed" (21). Ernest Schanzer took a different view of the play, but his view required him explicitly to reject the providentialist reading, thereby confirming its importance in contemporary criticism by default. Schanzer thought *Julius Caesar* was a "problem" play because it focuses on a moral problem—namely, the sacrifice of "personal loyalties" "to political ideals" (*Problem* 68). He therefore disagreed that "the spirit of Caesar in the sense of 'Caesarism', the absolute rule of a single man, informs the second part of the play" (35), and he took issue with J. E. Phillips on this point in particular

(36n. 1). Believing that *Julius Caesar* is "one of Shakespeare's few genuine problem plays" because it avoids "giving a plain and clear-cut answer" to the problems it raises (70), Schanzer necessarily opposed the moralism and providentialism of MacCallum, Tillyard, and others.

48The providentialist reading of Julius Caesar reached its high-water mark in J. L. Simmons's book, *Shakespeare's Pagan World*. Simmons argued that the plays derived from Plutarch "are more genuinely Roman than is usually recognized" because they antedate Christian revelation and therefore offer a genuinely "pagan world," devoid of the moral clarity that one finds in the English history plays (7). Acknowledging Barroll's essay for this view (8n. 21), Simmons traced it to the Augustinian idea of history, which he thought was evident in Thomas North's translation of North's Plutarch, specifically in the Epistle Dedicatory to Queen Elizabeth. Simmons also acknowledged, however, that Augustine's view is not one of providential triumphalism, and Simmons's reading of *Julius Caesar* followed suit. Citing the same passages on providential Caesarism from North's Plutarch that MacCallum had cited, Simmons argued that "practical politics and providence" alike "urge the necessity of one-man rule" (72). In other words, a strong man is necessary to prevent political chaos, but Simmons offered minimal assent to the strong man himself, emphasizing both Shakespeare's invented character weaknesses in Caesar and the play's sympathy to Brutus. "The play develops a conflict between the good of Caesar (political order, stability, and glory), flawed by his potential evil, and Brutus's ideal of a world in which no Caesar is necessary, flawed by the nature of man" (86). Simmons's complex and ironic analysis may respond to his own historical context toward the end of the Vietnam war, and his emphasis on Caesar's weaknesses tests the providential reading about as strongly as it could be tested and still hold together. With the rise of new historicism and cultural materialism in the next decade after Simmons's book appeared, reaction against Tillyard in particular became so strong that providentialist interpretations virtually disappeared from the critical record. John Drakakis's introduction to the collection of essays called *Alternative Shakespeares*, for example, explicitly challenged Tillyard (14-15), and Alessandro Serpieri's analysis of *Julius Caesar* in that collection is entirely semiotic (126-34).

4. Self-Deception

49The second point in which MacCallum anticipated twentieth-century critical developments concerning *Julius Caesar* was his recognizing strong inconsistency in the characters of both Caesar and Brutus—inconsistency so strong that MacCallum referred to it as self-deception. Noting Caesar's fear of supernatural signs, MacCallum acknowledges "a touch of self-deception as well as of superstition in Caesar, and this self-deception reappears in other more important matters," such as Caesar's repeated insistence that he is not afraid (220-21). (Gervinus had anticipated MacCallum on this point: Caesar "speaks so much of having no fear, that by this very thing he betrays his fear" [720].) As for Brutus, MacCallum thought he was "doubly duped, by his own subtlety and his own simplicity in league with his conscientiousness . . . and such self-deception avenges itself as surely as any intentional crime" (255). Despite these canny

insights, MacCallum was so impressed by Caesar's superiority as an imperial ideal that he played down his own observation and understated the extent to which Shakespeare had made Caesar and Brutus resemble one another.

50Though MacCallum was a neo-Romantic critic, his recognition of self-deception resonates strongly with postmodern criticism, because self-deception is a key expression of what Paul Ricoeur calls "suspicion" in postmodern thinking. The formative thinkers for postmodernism, Ricoeur points out, are Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, who all recognized a disjunction between conscious intention and unconscious motivation, thereby challenging the emphasis on rational consciousness that had prevailed in western thinking since Descartes ("I think, therefore I am"). Marx called this disjunction "false consciousness," but all three of Ricoeur's "masters of suspicion" acknowledged it in various forms. Using Ricoeur's key word, "suspicion," in describing Caesar's self-deception, MacCallum anticipates postmodern analysis when he writes of Caesar that "if anything could make us suspicious, it would be his constant harping on his flawless valour" (221). Paradoxically, however, the most thoughtful expounders of self-deception in Shakespeare, Stanley Cavell and Harry Berger, have not addressed *Julius Caesar*, and the topic has been discussed since MacCallum principally in historical terms, as a product of Shakespeare's reflection on neo-stoicism and skepticism.

51Passing references to self-deception are made by Brents Stirling, who sees it as a characteristic of Brutus alone (765), and by R. A. Foakes, who mentions it as one of many examples of things coming full circle in such a way as to create unity among the play's diverse elements. Brutus's "self-deception, an obsession with names and an ignorance of reality," defeats his idealistic effort to find liberty from Caesar's supposed bondage (270). But MacCallum's understatement of his own insight concerning self-deception was most importantly corrected in an article by Norman Rabkin, who was at the forefront of many postmodern developments in Shakespearean criticism. Rabkin pointed out close parallels between two consecutive scenes in *Julius Caesar* (2.1 and 2.2), with the argument that Shakespeare invented the parallels in order to emphasize similarities between Caesar and Brutus. Brutus's soliloquy in 2.1 shows "a capacity to be deceived by analogies of his own making" (244), and Caesar's insistence on his fearlessness in 2.2 "degenerates immediately from magnificence to bluster, culminating in inflated self-adulation ironic in the context" (245). A peculiar "balance of perception and self-righteous blindness" is apparent in both men (246), and the point of their "wishful self-deception" (249) is that "the spirit of Caesar" is avenged in the destruction of its mirror image, so that the play becomes, in effect, a revenge tragedy, in which Brutus's "crime against established order" (251) is punished. (Foakes had also seen the play "as a kind of revenge tragedy" in its cyclical character [263].) Rabkin thus preserved a vestige of the providential reading, even referring to "Nemesis" (251n. 11), while emphasizing an ironic reading of character in *Julius Caesar* that would have been impossible for MacCallum. In his revision of the essay for *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding*, Rabkin identified *Julius Caesar* with the history plays that precede it: "The tragedy of the historical plays is based

increasingly on Shakespeare's psychology, which sees human ideals and the virtue of reason set hopelessly against the fact of the human drive for power" (120).

52Acknowledging Rabkin (12) but moving in another direction entirely, John Anson cited neo-stoicism in the 1590s to explain Shakespeare's characterization of Caesar and Brutus in an anti-stoic manner, and Anson emphasized the self-deception of Brutus in particular: "the love of country that leads him to murder his dearest friend clearly serves to conceal an envy of Caesar so great that he cannot afford to admit it. To do so would be to admit that his whole sense of self was shadowed by an intolerable comparison with Caesar" (25). Rene Fortin's emphasis on skepticism in *Julius Caesar* is as strong as Rabkin's, and Fortin also focused on the play's most noble characters, Caesar and Brutus, who are nonetheless "enveloped by the mists of error, victims of deception and self-deception" (342). So pervasive is the lack of self-knowledge that Shakespeare seems "to involve the audience in the fallible judgments of the characters," so that the play becomes "an exploration of man's epistemological situation" in the manner of Montaigne (346). Marvin Vawter acknowledged Anson (173) but focused exclusively on Brutus, because of Brutus's reputation as a stoic, which Shakespeare acknowledges in *Julius Caesar* (TLN 2132-33, 2442). (For a rebuttal to Vawter's argument about Brutus's stoicism, see Monsarrat, 139-44, especially 141-42n. 2). For Vawter, the human situation in *Julius Caesar* is not defined by skepticism, as it is for Fortin, but by the implicit affirmation of "an inseparable composition of mind and body," and Brutus errs in trying to espouse "the self-sufficiency of virtue-reason" at the expense of his body (177). So severe is the disjunction that Brutus is "unable to see himself" (180), and he misjudges everyone, including himself: "his sick mind is brutalizing his body with the result that there is nothing 'wholesome' about him" (181), even though, ironically, "he believes himself incapable of misjudgment or moral error" (188). Far from being a flawed nobleman, in Vawter's view, Brutus is so deeply self-deceived that critical attempts to reserve a shred of dignity for him are misguided (173).

The most perceptive discussion of self-deception in *Julius Caesar* is by Geoffrey Miles, who is the play's most careful historical critic. In an argument that bears some comparison to Foakes's (267-68), Miles acknowledges that "my greatest debt is to Simmons" (2n. 2), though he sets Simmons's providentialism aside and illuminates Simmons's point that Shakespeare's Rome is a "world apart" by emphasizing the distinctive interdependence of individual identity and social identity—both emphatically "Roman." Miles proceeds by tracing two traditions of stoic constancy, one Ciceronian and the other Senecan, that he thinks are especially important in Shakespeare's Plutarchan plays. A "flaw" in both traditions, Miles maintains, "is the failure of self-knowledge" (138), which marks all the characters in *Julius Caesar*, but especially Brutus. Though Brutus appeals to republican idealism, he "seems unaware how far his decision to kill Caesar is motivated by personal and family pride" (131-32). In other words, he is self-deceived about his motives, and Miles draws an appropriate postmodern conclusion: "The play has an almost Freudian sense of how emotion can work all the more powerfully because it is repressed" (132).

5. Imagery

An important twentieth-century development in criticism of *Julius Caesar* that MacCallum did not anticipate is study of the play's imagery, which has also, like the study of self-deception, been readily adapted to postmodern criticism. In this vein, the first important name for *Julius Caesar* is G. Wilson Knight, though the most influential critic of Shakespearean imagery was Caroline Spurgeon. Eschewing character criticism, because "the 'character' cannot be abstracted from those imaginative effects of poetry and poetic-drama of which he is composed" (19), Knight nonetheless reinvented another Romantic emphasis, which he called "imaginative interpretation" (1-31). He believed that imagery is "essentially transmitted imaginatively to the imaginative consciousness" (1), and he revived Schlegel's and Coleridge's sense of organic form in asserting that "imaginative criticism judges rather by results, by the tree's fruits, not its roots" (21). Distinguishing his approach to imagery from Caroline Spurgeon's in a 1951 Preface, Knight noted that Spurgeon had found *Julius Caesar* "poor in 'imagery,'" whereas he thought "no single work of Shakespeare so tingles with vivid, fiery and—to use Masefield's word—'startling' life" (viii). Taking a more expansive view of imagery than Spurgeon, Knight introduced the idea of the "theme" in close reading (1), an idea that would become influential in New Criticism, and he traced a number of themes through *Julius Caesar*, beginning with "animal-suggestion" (also noticed by Spurgeon but less broadly) and "metals" (33).

Word association was important for Knight, including associations between his own words to describe *Julius Caesar*. He summarizes a long list of animal images, for example, as having "a single quality: vivid and picturesque perception," and he links it with metallic imagery through "the flash of metals" (34). "Vivid" and "flash" both involve sight imagery, but the imagery is Knight's, not Shakespeare's, and Knight does not relate it to problems of seeing and perception that are pervasive in *Julius Caesar*, presumably because they are a prominent part of the play's literal texture and therefore do not appeal to the "imaginative consciousness." Over-generalization and solipsism mark Knight's writing about imagery in particular, though a characteristic inability to define "imagery" was pointed out by Lillian Hornstein in an early critique of Spurgeon's book as well. Nonetheless, Knight's observations are often acute, and his influence on subsequent criticism is hard to overestimate. He is perceptive about "body-references" (37-48), including eyes, ears, hair, lips, throat, nourishment, sleeplessness, illness, and especially blood (45-48). Not surprisingly, his summary of "all this imagery" is that it is "all visual, vivid" (48), thus coming back to his own opening generalization in a markedly impressionistic manner: "So we have a clear train of ideas: man's body, visually, almost erotically, observed; thoughts of physical weakness and sickness; emotion, blood, the heart's passion—the life forces encased in the body; finally, spirit, fire, the fine essence of vitality, the human spirit in all its resplendent power and beauty, housed as it may be in a frail tenement of flesh" (53).

Leo Kirschbaum developed Knight's remarks about the body in *Julius Caesar* in an essay on

blood, though Kirschbaum addressed staging rather than language. (Knight was an actor, as well as a critic, and he insists that "stage representation" is "necessary, where, if the production be careful and correct, the purely imaginative effects of Shakespeare may be extremely powerful" [20], yet he attends entirely to poetry, not to dramatic representation.) Noting that Shakespeare's plays call for no less stage blood than those of his contemporaries, Kirschbaum points out that bloody deeds in *Julius Caesar* are "not metaphorical at all. They are naturalistic stage effects *coram populo* deliberately meant by Shakespeare for actual production and undoubtedly achieved at the Globe" (520). His primary example is Brutus's urging the conspirators to bathe their hands in Caesar's blood after the assassination—a bold and horrific scene that Shakespeare invented (523). Its effect, Kirschbaum, argued, is to present in the most concrete possible way the horror of Brutus's actual deed in contrast to the idealism with which he undertakes it. Moreover, the blood that he smears on himself "is the symbol and mark of the blood and destruction which is to flow through the rest of the play" (524). The conspirators may drain the blood from Caesar's body, but they are unable, as MacCallum and others had pointed out, to destroy his vengeful spirit. Also focusing on Brutus's attempt "to dignify assassination, the means, by lifting it to the level of rite and ceremony" (765-66), Brents Stirling pursued an interpretative strategy closer to Knight's than Kirschbaum's, finding "the theme of incantation and ritual" throughout *Julius Caesar* as a structural principle (767). R. A. Foakes's essay is also reminiscent of Knight's criticism, which Foakes acknowledges (259n. 3). Raising a question about the play's "unity" at the outset, Foakes answers it in a Romantic manner that is indebted to Knight, finding a consistent theme in things coming full circle (260), but incidentally tracing others "themes," such as blood, fire, and sickness.

57Building on Knight's and Kirschbaum's insistence that poetic imagery and stage imagery complement each other in a play, Maurice Charney focused on three "image themes" in *Julius Caesar*: storm, blood, and fire (42). Each of these themes is ambiguous, he urged, because their interpretation depends on whether one favors Caesar or the conspirators, though the play favors neither one. Charney traced the "blood theme" from its introduction in Brutus's conversation with Cassius in TLN 799 ("Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers") to Titinius's lament for Cassius in TLN 2545-48. Following Kirschbaum, Charney emphasized stage action, pointing out that blood imagery keeps Caesar's assassination before the audience by having Caesar's body on stage for most of 3.1 and 3.2, including the "fearful blood ritual" in which Brutus leads the conspirators (52). Blood and hunting dominate Antony's oration in such a way as to stress "butchery rather than the sacrifice Brutus hoped for" before the assassination (55). Cassius's death by the same sword that he used to kill Caesar "is the reciprocity of blood for blood" (59).

58Two critics publishing simultaneously in *Shakespeare Studies* took their discussion of *Julius Caesar*'s imagery in the direction of Elizabethan religion, prompted by Stirling's comments about ritual in the play. Naomi Conn Liebler emphasized the possible influence of Plutarch's *Life of Romulus* on *Julius Caesar* and on Shakespeare's way of imagining the feast of Lupercal in particular, since Plutarch describes the Lupercal in greater detail in *Romulus* than in any of

his other biographies. Where blood imagery is concerned, Liebler points out that "the cutting up of the sacrificial *pharmakos*, whose blood is then smeared upon the flesh of the priestly celebrants, is one of the central events in the rites of the Lupercalia," and she compares the ritual to Brutus's "insistence on the semblance of a ritual as a pattern for Caesar's assassination" (183). Elizabethans would have responded to the ritual aspects of Shakespeare's play, learned from Plutarch, because their own lives were full of "Lupercalia-like rites" (189). David Kaula's interpretation of religion in *Julius Caesar* addresses the reformation context in particular. Adoration of Caesar in the play "is something akin to Roman Catholic worship" (199), just as Cassius's satirical description of Caesar's weaknesses is akin to Protestant attacks on the Pope (200). Blood imagery makes Caesar "a redeemer who voluntarily sheds his blood for the spiritual sustenance of his people," and Decius's crafty description of Calpurnia's dream imagines Romans competing for "relics" of Caesar as Catholics in England sought relics of their martyrs to Elizabeth's regime (204-5). Following this train of thought, "we might even see a moderate form of Protestantism reflected in Brutus's self-conscious Stoic virtue" (206).

59The imagistic and thematic interpretation that Knight introduced to criticism of *Julius Caesar* marked the heyday of New Criticism in particular, from the 1930s to the 1970s. The movement was named for John Crowe Ransom's book, published in 1941, but the method was practiced in England as well, by Knight himself and especially by F. R. Leavis. New Critics theorized a way of reading that eschewed literary history and the history of ideas, practiced by critics like Tillyard, in favor of what W. K. Wimsatt called "verbal icons," emphasizing "a verbal image which fully realizes its verbal capacities," both pictorially and as "an interpretation of reality in its metaphoric and symbolic dimensions" (x). Cleanth Brooks declared that it is "heresy" "to refer the structure of the poem . . . to something outside the poem," including history (184). Despite its appeal for several decades, this way of reading eventually ran its course as competing interpretations of the same kind increasingly proliferated, suggesting that no standard could be applied for preferring one reading over another. "My Theme Can Lick Your Theme" is the facetious title of a serious article by Richard Levin on the circular reasoning of thematic interpretation, when the thematic critic begins by assuming what he or she is going to find in the text and then proceeds to find it. Levin's 1979 book effectively rang the death knell of thematic criticism for *Julius Caesar* as Knight originally conceived it.

60With the advent of postmodern criticism in the 1980s, however, the study of imagery took on new life and new forms. Postmodern commentary on imagery of the body in *Julius Caesar* depends on a perceived disjunction between conscious intention and unconscious motivation—a disjunction that is frequently described in terms of a suspicious false consciousness, as in the case of self-deception (discussed above). The assumption of gender hierarchy (with male superior to female), for example, often appears both consciously and unconsciously in writing from the past and is often perpetuated in critical commentary about past writers, including Shakespeare. Gail Kern Paster addressed this particular assumption in her comments on blood imagery in *Julius Caesar*, pointing out that Mikhail Bakhtin distinguishes "the grotesque,

essentially medieval conception of an unfinished, self-transgressing open body of hyperactive orifices" from a "classical body" that is relatively complete, closed, and therefore perceived as more nearly perfect (285). Paster argues that this distinction is not only historical (early modern as opposed to medieval) but also gendered, with the "open" body being female and the "closed" body male. With this distinction in mind, she reads the body images of *Julius Caesar* as a complex attempt on the conspirators' part to make Caesar female (a vulnerable, bleeding body), countered by Antony's attempt to "recuperate Caesar's body for his own political uses by redefining Caesar's blood and Caesar's bleeding" (286). Paster draws on and acknowledges Charney's and Kaula's essays in particular, but her emphasis and interpretation are quite different from theirs—not to trace the workings of Shakespeare's creative imagination but to find traces of unconscious patriarchal bias in the play's language, imagery, and action. Paster affirms Kaula's reading of Decius's reinterpretation of Calpurnia's dream, for example, as influenced by the medieval cult of the Holy Blood (294), and she points out that "Decius Brutus specifically allegorizes Caesar as a lactating figure" by using the verb "suck" to describe the action of Romans who gather for nourishment at Caesar's bloody fountain (295). This strikingly original interpretation of blood imagery in *Julius Caesar* opened up new possibilities of understanding the play, both textually and historically.

61Writing at the same time as Paster, Mark Rose took blood imagery in the direction of still another form of postmodern analysis, New Historicism. Caesar's assassination is "conspicuously ritualized," Rose points out, in the conspirators' smearing of Caesar's blood on themselves—a ceremony Brutus imagines being performed in future theaters (298-99). Caesar's bloody death thus becomes the paradoxical basis of his historic monumentality, which Shakespeare's play celebrates as "a kind of political Mass"—a point Rose compares to Kaula's analysis of Caesar as a political redeemer modeled on Christ (301). What Caesar redeems is Roman political order, which he initiates as the de facto first emperor and the founder of an imperial tradition that the Tudor monarchs frequently invoked as the basis of their own authority (302). "Drained out of the official religion," Rose observes, "magic and ceremony reappeared not only on the stage, but in the equally theatrical world of the court" (302). Though Rose seems unaware of Stephen Greenblatt's essay on exorcism, first published five years earlier, Rose's interpretation of the bleeding Caesar is fully compatible with Greenblatt's ideas, which became the basis of New Historicism's positing of a historical false consciousness about religion, art, and political power. The Elizabethan theater was crucial, Greenblatt argues, in England's transition from a sacred to a secular culture. Shakespeare's plays evoke sacred signs but consistently secularize them in a form "drained" of "institutional and doctrinal significance," so that "the official position is *emptied out*, even as it is loyally confirmed" (125-26). What had once been spiritually literal became merely literary, as the culture took "a drastic swerve from the sacred to the secular—in the theater" (126). Both Rose and Greenblatt use the image of "draining" to describe late Elizabethan secularization; both see the theater as crucial to the process; both see the process as unavoidably political, given the theatricality of the court.

62In a complex argument that effectively combines feminism and New Historicism, Coppèlia Kahn addresses the blood imagery of *Julius Caesar* in the context of republican competitiveness, which Shakespeare calls "emulation," both in *Julius Caesar* (TLN 1141) and in other plays. False consciousness appears in the idealism that hides republican emulation from those engaged in it, especially Brutus: "in their vision of the republic, these patricians represent to themselves an imaginary conception of their real relation to the Roman state" (86). But parallel false consciousness also appears in the conception of the republic as "a distinctively masculine sphere in which debate and action, the exercise of reason and freedom, make men truly virile" (83). Moreover, Kahn compares imagined Roman false consciousness to contemporary Elizabethan emulation at court (92-93). Roman *virtus* thus defines republican virility over against female submissiveness, and Kahn interprets the contrast in much the same way as Paster. Portia's self-wounding is the oppositional counterpart to the conspirators' wounding of Caesar: the first is a woman's attempt to imitate a man's constancy (101), and the second "resoundingly feminizes Caesar" (104), after Decius successfully construes Calpurnia's predictive dream of the assassination as a nurturing image, which "recalls the legend of Romulus and Remus who, suckled by the she-wolf, were thus enabled to found the Roman state" (103). By attending carefully to both ancient Roman and Elizabethan texts, Kahn freshly illuminates suspicion of power in *Julius Caesar* where competitive Roman patricians and Elizabethan aristocrats are both concerned.

Character List

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Flavius and **Marullus**

Tribunes who wish to protect the plebeians from Caesar's tyranny; they break up a crowd of commoners waiting to witness Caesar's triumph and are "put to silence" during the feast of Lupercal for removing ornaments from Caesar's statues.

Julius Caesar

A successful military leader who wants the crown of Rome. Unfortunately, he is not the man he used to be and is imperious, easily flattered, and overly ambitious. He is assassinated midway through the play; later, his spirit appears to Brutus at Sardis and also at Philippi.

Casca

Witness to Caesar's attempts to manipulate the people of Rome into offering him the crown, he reports the failure to Brutus and Cassius. He joins the conspiracy the night before the assassination and is the first conspirator to stab Caesar.

Calphurnia

The wife of Julius Caesar; she urges him to stay at home on the day of the assassination because of the unnatural events of the previous night as well her prophetic dream in which Caesar's body is a fountain of blood.

Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony)

He appears first as a confidant and a devoted follower of Caesar, and he offers Caesar a crown during the feast of Lupercal. He has a reputation for sensuous living, but he is also militarily accomplished, politically shrewd, and skilled at oration. He is able to dupe Brutus into allowing him to speak at Caesar's funeral and by his funeral oration to excite the crowd to rebellion. He is one of the triumvirs, and he and Octavius defeat Brutus and Cassius at Philippi.

A soothsayer

He warns Caesar during the celebration of the feast of Lupercal to "beware the ides of March." He again warns Caesar as he enters the Senate House.

Marcus Brutus

A *praetor;* that is, a judicial magistrate of Rome. He is widely admired for his noble nature. He joins the conspiracy because he fears that Caesar will become a tyrant, but his idealism causes him to make several poor judgements and impedes his ability to understand those who are less scrupulous than he. Brutus defeats Octavius' forces in the first battle at Philippi, but loses the second battle and commits suicide rather than be taken prisoner.

Cassius

The brother-in-law of Brutus and an acute judge of human nature, Cassius organizes the conspiracy against Caesar and recruits Brutus by passionate argument and by deviously placed, forged letters. He argues that Antony should be assassinated along with Caesar, that

Antony should not speak at Caesar's funeral, and that he (Cassius) and Brutus should not fight at Philippi, but he eventually defers to Brutus in each instance. He is defeated by Antony at the first battle of Philippi, and he commits suicide when he mistakenly believes that Brutus has been defeated.

Cicero

A senator and a famous orator of Rome. He is calm and philosophical when he meets the excited Casca during the night of portentous tumult proceeding the day of the assassination. The triumvirs have him put to death.

Cinna

The conspirator who urges Cassius to bring "noble" Brutus into the conspiracy; he assists by placing some of Cassius' forged letters where Brutus will discover them.

Lucius

Brutus' young servant; Brutus treats him with understanding, gentleness, and tolerance.

Decius Brutus

The conspirator who persuades Caesar to attend the Senate on the day of the ides of March by fabricating a flattering interpretation of Calphurnia's portentous dream and by telling Caesar that the Senate intends to crown him king.

Metellus Cimber

The conspirator who attracts Caesar's attention by requesting that his brother's banishment be repealed, allowing the assassins to surround Caesar and thereby giving Casca the opportunity to stab him from behind.

Trebonius

The first of the conspirators to second Brutus' argument that Antony be spared, Trebonius lures Antony out of the Senate House so that the other conspirators can kill Caesar without having to fear Antony's intervention. Consequently, he is the only conspirator who does not actually stab Caesar.

Portia

The wife of Brutus and the daughter of Marcus Cato. She argues that those familial relationships make her strong enough to conceal Brutus' secrets, but on the morning of the assassination, she is extremely agitated by the fear that she will reveal what Brutus has told her. She commits suicide when she realizes that her husband's fortunes are doomed.

Caius Ligarius

No friend of Caesar's, he is inspired by Brutus' nobility to cast off his illness and join the conspirators in the early morning of the ides of March.

Publius

An elderly senator who arrives with the conspirators to escort Caesar to the Capitol. He is stunned as he witnesses the assassination. Brutus sends him out to tell the citizens that no one else will be harmed.

Artemidorus

He gives Caesar a letter as the emperor enters the Capitol; in the letter, he lists the conspirators by name and indicates that they intend to kill him, but Caesar does not read it.

Popilius Lena

The senator who wishes Cassius well in his "enterprise" as Caesar enters the Senate House. This comment intensifies the dramatic tension in the moments immediately prior to the assassination by causing Cassius and Brutus to briefly fear that they have been betrayed.

Cinna the poet

On his way to attend Caesar's funeral, he is caught up in the riot caused by Antony's funeral oration. The mob at first confuses him with Cinna the conspirator, but even after they discover their error, they kill him anyway "for his bad verses."

Octavius Caesar

The adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar; he is one of the triumvirs who rule following the death of Caesar. He and Antony lead the army that defeats Cassius and Brutus at Philippi.

M. Aemilius Lepidus

He joins Antony and Octavius to form the Second Triumvirate to rule the Roman Empire following the assassination of Caesar. He is weak, and Antony uses him essentially to run errands.

Lucilius

The officer who impersonates Brutus at the second battle of Philippi and is captured by Antony's soldiers. Antony admires his loyalty to Brutus and thus he protects him, hoping that Lucilius will choose to serve him as loyally as he did Brutus.

Pindarus

At Philippi, he erroneously tells his master, Cassius, that the scout Titinius has been captured by the enemy when the scout has actually been greeted by the victorious forces of Brutus. Thinking that all is lost, Cassius decides to die; he has Pindarus kill him with the same sword that he used to help slay Caesar.

Titinius

An officer in the army commanded by Cassius and Brutus, he guards the tent at Sardis during the argument between the two generals, and is a scout at Philippi for Cassius. After Cassius commits suicide when he mistakenly believes Titinius to have been taken prisoner by the enemy, Titinius kills himself in emulation of Cassius.

Messala

A soldier serving under Brutus and Cassius, Messala gives information concerning the advance of the triumvirs, and he reports Portia's death to Brutus at Sardis. At Philippi, he hears Cassius confess that he believes in omens. Later, he discovers Cassius' body.

Varro and Claudius

Servants of Brutus, they spend the night in his tent at Sardis. Neither of them observes the ghost of Caesar that appears to Brutus.

Young Cato

The son of Marcus Cato, the brother of Portia, the brother-in-law of Brutus, and a soldier in the army commanded by Brutus and Cassius. He dies during the second battle at Philippi while trying to inspire the army by loudly proclaiming that he is the son of Marcus Cato and that he is still fighting.

Clitus and **Dardanius**

Servants of Brutus, they refuse their master's request at Philippi to kill him.

Volumnius

A friend of Brutus and a soldier under his command at Philippi. He refuses to hold a sword for Brutus to impale himself on.

Strato

The loyal servant who holds Brutus' sword so that he may commit suicide. Later, he becomes a servant to Octavius.

Major Characters

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Julius Caesar

In using Julius Caesar as a central figure, Shakespeare is less interested in portraying a figure of legendary greatness than he is in creating a character who is consistent with the other aspects of his drama. If Brutus and Cassius were eminently evil men insidiously planning the cold-blooded murder of an eminently admirable ruler, *Julius Caesar* would be little more than a melodrama of suspense and revenge. On the other hand, if Caesar were wholly the bloody tyrant, there would be little cause for Brutus' hesitation and no justification for Antony's thirst for revenge. In fact, Shakespeare creates in Caesar a character who is sometimes reasonable, sometimes superstitious, sometimes compassionate, and sometimes arrogantly aloof. In so doing, he has projected Caesar as a man whom the nobility have just reasons to fear, yet who

is not a villain.

Flavius concludes his criticism of Caesar in Act I, Scene 1, by expressing his fear that Caesar desires to "soar above the view of men / And keep us all in servile fearfulness." His opinion is given credence when, moments later, Casca and Antony's attitude toward Caesar demonstrates that they consider him a man whose every wish should be considered a command by the citizens of Rome. Caesar's opinion of himself throughout shows that he complies with that attitude. He does not fear Cassius because he believes himself to be beyond the reach of mere humans, and he caps his explanation of his incapability of experiencing fear by observing, ". . . for always I am Caesar." However, his reference to his partial deafness provides an obvious contrast between the conceptions of the vain man who perceives himself in godlike terms and the actual, aging man who stands in imminent danger of assassination. His potential for evil is further emphasized by the swiftness with which he summarily has Flavius and Marullus "put to silence." Finally, at the very moment preceding his death, Caesar compares himself to the gods of Olympus in his determination to continue his arbitrary administration of Roman justice.

Caesar's teeming arrogance and pride more than offset his proven ability to reason. He expresses a fatalistic acceptance of the inevitability of death when he tells Calphurnia how strange it is to him "that men should fear; / Seeing that death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come." But it is not his belief that the hour of his death has been predetermined and thus cannot be avoided that causes him to ignore the portents, his priests, and Calphurnia. Instead, he ignores them because of Decius' challenge to his sense of pride and to his ambition. Caesar, who is so perceptive in his analysis of Cassius, cannot always look "quite through the deeds" of a calculating deceiver.

From his first appearance, Caesar openly displays a superstitious nature, but also from the beginning he displays a propensity to ignore warnings and signs that should alert a man of his beliefs. He enters the action of the play by advising Calphurnia to seek a cure for her sterility by ritual, and he exits fifteen lines later, dismissing the soothsayer as "a dreamer." He ignores the soothsayer, Calphurnia, the many portents, his priests, and finally Artemidorus because he has ceased to think of himself as a fallible human being, and because he passionately wants to be crowned king. He does not fear Cassius, although he knows him to be a danger to political leaders, because he believes that he and Cassius occupy two separate levels of existence. Cassius is a man; Caesar, a demigod. He even comes to think of himself in terms of abstract qualities, considering himself older and more terrible even than "danger." His sense of superiority to his fellow humans, as well as his overriding ambition to be king, ultimately

prevent him from observing and reasoning clearly.

Caesar as a viable character in the play endures beyond his assassination. Brutus wants to "come by Caesar's spirit / And not dismember Caesar." In fact, Brutus and the conspirators succeed in dismembering the corporeal Caesar, but they fail to destroy his spirit. Antony invokes the spirit of Caesar first in his soliloquy in Act III, Scene 1, and he uses it to bring the citizens of Rome to rebellion in Act III, Scene 2. The ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus at Sardis and again at Philippi, signifying that Brutus has failed to reconcile mentally and morally his participation in the murder, as well as signifying that his and Cassius' fortunes are fading. Caesar's spirit ceases to be a force in the play only when C

Brutus

Brutus is the most complex of the characters in this play. He is proud of his reputation for honor and nobleness, but he is not always practical, and is often naive. He is the only major character in the play intensely committed to fashioning his behavior to fit a strict moral and ethical code, but he take actions that are unconsciously hypocritical. One of the significant themes that Shakespeare uses to enrich the complexity of Brutus involves his attempt to ritualize the assassination of Caesar. He cannot justify, to his own satisfaction, the murder of a man who is a friend and who has not excessively misused the powers of his office. Consequently, thinking of the assassination in terms of a quasi-religious ritual instead of cold-blooded murder makes it more acceptable to him. Unfortunately for him, he consistently misjudges the people and the citizens of Rome; he believes that they will be willing to consider the assassination in abstract terms.

Brutus is guided in all things by his concepts of honor. He speaks of them often to Cassius, and he is greatly disturbed when events force him to act in a manner inconsistent with them. Consider his anguish when he drinks a toast with Caesar while wearing a false face to hide his complicity in the conspiracy. Ironically, his widely reputed honor is what causes Cassius to make an all-out effort to bring him into an enterprise of debatable moral respectability. Brutus' reputation is so great that it will act to convince others who are as yet undecided to join.

Brutus' concentration on honorable and noble behavior also leads him into assuming a naive view of the world. He is unable to see through the roles being played by Cassius, Casca, and Antony. He does not recognize the bogus letters as having been sent by Cassius, although they contain sentiments and diction that would warn a more perceptive man. He underestimates

Antony as an opponent, and he loses control over the discussion at the Capitol following the assassination by meeting Antony's requests too readily. Brutus as a naive thinker is most clearly revealed in the scene in the Forum. He presents his reasons for the assassination, and he leaves believing that he has satisfied the Roman citizens with his reasoned oration. He does not realize that his speech has only moved the mob emotionally; it has not prodded them to make reasoned assessments of what the conspirators have done.

Brutus is endowed with qualities that could make him a successful private man but that limit him severely, even fatally, when he endeavors to compete in public life with those who do not choose to act with the same ethical and moral considerations. In his scene with Portia, Brutus shows that he has already become alienated with his once happy home life because of his concentration on his "enterprise," which will eventually cause him to lose everything except the belief that he has acted honorably and nobly. In the tent at Sardis, after learning of Portia's death and believing that Cassius is bringing discredit on the republican cause, Brutus becomes most isolated. His private life is destroyed, and he also has difficulty avoiding the taint of dishonor in his public life.

Brutus makes moral decisions slowly, and he is continually at war with himself even after he has decided on a course of action. He has been thinking about the problem that Caesar represents to Roman liberty for an unspecified time when the play opens. After Cassius raises the subject and asks for Brutus' commitment, he requests time to think the matter over, and a month later, speaking alone in his orchard, he reveals that he has since thought of little else. He has trouble arriving at a decision whether to participate in the assassination, he expresses contradictory attitudes towards the conspiracy, he attempts to "purify" the murder through ritual, and he condemns Cassius' money-raising practices while asking for a share. His final words, "Caesar, now be still: / I kill'd not thee with half so good a will," are almost a supplication for an end to his mental torture.

On the other hand, Brutus characteristically makes decisions that are essential to his and Cassius' success with much less forethought, and after he's committed to a plan, he does not waiver. He quickly takes command of the conspiracy and makes crucial decisions regarding Cicero and Antony. He does not, however, make adequate plans to solidify republican control of government following the assassination, and he too readily agrees to allow Antony to speak.

Brutus' character is made even more complex by his unconscious hypocrisy. He has conflicting attitudes toward the conspiracy, but he becomes more favorable following his becoming a member of the plot against Caesar. He attacks Cassius for raising money dishonestly, yet he

demands a portion. Nevertheless, at the end, Brutus is a man who nobly accepts his fate. He dismisses the ghost of Caesar at Sardis. He chooses personal honor over a strict adherence to an abstract philosophy. He reacts calmly and reasonably to Cassius' death, as he had earlier in a moment of crisis when Popilius revealed that the conspiracy was no longer secret. In his last moments, he has the satisfaction of being certain in his own mind that he has been faithful to the principles embodying the honor and nobility on which he has placed so much value throughout his life.

Antony

Prior to Caesar's assassination, Antony makes four brief appearances in which he speaks a total of five lines. Twice during Lupercal and again at Caesar's house, he makes short statements indicating that he is loyal to Caesar as dictator and as a friend. Caesar's confiding to Antony at Lupercal indicates that he trusts Antony and looks upon him as a friend in return, perhaps even as a protégé. Antony appears at the Capitol at the beginning of Act III, Scene 1, but he does not speak before Trebonius leads him out.

When, during Lupercal, Caesar describes Cassius as a dangerous man, Antony defends him as "a noble Roman and well given." While Antony does not perceive at that time that Cassius is dangerous, and later underestimates the determination of Octavius, as a ruler, he is a perceptive observer who verifies Cassius' assessment of him as being a "shrewd contriver." Following the assassination, Antony quickly grasps that he must deal with Brutus, and he has the shrewdness to take advantage of Brutus' naïveté. When he has his servant say that "Brutus is noble, wise, valiant, and honest," it is clear that Antony intends to flatter Brutus and to work upon those personal qualities of Brutus that represent moral strengths, but that are also fundamental weaknesses when dealing with a more sophisticated man.

Antony's requests for safety and for an explanation for the murder are reasonable in the context of the situation, but Brutus' consent to provide both ensures that, upon returning to the Capitol, Antony can concentrate on his ultimate objective of gaining a forum. At the Capitol, by having Brutus repeat his promises, Antony succeeds in placing him on the defensive and in establishing a means to evade the more difficult questions being raised by Cassius. He is not in the slightest degree deterred by considerations of honesty when dealing with those whom he wishes to deceive or manipulate. He knows that Brutus wants to believe that he (Antony) will join the conspirators' cause, and he takes advantage of Brutus' hope

when he falsely tells the conspirators, "Friends am I with you all, and love you all." He will also freely use half-truths and outright falsehoods to sway the mob at the Forum to do what he wants.

Antony faces danger in this meeting from Cassius, who knows him to be a "shrewd contriver," and from the other conspirators, who know him to be a friend of Caesar. He disposes of the threat of Cassius by directing his attention to the more powerful and gullible Brutus, whom he keeps on the defensive by repeating that he will be friends if he receives a satisfactory explanation. He disposes of the remaining conspirators by boldly raising the subject of his apparent hypocrisy in making friends with his friend's murderers and by then shrewdly diverting his comments to the nobility of Caesar. This is much in the manner that he will turn the citizens to rebellion by professing that he does not want to stir them up. Antony, in reality, wants two things: to avenge Caesar's murder and to rule Rome. In order to do both, he must first undermine public confidence in the republicans, and second, he must drive them from power by creating a chaotic situation that will allow him to seize power in their place. The method he chooses is to gain permission to speak at Caesar's funeral, and that is the sole reason he plays the role he does in the Capitol.

In his soliloquy in the Capitol, Antony reveals that he intends to create civil strife throughout Italy, and in his oration he sets it off to a promising start. He is thoroughly the politically expedient man in his speech. He wants to create rebellion and overthrow the republicans so that he and Octavius can fill the vacuum, and he succeeds to the fullest measure. From his soliloquy in the Capitol until the end of the play, he is constantly ambitious, confident, successful, and exceptionally ruthless. He has no concern for the welfare of the citizens of Rome who will suffer in the civil strife he has instigated, he is willing to have a nephew put to death rather than argue for his life, he seeks to keep as much as he can of Caesar's legacy to the poor of Rome, and he openly acknowledges that he will remove Lepidus from power as soon as Lepidus is no longer of use to him.

He has some personality conflict with Octavius, but he is able to relegate it to the background so that their differences are always secondary to their struggle to defeat Brutus and Cassius. Antony is also particularly adept at locating the most advantageous point of attack in all of his confrontations. In the Capitol, rather than confront all of the conspirators, he concentrates on Brutus' naive sense of honor and nobility. In the Forum, rather than construct a reasoned argument against the assassins, he appeals to the emotion with which he saw the crowd respond to Brutus' speech. At Philippi, when Brutus leaves Cassius' army exposed, Antony attacks immediately. At the conclusion of the play, when Brutus and Cassius are dead and the

republicans thoroughly defeated, he publicly praises Brutus in order to set about healing the political wounds of Rome. Ironically, Brutus hoped to remove arbitrary government from Rome by the assassination, but by murdering Caesar, he established the conditions for an even more ruthless tyranny to seize power in the persons of Antony and Octavius.

Octavius

Julius Caesar is its own frame of reference, and a knowledge of Roman history is not essential to an understanding of the play. However, Shakespeare does construct the character of Octavius by highlighting those aspects of his personality that will predominate later in his political and military conflicts with Antony and in his role as the Emperor Augustus. In order to stabilize the political situation in Rome following the assassination and to solidify the triumvirs' control of government, Octavius is willing to conduct a ruthless reign of terror during which the opponents to the triumvirs are methodically slaughtered, but not all of those on the proscription list are actual enemies. Some are simply wealthy Romans who are condemned as "traitors" and executed in order that the triumvirs may confiscate their estates as a means of raising money to finance their armies. It is, nevertheless, noteworthy that the future Augustus does not volunteer members of his own immediate family to the list, although he does insist on the death of Lepidus' brother and does not object to the inclusion of Antony's nephew.

Octavius exhibits creditable insight in his observation that all who currently act friendly to the triumvirs are not indeed friends and in his attitude toward Antony throughout the play. He knows that he is in a power struggle with Antony that will intensify after they have defeated their enemies, and he knows enough about Antony's thirst for power to protect himself from domination by Antony. Consequently, he is not reluctant to disagree with Antony, as he demonstrates in his defense of Lepidus ("he's a tried and valiant soldier"), in his pointing to Antony's error in predicting that Brutus and Cassius would not come to Philippi, and in his insistence that he will fight on the right-hand side of the battlefield at Philippi and not the left-hand side as Antony orders. However, Octavius does not let his determination to remain independent interfere with following Antony's advice when he realizes that Antony speaks from experience, as he demonstrates in agreeing to allow Antony to make Lepidus a junior partner in the Triumvirate, in agreeing with Antony that the most important matter at hand following the assassination is to prepare to meet the republican armies, and in accepting Antony's decision that they should fight from defensive positions at Philippi and allow the

enemy to initiate the battle.

Octavius is shrewd in his political assessments and in his relationship with Antony. He is decisive in executing the proscription and in preparing to meet Brutus and Cassius. He is also supremely confident that he will succeed in defeating his enemies at Philippi and in organizing a successful new government of Rome.

Cassius

The most significant characteristic of Cassius is his ability to perceive the true motives of men. Caesar says of him, "He reads much; / He is a great observer and he looks / Quite through the deeds of men." The great irony surrounding Cassius throughout the play is that he nullifies his greatest asset when he allows Brutus to take effective control of the republican faction.

Cassius believes that the nobility of Rome are responsible for the government of Rome. They have allowed a man to gain excessive power; therefore, they have the responsibility to stop him, and with a man of Caesar's well-known ambition, that can only mean assassination.

Cassius intensely dislikes Caesar personally, but he also deeply resents being subservient to a tyrant, and there are indications that he would fight for his personal freedom under any tyrant. He does not resent following the almost dictatorial pronouncements of his equal, Brutus, although he does disagree heatedly with most of Brutus' tactical decisions. To accomplish his goal of removing Caesar from power, he resorts to using his keen insight into human nature to deceive Brutus by means of a long and passionate argument, coupled with bogus notes. In the conversation, he appeals to Brutus' sense of honor, nobility, and pride more than he presents concrete examples of Caesar's tyrannical actions. Later, he is more outrightly devious in the use of forged notes, the last of which prompts Brutus to leave off contemplation and to join the conspiracy. Cassius later uses similar means to bring Casca into the plot.

Throughout the action, Cassius remains relatively unconcerned with the unscrupulous means he is willing to use to further the republican cause, and at Sardis, he and Brutus come almost to breaking up their alliance because Brutus objects to his ways of collecting revenue to support the armies. Cassius sees Brutus as the catalyst that will unite the leading nobles in a conspiracy, and he makes the recruitment of Brutus his first priority. Ironically, his success leads directly to a continuous decline of his own influence within the republican camp.

Clearly, Cassius has his negative aspects. He envies Caesar; he becomes an assassin; and he

will consent to bribery, sell commissions, and impose ruinous taxation to raise money. But he also has a certain nobility of mind that is generally recognized. When Caesar tells Antony that Cassius is dangerous, Antony answers, "Fear him not, Caesar; he's not dangerous. / He's a noble Roman and well given." He was no doubt expressing sentiments popular at the time. Cassius is also highly emotional. He displays extreme hatred in his verbal attack on Caesar during Lupercal; he almost loses control because of fear when Popilius reveals that the conspirators' plans have been leaked; he gives vent to anger in his argument with Brutus in the tent at Sardis; he expresses an understanding tolerance of the poet who pleads for him and Brutus to stop their quarrel; and he threatens suicide repeatedly and finally chooses self-inflicted death to humiliating capture by Antony and Octavius. When he becomes a genuine friend of Brutus following the reconciliation in the tent, he remains faithful and refuses to blame Brutus for the dilemma that he encounters at Philippi, even though he has reason to do so.

Of all the leading characters in Julius Caesar, Cassius develops most as the action progresses. At the end of Act I, Scene 2, he is a passionate and devious manipulator striving to use Brutus to gain his ends. By the end of Act IV, Scene 3, he is a calm friend of Brutus who will remain faithful to their friendship until death.

Portia

Portia is Brutus's devoted wife. She doesn't get a whole lot of stage time but we think she's an interesting figure, especially when it comes to the play's concern with gender dynamics.

When Brutus refuses to confide in Portia, she takes issue with his secrecy: as a married couple, she says, they should have no secrets.

Dear my lord,
Make me acquainted with your cause of grief.
[...]
Within the bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,
Is it excepted I should know no secrets
That appertain to you? Am I yourself
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,

Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife. (2.1.5)

In other words, Portia is sick and tired of being excluded from her husband's world just because she's a woman. She also suggests that, when Brutus keeps things from her, he's treating her like a "harlot [prostitute], not his wife."

Portia's desire to be close to her husband seems reasonable enough. But Portia also has the annoying habit of talking about women (including herself) as though they're weaker than men.

I grant I am a woman; but withal
A woman well-reputed, Cato's daughter.
Think you I am no stronger than my sex,
Being so father'd and so husbanded?
Tell me your counsels, I will not disclose 'em:
I have made strong proof of my constancy,
Giving myself a voluntary wound
Here, in the thigh: can I bear that with patience.
And not my husband's secrets? (2.1.6)

Here Portia says she knows she's just a girl, but since she's the daughter and wife of two really awesome men, that makes her better than the average woman. To prove her point, she stabs herself in the thigh without flinching and demands that her husband treat her with more respect. Yikes! Later she kills herself by swallowing "fire," or hot coals (4.3). This is interesting because it's usually men who are prone to violence in the play.

History Snack: When Portia says she knows she's just "a woman" but she also thinks she's "stronger" and more constant (i.e., steady and masculine) than most, she sounds a lot like Queen Elizabeth I (Shakespeare's monarch) who famously said "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king" ("Speech to the Troops at Tilbury", 1588). Queen Elizabeth I, like Portia, buys into the idea that women are weaker than men but also presents herself as the exception to the rule.

Calphurnia

Calphurnia is Julius Caesar's wife. Just before Caesar is assassinated at the Capitol, Calphurnia has an ominous dream that seems to predict Caesar's violent death. She begs Caesar to stay home, but her husband blows her off:

Calphurnia here, my wife, stays me at home:
She dreamt to-night she saw my statua [statue],
Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,
Did run pure blood: and many lusty Romans
Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it:
And these does she apply for warnings, and portents,
And evils imminent; and on her knee
Hath begg'd that I will stay at home to-day. (2.2.11)

Calphurnia's dream of Caesar's body spurting blood like a fountain turns out to be pretty prophetic. (Remember, Caesar is stabbed 33 times and the conspirators stand around afterward and wash their hands in his blood.) So why doesn't Caesar pay attention to his wife? At first it seems like Caesar is going to heed his wife's warning. But Calphurnia's attempts to protect her husband are completely undermined when Decius shows up and says girls don't know how to interpret dreams. If this dream had come from someone other than Calphurnia (who is a woman and thus considered less insightful during Caesar's day), would Caesar have listened?

Casca

Casca is a Roman conspirator who takes part in Caesar's assassination.

Like all the other conspirators, Casca is worried that Caesar will be crowned king, which goes against the ideals of the Roman Republic. Casca is also not a big fan of Caesar's theatrics. Check out the way Casca describes how Caesar refused the crown three times and then fainted dramatically before the adoring crowd:

And then [Antony] offered it the third
time; he put it the third time by: and still as he
refused it, the rabblement hooted and clapped their
chapped hands and threw up their sweaty night-caps
and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because
Caesar refused the crown that it had almost choked
Caesar; for he swounded and fell down at it: and
for mine own part, I durst not laugh, for fear of
opening my lips and receiving the bad air. (1.2.9)

Casca knows that Caesar's dramatic refusal of the crown and fainting spell are just cheap tricks to curry favor with the "hoot[ing]" and "clap[ing]" crowd. What's interesting is that Casca describes the crowd as though it were a theater audience watching a performance.

If the tag-rag people did not
clap him and hiss him, according as he pleased and
displeased them, as they use to do the players in
the theatre, I am no true man. (1.2.11)

Casca is suggesting, by describing Caesar's "clap[ping]" and "hiss[ing]" fans, that political leaders like Caesar are nothing but actors on a very public stage. This concept isn't a new one. Shakespeare also explores the relationship between acting and politics in plays like *Henry IV Part 1* and *Part 2*. Yet Casca's critique of Caesar and his followers seems pretty modern. His remarks could apply to just about any 21st-century politician and his or her supporters.

Soothsayer

This is the guy who famously and cryptically warns Caesar to "beware the Ides of March" (1.2.3). The "Ides of March" refers to March 15, the day Julius Caesar is assassinated by the Roman conspirators. Even though he gets to speak the coolest line in the play, nobody pays any attention to the soothsayer (except the audience, who knows all about how the historical Julius Caesar was stabbed in the back that day).

The soothsayer's warning raises an interesting question about fate and free will. If Caesar had actually heeded the warning to "beware the Ides of March," could he have changed the course of events that day? On the one hand, the soothsayer's warning about his impending doom (along with all the other creepy omens in the play) suggests that Caesar's fate is already decided. On the other hand, why would the soothsayer bother warning Caesar if there was nothing he could do to prevent his death? For more on this, see "Themes: Fate and Free Will.

Cinna (the Conspirator)

We first meet Cinna in Act 1, Scene 3, where he schemes with Cassius about how to get Brutus to join the conspiracy against Caesar. He's also assigned the task of planting some phony documents in Brutus's room. Cinna the conspirator shouldn't be confused with Cinna the poet

Cinna (the Poet)

This poor guy is the victim of mistaken identity when an angry mob confronts him on the streets of Rome:

CINNA THE POET
Truly, my name is Cinna.
First Citizen
Tear him to pieces; he's a conspirator.
CINNA THE POET
I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet.
Fourth Citizen
Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.
CINNA THE POET
I am not Cinna the conspirator.
Fourth Citizen
It is no matter, his name's Cinna; pluck but his
name out of his heart, and turn him going. (3.3.4)

Yikes! Even after he declares his true identity to the angry mob, he's ripped to shreds for his "bad verses." Cinna's violent death seems emblematic of the disorder that ensues after Caesar's assassination. With Caesar dead, Rome falls into utter chaos and nobody is safe. Go to "Symbolism" if you want to know more about why poets don't get any love in *Julius Caesar.*

Flavius and Murellus

Flavius and Murellus are two snooty conspirators against Caesar. In the opening scene, they catch a bunch of commoners celebrating Caesar's victorious return to Rome and try to give them a spanking for not being hard at work. Check out what Flavius says (and pay attention, because these are the very first lines spoken in the play):

Hence! home, you idle creatures get you home:
Is this a holiday? what! know you not,
Being mechanical, you ought not walk
Upon a labouring day without the sign
Of your profession? Speak, what trade art thou? (1.1.1)

Obviously Flavius is miffed that Caesar is such a rock star among the plebeians. It also seems pretty clear that he doesn't have any respect for the common folk in Rome, which draws our

attention to the fact that, even though Rome may be a Republic, guys like Flavius and Murellus don't necessarily think all Romans are created equal. This raises an important question in the play: Who should get to decide the rules of government? Later, when we learn that Flavius and Murellus have been "put to silence" (1.2.14) for defacing pictures of Caesar, we wonder whether Caesar might really be the tyrant the conspirators say he is.

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