SHAKESPEARE'S TREATMENT OF SOURCE

MATERIAL IN JULIUS CAESAR

APPROVED:

E. S. Clifton
Major Professor

Marian F. De Shazo
Minor Professor

E. S. Clifton
Director of the Department of English

Robert B. Toulouse
Dean of the Graduate School
SHAKESPEARE'S TREATMENT OF SOURCE

MATERIAL IN JULIUS CAESAR

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Thomas J. Way, B. A.

Denton, Texas

June, 1956
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. SOURCES AND INFLUENCES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. PLOT AND DICTION</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE CHARACTER OF CAESAR.</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE CHARACTER OF BRUTUS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

SOURCES AND INFLUENCES

In discussing Shakespeare as a playwright, George Bernard Shaw once mentioned the bard's "gift of telling a story (provided some one else told it to him first) ... ." One of the best examples of Shakespeare's ability to dramatize an already known story and breathe new life into it by the addition of a few touches of his own is his *Julius Caesar*. A not too careful reading of that play and of its main source, North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians* and *Romans*, could lead one to believe that Shakespeare did little more than make a poetic dramatization of his model. But Shakespearean scholars are notoriously careful, and considerable controversy has arisen concerning the differences between the two versions. What those differences are, and wherein they are significant, if at all, many know beyond a doubt; few, however, seem to know the same things, there being, as always in the welter of Shakespearean criticism, a wide variety of opinions, almost all of which possess some plausibility. However, some major trends can be discerned in the indescribably complicated mass of critical comment on *Julius Caesar*, although the play presents so many difficulties that one of the more self-assured
critics, citing several apparent cruxes in it, concludes that it is doubtless the work of several hands. ¹

In this study of Shakespeare's adaptation of the Caesar story and the questions to which it has given rise, consideration of much material besides the play itself has been found necessary. Thus, in the first chapter Plutarch is examined for his intentions and accomplishment, as are Jacques Amyot, who made a French translation of the Lives, and Sir Thomas North, who, working from Amyot's version, made the English translation from which Shakespeare worked. Further, the Senecan tradition is taken up, both because it was important as a general influence on the Elizabethan stage and because some of the treatments of the Caesar story written under its influence are thought to have had some effect on Shakespeare's treatment; and there is a discussion of the political beliefs of the Elizabethans and of Shakespeare. A few minor sources are also mentioned. The specific influences of these sources and beliefs on Julius Caesar are not taken up in this chapter, which is intended simply as a discussion of the ground on which Shakespeare built.

The second chapter is concerned with Shakespeare's general procedure in reworking Plutarch. The first part contains a detailed discussion of the first two scenes of the first act, a more general study

¹Cecil W. Sabier, "Who Wrote 'Julius Caesar'?" The Shakespearean Quarterly, III (October, 1924), 30-33.
of the rest of the play, and some mention of Shakespeare's addition of anachronistic elements. The second part takes up Shakespeare's adaptation of the language of the North version. The third and fourth chapters are studies of the differences in treatment of character in Plutarch and Shakespeare. Critical thought concerning the changes Shakespeare makes, for the most part that of twentieth century writers, is discussed in chronological order, and changes in trends of thought are noted and discussed. Chapter III has to do with Caesar himself, and Chapter IV with Brutus; Chapter V summarizes the conclusions of the whole study.

Before any intensive study is begun, however, perhaps a brief summary of the probably already familiar plot will not be out of order. The genuine ability of Julius Caesar, backed by his great ambition, has enabled him to win such power and popularity in Rome that his being crowned emperor seems imminent. Many of the aristocracy of the heretofore republican Rome deplore the settling of all this power on one man's shoulders, some because of envy and others because they believe in the existing system and consider rule by an emperor tyranny. Cassius, one of the envious ones, seeks the aid of Brutus, a man of impeccable reputation and high republican ideals, in the cause of the murder of Caesar. Brutus, after much arguing with himself and much shrewd manipulation on the part of Cassius, consents. He, Cassius, and several other Roman citizens, undismayed by a series of omens
of catastrophe, kill Caesar and think that they have liberated Rome from tyranny. But the wily Mark Antony, allowed by Brutus to speak at Caesar's funeral, is able in his oration to sway the populace against the conspirators, and the supporters of Caesar, including his nephew and heir, Octavius, are able to gain ascendancy in Rome. The conspirators raise forces and prepare for battle with the triumvirate, made up of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus, and eventually meet defeat and die, the principal ones by their own hands. The members of the triumvirate, victorious, take up the rule of Rome.

These incidents are the same in all the treatments of the Caesar story, including that of Plutarch and that of Shakespeare. As far as incident is concerned the two versions differ only in details; but these details, as will soon be seen, are of the utmost importance in interpretation of any version.

The end of Caesar's reign is of course an historical event, but its popularity as a story began with its treatment by Plutarch. The old Greek biographer (50? -126? A. D.), born in Chaeronea in Thebes, was to a great degree a child of his age. Living in a Greece which was occupied by Rome but which still retained memories of its former greatness, and which was the source of much of Rome's learning, he naturally had great admiration for the heroes of his own country; and possessing wide knowledge of Rome's history and reverence for its accomplishments in the arts of war and statesmanship, he just as
naturally found himself attracted by its heroes. His citizenship in politically minded Rome made him respect most those men who had distinguished themselves in the two arts just mentioned; and when he desired to write a work which would be of moral value to its readers, he of course chose to use them as his subjects, rather than those in what are called the "fine arts."²

Having chosen his subjects, Plutarch proceeded to portray them according to his own theory of biography, which is succinctly stated in the following passage from the *Life of Alexander*:

... Having to speake of many things, I will use none other preface, but only desire the readers not to blame me though I do not declare all things at large, but briefly touch divers, chiefly in those their noblest acts and most worthy of memory. For the noblest deedes doe not always shew mens vertues and vices, but oftentimes a light occasion, a word, or some sorte makes mens naturall dispositions and manners appeare more plaine, then the famous battells wonne, wherein are slaine tenne thousand men, or the great armyes, or cities wonne by siege or assault. For like as painters or drawers of pictures, which make no accompt of other partes of the bodie, do take the resembaunces of the face and favor of the countenance, in the which consisteth the judgement of their maners and disposition: even so they must give us leave to seeke out the signes and tokens of the minde only, and thereby shewe the life of either of them, referring you unto others to wryte the warres, battells, and other great things they did.³

In spite, however, of his saying that he will tell "chiefly... those their noblest acts and most worthy of memory," Plutarch does show his


heroes' faults. He tells all about his heroes, following known facts and
accepted hearsay in his accounts of them, and making shrewd implicit
judgments of them; but even then, MacCallum notes, he does not imply
that because a man is human and has some human faults he therefore
cannot be a great man. In short, he gives what he thinks are the facts,
both good and bad, about his heroes, and seldom draws any stated conclusion
from them, seeming to feel that they will by themselves accomplish his
purpose. And, as MacCallum remarks, if the facts happen to be con-
tradictory, he cares not a whit.

In addition to his purpose to show the real man behind a hero's
actions, Plutarch had the purpose of stating his ideas concerning
government, says Wyndham. Those ideas, found in remarks in various
places in the Lives, are basically republican, or rather oligarchic;
Plutarch opposes hereditary monarchies and approves of constitutional
republics, governed by a few wise and benevolent men, and believes
that a man of low birth should be able to obtain a position of as much
power as his capability and virtue warrant. If a government fails, he
believes, it does so because of a failure of the few in power, who
should have "natural grace" enough to please the people and keep them
under control.

---

4 Mungo W. MacCallum, Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their
5 Ibid., p. 112.
6 Wyndham, pp. 141-143.
But though Plutarch considered oligarchy the ideal form of government, he still felt that the Roman Empire of Caesar's time, with its weak and ineffectual Senate, needed an emperor, and that Caesar was the man to fill that need, even though his ambition led him to make a few mistakes and even though there were difficulties of adjustment at the beginning of his de facto reign.  

There are a few other elements to be found in Plutarch which are of special interest when he is considered in conjunction with Shakespeare. One is his ability as a painter of incidents and scenes, who uses often the simplest means to achieve his purposes, such as the evocation of the senses and the mentioning of small details which point up the impression of a whole scene. Another quality is his romanticism; he never misses a sensational incident or a sentimental touch. Still another is his strong feeling for family relationships, shown in his portrayals of the relationship in Coriolanus, between the hero and his mother, Veturia (whom Shakespeare calls Volumnia), and of that between Portia and Brutus in Julius Caesar. And then there is his superstition, which leads him always to mention the portents of any great upheaval or black deed, as he does in Julius Caesar, and to tell of the seeing of visions and ghosts.

---

7Ibid., p. 152.  
8Ibid., p. 175.  
9Ibid., p. 179.  
10Ibid., p. 183.  
11Ibid., p. 190.
Plutarch, then, can easily be recognized as one who would interest Shakespeare; but before Shakespeare could become acquainted with his works it was necessary that they be translated into English, and so they were in time. First, however, they were translated into French by Jacques Amyot, a man who, as Sainte-Beuve remarks, is unusual in that, although his literary output is made up entirely of translations, he is remembered with all the honor given to an original genius. 12

Born in 1513, Amyot made translation his life's main work, although he was also a churchman and was made Bishop of Auxerre in 1570. The Lives are not the only work which he translated: he made French versions of many other works in Greek and Latin, among them the Aethiopica of Heliodorus, Books XI to XVII of Diodorus Siculus1

Bibliotheca Historia, the Moralia of Plutarch, and various other works, some of which he had discovered on a trip to Rome taken in hopes of finding the lost Lives. MacCallum comments that his treatment of his discoveries was characteristic: he did not publish them in editions in the original for scholars, but made translations so that all his countrymen could benefit from them. 13

Amyot's version of the Lives appeared first in 1559, and in revised editions in 1565 and 1567. 14 It has stirred admiration among


13 MacCallum, pp. 121-124.

14 Ibid., pp. 124-125.
literary men ever since. Montaigne complimented Amyot for his feat in translating so well an author with a style as "thorny and crabbed" ("épineuse et ferré") as Plutarch's, for his choice of material, and especially for his style, calling him the greatest prose artist of his time and giving him credit for an entirely salutary influence on the language. 15 Later he found it hard to believe when someone pointed out that Amyot made many errors in translation, but he still retained his respect for him. 16

Bachet de Mézières had a somewhat different view of Amyot's accomplishment. An assiduous scholar, he compared Amyot's version with the original and found, he said, more than two thousand passages in which Amyot missed the sense of Plutarch. 17 But men who are not blinded by actually small technical errors in scholarship have always respected him for his general accuracy and for his style and its beneficial influence on the French language, although, as Sainte-Beuve remarks, his reputation has undergone some fluctuation according to the tastes of various times. 18

Amyot's task was no easy one. MacCallum notes that the Greek of Plutarch's time was "a language full of reminiscences and past its prime," whereas Amyot's French was "a language that was just

---

17 MacCallum, pp. 128-129.
18 Sainte-Beuve, p. 452.
reaching self-consciousness and that had the future before it." Therefore Amyot could not hope to give an exact representation of Plutarch as he was originally. But he set methodically to work to do the best he could. Sainte-Beuve says of the result that it is not exactly Plutarch, but that its somewhat more leisurely and extended style has an original charm of its own:

Un esprit tout critique et chagrin pourrait trouver dans ces pages . . . des redondances, et cette disposition d' Amyot à tout étendre et à tout allonger; on nage avec lui dans les superfluïtés sans doute; là où Plutarque ne met que deux mots, il en met trois et quatre, et six: mais que nous importe si ces mots sont des plus heureux, et de ceux mêmes que le lecteur qui ne sais que le français va d'abord relever avec sourire et avec charme?  

Wyndham too notes that Amyot "piles up his epithets," but finds in that piling up more than the creation of a pleasing aural effect, calling it the result of "extreme research." Plutarch's language, he says with MacCallum, was old and rich with connotations; therefore Amyot, using a relatively new and simple language, had to seek perfect expression "not . . . in one word but in the resultant of many." The end result of Amyot's labor, then, is a work which is, as Thomson says, "reasonably accurate," and which stands as a noteworthy and eminently respectable literary work in its own right.

---

19 MacCallum, p. 437.  
20 Sainte-Beuve, p. 461.  
21 Wyndham, p. 209.  
A translation which has received so much praise deserved, when it came to be put into English, to be treated by another artist, and Sir Thomas North is recognized as such. Comparatively little is known of his life and career, but he is, as MacCallum comments, of more importance to students of Shakespeare than either Amyot or Plutarch, since it was directly from his version of the Lives that Shakespeare worked. 23 He may have known a little Greek, as is shown by his occasionally correcting an error made by Amyot, and he certainly knew some Latin; but in his various translations he always worked from some contemporary vernacular. 24 He chose Plutarch to translate because of the moral value of his works, and because he considered the Greek important as both "Philosopher and Historiographer." 25

Using probably the 1559 edition of Amyot's work, North worked for several years on his translation, publishing it in 1579 and again in 1595. 26 The version shows careful following of Amyot, which sometimes leads North into difficulties, when he tries, in an English which is somewhat heavier and moves somewhat more slowly than French, to translate Amyot's extended periods almost word for word, a practice which causes his grammar and his meaning sometimes to become

23 MacCallum, p. 142.  
24 Ibid., p. 147.  
25 Ibid., p. 151.  
strained and obscure. North was on the whole a very capable translator, however; Wyndham says that there are not twenty mis-translations of Amyot in the 1175 folio pages of his version, and even those are unimportant in a work which "echoes its original not only in sense but also in rhythm and form." Some of them are undoubtedly intentional, such as his always translating "le déluge" as "Noe's flood." The most famous, which Shakespeare follows faithfully, is the description of Pompey's statue at Caesar's murder. Shakespeare has Antony mention it as follows:

. . . in his mantle muffling up his face,
Even at the base of Pompey's statua,
Which all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell.

(III, ii, 191-193).

North reads: " . . . against the base whereupon Pompey's image stood, which ranne all of a goare blood." Amyot, translating Plutarch accurately, says that when Caesar fell on it the statue "en fust toute ensanglante." North's revision, says the sometimes overenthusiastic Wyndham, may have been the result of either an error or a stroke of

27 Wyndham, p. 201.

28 References to Shakespeare's works will not be footnoted, but indicated by act, scene, and line numbers corresponding to those in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by Hardin Craig (New York, 1951).
genius on North's part, but whichever it is, it has "enriched the world." MacCallum cites a few other errors made by North which, although taken out of context, may give an idea of the sort of mistakes he makes. In the Life of Coriolanus, where Amyot reads "je m'en revois (i.e., revais, retourne) vaincu par toy seuls," North translates "I see myself vanquished by you alone." In the Themistocles, North is confused by the specialized use of ne: where Amyot says "Ces paroles feirent incontinent penser à Eurybides et craindre que les Atheniens ne s'en vouussent aller et les abandonner," North says, "These wordes made Eurybides presently thinke and fear that the Athenians would not goe, and that they would forsake them." But such matters are not especially significant. What is important is North's usually quite faithful rendition of Amyot, which the two following examples, from the Marcus Antonius, will show. First Amyot:

Il se meit quelquefois à pescher à la ligne, et voyant qu'il ne pouvoit rien prendre, si en estoit fort despit et marry à cause que Cleopatra estoit présente. Si commanda secrettement a quelques pescheurs, quand il auroit jeté sa ligne, qu'ils se plongeasent soudain en l'eau, et qu'ils allassent accrocher à son hameçon quelques poissons de ceux qu'ils auoyent eu


30 MacCallum, p. 155.
And North:

On a time he went to angle for fish, and when he could take none, he was as angrie as could be, because Cleopatra stode by. Wherefore he secretly commanded the fisher men, that when he cast in his line, they should straight dive under the water, and put a fishe on his hooke which they had taken before; and so snatched up his angling rode and brought up a fish twise or thrise. Cleopatra found it straight, yet she seemed not to see it, but wondered at his excellent fishing: but when she was alone by her self among her owne people, she told them howe it was, and had them the next morning to see the fishing. A number of people came to the haven, and got into the fisher boates to see this fishing. Antonius then threw in his line, and Cleopatra straight commanded one of her men to dive under water before Antonius men and to put some old saite fish upon his baite, like unto those that are brought out of the contrie of Pont. When he had long the fish on his hooke, Antonius, thinking he had taken a fishe in deede, snatched up his line presently. Then they all fell a-laughing. Cleopatra laughing also, said unto

---

him: "Leave us, (my lord), AEgyptians (which dwell in the contry of Pharos and Canobus) your angling rodde: this is not thy profes-

sion; thou must hunt after conquering realmes and contries." 32

Also important is North's introduction of earthy idiomatic expressions, such as his description of a wife, in the Cicero, as "wearing her husbands breeches." 33 Such things were quite foreign to Amyot's inten-
tention, which was to put Plutarch into the words "qui nous sembleront plus doux, qui sonneront le mieux à l'oreille, qui seront coutumièremen-
et en la bouche des biens parlants. . . ." 34 But they aided North in his purpose, which was to give Plutarch to Englishmen, and in which he succeeded in such a way that Thomson says of his version:

North takes Amyot's version and expands, variegates, elaborates it in the idiom of Tudor England. The result has an independent life of its own. In North's version Plutarch became, so far as that was possible, an Englishman and his book a masterpiece of English literature. 35

North, then, follows Amyot carefully, but gives Plutarch an English dress, putting his Lives into a language which Shakespeare himself often uses almost verbatim.

Though North's Plutarch is certainly the basic and far and away the most important source of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, there are other influences which operate on the play to some extent. One of the


33 North, quoted in Wyndham, p. 217.

34 Amyot, quoted in Wyndham, p. 198. 35 Thomson, p. 12.
strongest is that of the Senecan drama of Shakespeare's time. The men of the Renaissance were fascinated by the ten plays attributed to the Latin tragedian Seneca, which, composed mostly for recitation to jaded Roman aristocrats, contain much often almost meaningless but always high-sounding rhetoric, or rant, and much blood and thunder, treating violent themes, especially that of revenge, with graphic description and even presentation of the most terrifying actions. The reason for their fascination, says MacCallum, is that as members of a civilization which was still young and crude and was fond of anything ancient, they liked anything that was Latin and liked the violence and the purple passages in Latin tragedy. 36 Playwrights in France and England began imitating the old tragedies. The first Senecan drama written in France was the Latin Julius Caesar of Muret (1550), which was followed by many others, among them Grévin's adaptation into the vernacular of the same play, Jodelle's Cléopatre Captive (called the first real French tragedy), Garnier's Cornélie and his Marc Antoine, and many other less important plays. 37 The English Senecan dramas followed two main channels, some being written, performed, and attended by university men, and others being intended for the popular stage. The "university plays," as those in the first group are called.

contained long harangues instead of dialogue, with many literary allusions, most of them to mythology and to ancient writers. Examples are Gorboduc, Kyd's translation of Garnier's Cornélie, Daniel's Cleopatra and his Philotas, and the anonymous Caesar and Pompey or Caesar's Revenge. The popular plays were bloodier, displayed less erudition, and often showed even less taste and more sensationalism and bombastic mouthings than the university plays. Among these are Kyd's fabulously successful The Spanish Tragedy, Marlowe's Tamburlaine, and others concerned with themes of revenge or of irresistible warriors. 38

Since Senecan drama was thus popular on the stage, Shakespeare, who of course wrote for audiences, could not have helped showing its influence in his treatment of almost any tragic theme, and it may, as will be seen later, have had a great deal to do with his treatment of Caesar. One specific influence may have been that of the already mentioned Julius Caesar first written by Muret in Latin and translated and expanded by Grevin. That the play was known in England before Shakespeare wrote his Julius Caesar seems fairly certain, since an English tragedy by Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, apparently based on it and on Garnier's Cornélie, was published in 1604, and

had probably been written much earlier. MacCallum notes that

Muret

employs a number of the motifs that reappear in Shakespeare. Thus he gives great prominence to the self-conscious magnanimity of Caesar; to the temporary hesitation of Brutus, with his appeal to his name and the letters placed in his way; to his admiration for the courage and constancy of Portia; to his final whole-heartedness and disregard of Caesar's love for him; to his prohibition of Mark Antony's death; to Cassius' vindictive zeal and eager solicitation of his friend; to Calpurnia's dream, and the contest between her and Decimus Brutus and in Caesar's own mind; to Caesar's fatal decision in view of his honour, and his rejection of the fear of death; to the exultation of Brutus and Cassius as they enter with their blood-stained swords after the deed is done.

MacCallum further calls attention to the division of sympathy on

Muret's part between the two opposing forces, which is also found in Shakespeare. All those similarities lead him to believe that Shakespeare almost certainly knew the Muret-Grévin-Alexander play in one of its versions. Furness, however, believes that they result only from the fact that the basic source of all the plays is the same.

Tillyard gives a thorough discussion of another strong influence on Shakespeare, the religio-political beliefs of his time. They were founded on the conception of world order which was accepted by almost all the men of the Renaissance. The universe was thought of as a unit,

---


40 MacCallum, pp. 26-27.

41 Ibid., p. 27.

42 Shakespeare, Variorum, Preface, p. x.
which, however, "presented itself to the Elizabethans under three different, though often related, appearances: a chain, a series of corresponding planes, and a dance to music." The chain was made up of a series of beings, rising gradually "from the lowest of inanimate objects up to the archangel nearest to the throne of God." Every link was in place, and no being could alter its position. Each division of the chain was thought to correspond within itself to the scheme of the whole chain—thus the "series of corresponding planes." Calling all motion or change a dance to music was a figurative statement of the conception of a state of orderliness, in which, to resort to a proverb, there was "a place for everything and everything in its place"; that is, all beings were creating harmony by performing their assigned tasks and thus furthering the will of God. But let one being attempt to slip out of its place or to interfere with the proper order of things, and confusion resulted.

The plane of government among men was thought to correspond to the basic scheme. Since that scheme ascended from the lowest order to God Himself, it was, logically enough, thought natural, fitting, and proper that the scale within the human order should ascend from the lowliest subject to the king; that the king, whose function was after all to preserve order within the commonwealth, should be the earthly

representative of God; and that any insurrection both constituted an affront to nature and inevitably brought about chaos and discord. 44

That this belief was held by Shakespeare is obvious throughout his works, but nowhere in a statement so complete or so striking as is that spoken by Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida (I, iii, 75-138). The speech is too long to be quoted here, and it need not be, for it simply sets forth, although in somewhat more effective language, what has just been said.

The doctrine of absolute obedience of a sovereign, Tillyard points out, is one of the most important beliefs brought out in the writings of the time. A citizen was obligated to obey his king even if he were convinced that the king did not rule wisely or was unfit for his position. 45 There were only two exceptions to this universal law. The first was the necessity of rebelling against a king who had usurped the throne, and who was thus no king at all; 46 the second was that "if a king is quite bad. . . , then rebellion is justified. The words constantly used to describe the quite bad king are tyrant and tyranny, whose connotations in the sixteenth century must have been even worse than they are now. . . . Normally a tyrant is past praying for." 47 But Tillyard notes

that thinkers of the time qualified even these exceptions by saying that
"it was . . . just to revolt against a tyrant, but discontented man was
only too apt to class as tyrant a merely bad king appointed by God to
punish his impious subjects." 48

Aside from the major sources of Julius Caesar and the influences
on it of Elizabethan dramatic tradition and political beliefs, commen-
tators have suggested the use of various works as line sources. Many
have been struck by the fact that Antony's famous oration has no real
counterpart in Plutarch. The biographer mentions the speech twice,
but does little more than tell the situation which prompted it, its general
tone, and its effect; 49 and several have believed that Shakespeare used
as the source for it a work by Appian which was published in 1578 in an
English translation entitled An Ancient Historie and exquisite Chronicle
of the Romanes warres, both Civile and Foren. 50 But MacCallum, after
quoting the whole account of the speech as it is found in Appian, states
his belief to be that the speech is mostly the work of Shakespeare, based
on the general ideas found in Plutarch and only supplemented with a few
minor details from Appian. 51

48 Ibid., p. 89.
49 See Plutarch, The Life of Marcus Brutus, op. cit., IV, p. 451,
and The Life of Marcus Antonius, ibid., pp. 301-302.
50 MacCallum, p. 644.
51 Ibid., pp. 645-647.
Dio, Ovid, Suetonius, Valerius Maximus, Virgil's *Georgics*, Boccaccio's *Life of Caesar*, and Eedes' Latin play on Caesar have also been suggested as providing minor details. 52 However, Dio, Suetonius, and Valerius Maximus were not in translation until too late for Shakespeare to use them. 53

Lisi Cipriani suggests another source in the *Cesare* of Orlando Pescetti, published in 1594 in Venice. This Italian tragedy, derived from Plutarch, contains elements which are not found there but are found in the Shakespeare play. Thus, concludes the writer, it is possible that Shakespeare knew and used the Pescetti version. 54 However, Cipriani makes no suggestion as to how a translation, if any were made, might have fallen into Shakespeare's hands. Ayres gives examples of the sort of resemblances to be found; one will suffice. In both the Renaissance versions, Brutus considers Antony not dangerous enough to kill for the two reasons that he is given to licentious living and that he can do nothing without Caesar's support (II, i, 182-183, 188-189).

Plutarch's Brutus does not give either of these reasons. There are many

---


54 Lisi Cipriani, "A Source of Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar'," *The Nation*, XC (June 2, 1910), 556.
more such parallels, but Ayres believes them merely fortuitous, saying that "it is difficult to attach any significance at all" to them.\(^{55}\)

The prize for making the wildest suggestions concerning Shakespeare's sources must go to William Theobald, whose ardently followed purpose is to prove that the plays falsely attributed to Shakespeare for all these years contain too many learned allusions to have possibly been written by anyone but such an erudite scholar as Sir Francis Bacon. In *Julius Caesar* alone he sees similarities to passages in Lucan, Caius Silius Italicus, Ovid, Plato, Statius, Sophocles, Horace, Gesner, an old Bohemian story, Johannes Stradamus, Pliny, Rufus Festus Avienus, Caius Suetonius Tranquilius, Aeschylus, Roger Bacon, Homer, Lucian, Flavius Avianus, Euripides, and even Plutarch.\(^{56}\) No comment seems necessary after that impressive array, but it must be admitted that at least some of Theobald's comparisons do demonstrate remarkable similarities between lines in *Julius Caesar* and in the earlier works.

In spite of all this more or less scholarly to-do, however, North's Plutarch is indisputably the major source of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The other influences—the Senecan tradition, as it has to do with both general and specific matters, and the political beliefs of the time—make

\(^{55}\)Ayres, p. 215, footnote 2.

themselves felt more as undercurrents than as direct sources for Shakespeare's dramatization, but an understanding of them is important in the explanation of Shakespeare's adaptation of his primary source. And, too, borrowings from other sources are used when Plutarch does not furnish Shakespeare with as much as he needs; but still it is Plutarch who is most important. Shakespeare's methods of adapting Plutarch will be the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER II

PLOT AND DICTION

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar is taken from three of Plutarch's biographies, The Life of Julius Caesar, The Life of Marcus Brutus, and The Life of Marcus Antonius. Critics have long differed in their opinions as to exactly what Shakespeare's intentions in reworking the story were and what he achieved in doing so. This chapter includes a brief sampling of critical thought on the subject and a careful look at Shakespeare's work. Of course, an entire separation of the discussion of manipulation of incidents and treatment of language from that of character problems is not possible; but for the sake of convenience, matters having to do strictly with plot and diction are discussed in this chapter, the others being taken up in later chapters.

In the eighteenth century Samuel Johnson said of Julius Caesar that though it contains several effective scenes, particularly that of the quarrel and reconciliation of Brutus and Cassius, he found it as a whole "somewhat cold and unaffected," and thought it had suffered from Shakespeare's close adherence to his source. Cotter considers the play a great one, and calls it the result of Shakespeare's taking

1Walter Raleigh, editor, Johnson on Shakespeare (New York, 1908), p. 179.
"the dry bones of history from the musty tome of Plutarch," and giving them life, interest, and moral truth. Trench, again, says that the success of the work is due to Shakespeare's realizing that his source had good qualities and following it with almost implicit trust; Shakespeare, he says, utilizes Plutarch's narration of incidents and North's wording, doing little more than to clothe them with "a rich mantle of poetry."  

Innes finds explanation for Shakespeare's close adherence to Plutarch in the popularity of the Greek's work in the North translation, which was so well known that audiences witnessing a dramatization of a story from it would have resented any fundamental change, expecting the dramatist only to make the incidents into poetic drama. Shakespeare, then, says Innes, either used or rejected what he found, but made no important changes in what he used.  

Another who believes that Shakespeare's work was little more than changing genres is Tassin, who says that the only important differences between the original and the dramatization are a twist which Shakespeare gives to the characterization of Brutus and the increase in interest

---


which he gives to some of the minor characters. Shakespeare, he says, did no more than follow contemporary conventions in his adaptation of Plutarch.  

Draper says substantially the same thing as does Tassin, adding a little about Shakespeare's practice. He says that Shakespeare was using his source in about the same way that any Elizabethan dramatist would have used a source like Painter or Holinshed, except that he followed Plutarch more closely than the others simply because Plutarch gave him more to follow than the others did; but he used great freedom in adaptation: "he did not hesitate to cut, to combine, and to amend."  

Craig gives Plutarch even more credit than this for influence on Shakespeare, saying that the latter "made use of Plutarch's gold without trying to gild it."  

Plutarch . . . gave Shakespeare scene by scene the very texture of what he was to say. Plutarch is the main reason for the carefully detailed portraits of the persons in the play of Julius Caesar, and it may be that from Plutarch Shakespeare learned much of the art of dramatic portraiture and the complexity of human motive. 

---


6 John W. Draper, "The Realism of Shakespeare's Roman Plays," *Studies in Philology*, XXX (April, 1933), 239.


8 Ibid., p. 771.
Not all critics, however, consider Shakespeare's work in *Julius Caesar* a more or less faithful acceptance by Shakespeare of the more or less great Plutarch. Furness, for instance, although he treats Shakespeare's double dependence on Plutarch and North as a "universally admitted" fact, gives Shakespeare credit for much more than simply following Plutarch blindly. He admits that it may seem at first that Shakespeare did little to the incidents he used, but he believes that careful consideration of how the three sources are blended and unified, how incidents in even one source are combined, and how easily and coherently incidents actually separated by long periods of time are presented almost in sequence is evidence sufficient to convince anyone that Shakespeare's accomplishment as a dramatist is not to be underrated.\(^9\)

And Craig comments that Shakespeare's heightening of dramatic effect certainly shows that Shakespeare does better his source and show his ability as an artist. "Consider," he says, "how much more frightful the supernatural portents which precede the death of Caesar are rendered by having the hardy Casca with his drawn sword in his hand tremble and start as he recounts them."\(^{10}\) And, too, he says, the greatest and most famous scene in the play, that of Antony's oration

---


\(^{10}\) Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, edited by Craig, p. 771.
and its effects, seems to be Shakespeare's own. MacCallum finds many flaws in Plutarch, chief among which are his tendency to moralize and his careless arrangement of details. Plutarch, he says, "is more excellent in details than in the whole," and his narratives do not hang together, "because he is little concerned to pierce to the meaning that would give them unity and coherence." Shakespeare's excellence comes from his realization of the potentialities of the narrations, from his supplying, out of his own mind or elsewhere, the important details which Plutarch leaves out.

In a sense he is more of a philosophic historian than his teacher. At any rate, while Plutarch takes his responsibilities lightly in regard both to facts and conclusions, Shakespeare, in so far as that is possible to an Elizabethan, has a sort of intuition of the principles that Plutarch's narrative involves, and, while adding some pigment from his own thought and feeling to give them colour and visible shape, accepts them as his pre-suppositions which interpret the story and which it interprets.

Thus the influences of North's Plutarch, whether of North's style or of Plutarch's manner, though no doubt very great, are in the last resort more in the way of suggestion than of control.  

Another scholar had preceded MacCallum in holding this belief. Delius made, in 1822, a careful and exhaustive comparison of the Shakespeare play with the passages in Plutarch from which it is taken, and arrived at much the same conclusions as did MacCallum.

---

11 Ibid.

12 MacCallum, p. 165.

13 Ibid., p. 166.

Faced by all this fundamental disagreement among scholars, one begins to want to look for oneself at Shakespeare's work and see wherein it follows Plutarch and wherein it differs from him. Doing so is no small task; Wyndham says that in all three of the Roman plays "Shakespeare's obligation is apparent in almost all he has written. To measure it you must quote the bulk of the three plays."\(^{15}\) The intention here, however, is not to quote all of *Julius Caesar* and of the three biographies from which it is taken, but merely to study how the order and emphasis given to the incidents in the drama compare with what is found in Plutarch, to throw some light on Shakespeare's methods of adding dramatic effectiveness to those incidents, to mention a few of the anachronisms and other departures from realism in the play, and, most difficult of all because dealing with the least tangible material, to study Shakespeare's technique in utilizing and reworking the language of his source.

The Incidents\(^{16}\)

The whole of *Julius Caesar* shows Shakespeare's expert adaptation of his source. A detailed study of the opening two scenes, which are

\(^{15}\) Wyndham, p. 219.

\(^{16}\) The findings discussed are the products of original study; however, many of the observations on what is and what is not found in Plutarch were suggested by similar studies in MacCallum, pp. 188-211, Tassin, pp. 258-281, and other works which have been utilized to lesser extents and which are duly cited.
taken together here for the sake of convenience, will perhaps give an accurate idea of his general procedure.

Almost all the happenings in the first two scenes, and suggestions for others, are found in Plutarch; but Shakespeare collects them from various scattered places and combines, compresses, and sometimes supplements them. Thus the celebration of the Feast of Lupercal is found in Plutarch, but it is Shakespeare who, apparently acting on the suggestion of Plutarch's mentioning that Caesar was "apparelled in triumphing manner," combines the Feast with the celebration of Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons, which had actually taken place some months earlier. Caesar's commanding Calpurnia to stand where Antony can strike her and his general admonishment to "leave no ceremony out," (I, ii, 11) and the consequent suggestion that he is superstitious, are original with Shakespeare, as are the rather obsequious overtones of the few speeches made by Brutus and Casca during Caesar's first appearance onstage. The soothsayer's warning comes from Plutarch, who says, however, that it occurred much earlier, and who mentions it only in telling of Caesar's decision to go to the Senate on the Ides of March regardless of supernatural discouragement. 18

18 Life of Caesar, pp. 448-449.
Antony's offering of the crown to Caesar, Caesar's threefold rejection of it, the crowd's reaction, and Caesar's offer of his throat to be cut are all found in the source, but there the latter incident took place at a Senate meeting some time before the Lupercalian festivities; and Caesar's epileptic seizure is Shakespeare's addition, although Plutarch does several times mention the epilepsy. Caesar's expression of distrust for Cassius because of the latter's "lean and hungry look" comes from Plutarch, but in all three of its occurrences there the sentiment applies to Brutus as well as Cassius. Tassin remarks that, since the two are together when Caesar re-enters, the speech might have applied to both of them. The reason why it does not, he conjectures, is probably only that the actor playing Brutus in Shakespeare's company did not fit the description. Caesar's deafness is not mentioned by Plutarch.

The "images" in Shakespeare's first scene are, in the Life of Antonius, only a single statue of Caesar on which the crown Antony had offered him was later placed; but in the Life of Caesar there are

---

19 Ibid., pp. 446-447; but Plutarch himself confuses the two incidents in the Life of Antonius, p. 300.

20 Life of Caesar, pp. 411, 441.

21 Ibid., p. 448; Life of Antonius, p. 300; Life of Brutus, p. 441.

22 Tassin, p. 269.
several, crowned with "Diadeamus." The stripping of the images in Plutarch, then, occurred only after the incidents in Shakespeare's second scene; it was motivated by the tribunes' anger with Caesar's ambition and by the fear that he would be called king instead of by his present title of Dictator. Plutarch says that the people, made suspicious by the lengths to which Caesar was going, applauded Marullus and Flavius for their deed; but Caesar had them put into prison. 23

Shakespeare, on the other hand, puts the Marullus-Flavius incident before the culmination of the Lupercalian festivities, has the images decked for Caesar's triumph over Pompey (which in Plutarch had happened several months before 24), presents the tribunes as moved by loyalty to the fallen leader, and makes the people seem no more than a fickle mob whose members are incapable of any real political thought. This revision, Whitaker believes, shows Shakespeare's inability to comprehend the Romans' republican thought. A thorough-going monarchist, he considered Caesar the rightful king of Rome and did not consider the objections to his kingship valid or even sensible; therefore he had to provide some other motivation for the tribunes' anger. 25

23 Life of Caesar, p. 447; Life of Antonius, pp. 300-301.


The conversation between Brutus and Cassius occurs in Plutarch as a consequence of the other two main events which Shakespeare has in his first two scenes. The unrest of the time and the seeming imminence of Caesar's being made king, Plutarch says, caused the citizens to approach the highly respected Brutus, both overtly and by means of anonymous notes left where he would find them, with wishes that he, as a descendant and namesake of the Brutus who had liberated Rome from one set of tyrants, would liberate it from another tyrant. Cassius, shrewdly noting the way public opinion was running, questioned a few friends about their feelings concerning a conspiracy against Caesar, and found that several of them were willing to join on condition that Brutus was a member: they felt that his name would lend respectability to their enterprise. Approaching Brutus then, for the first time since the two had had a falling out over a praetorship which both had wanted and which Caesar had given to Brutus, he had little trouble in convincing Brutus that steps must be taken to prevent Caesar's tyranny, although Brutus at first disliked the idea of killing Caesar, who had done him many favors, even sparing him after he had fought on the side of Pompey. The decision made, both proceeded to try to enlist others in the conspiracy. 26

26 Life of Caesar, pp. 447-448; Life of Brutus, pp. 442-443.
Shakespeare again makes important revisions. He has Brutus and Cassius meet for the Lupercalian festivities, and ascribes the coolness between them to Brutus' preoccupation with Roman affairs. Brutus' regard for Caesar is not mentioned in Plutarch, who says that if Brutus had wished "he might have bene one of Caesars chiepest frenedes, and of greatest authoritie and credit about him."  

Shakespeare's reason for bringing it out, says Craig, is his wish to increase the magnitude of the crime Brutus is to commit. Brutus' hesitation is the result of his inability to decide on the proper course to take. Cassius' dislike for tyrants in general comes from Plutarch, as does the suggestion that he is jealous of Caesar, but his narrations of Caesar's attack of the "falling sickness" during a campaign and of the swimming match in the Tiber, although the first has basis in Plutarch, are put only by Shakespeare into his mouth. The appeal to Brutus' name, and Brutus' expression of his distaste for living under a tyrant, are from Plutarch.

The calm tone and antithetical style of Brutus' next to last speech to Cassius just before the reappearance of Caesar and his train (I, ii, 162-175) show Shakespeare's observance of two elements in

---

27 Life of Brutus, p. 441.

28 Shakespeare, Complete Works, edited by Craig, p. 774, note to I, ii, 82.

29 Life of Brutus, p. 442.

30 Life of Caesar, pp. 411, 441; but Plutarch tells how Caesar managed with great fortitude to overcome his sickness.

31 Life of Caesar, p. 448; Life of Brutus, pp. 442-443.
Plutarch. One is Brutus' stoical ability to hide emotion, which is an undercurrent in Plutarch but which is not specifically stated; the other is a remark on Brutus' use, although only in his writing, of "that brief compendious manner of speech of the Lacedaemonians."  

That Cassius understands Brutus' stoicism is shown by his saying

I am glad that my weak words
Have struck but thus much show of fire from Brutus.
(I, ii, 176-177)

The humorous tone of Casca's narration of the offering of the crown to Caesar is an addition of Shakespeare's, and so are the slighting remarks he makes about the common people. These last Tolman considers an evidence of the Elizabethans' low estimate of the mob in general. Tolman remarks that the representation of the common people as being "too fickle, too ignorant, too subject to demagogues, to deserve the slightest respect" is a departure from Plutarch, and that it must be remembered that "Shakespeare as a dramatist was concerned entirely with what the common people were in his own time . . . ."  

But it should be noted that Plutarch, in discussing the turmoil directly after Caesar's death, said that Brutus and Cassius had hopes of

---

32 Life of Brutus, p. 437.

being able soon to return to Rome, "considering that they had to deale with a fickle and inconstant multitude; easye to be caried. . . ." 34

Cassius' famous soliloquy telling of his designs on Brutus is also an invention on the part of Shakespeare, and has excited much critical speculation; for, as has been mentioned, Plutarch says that the anony- mous letters to Brutus were the work of many different people, and Shakespeare's attributing all of them to Cassius causes the character to seem shabby and conniving. Also, the lines

For who so firm that cannot be seduced? (I, ii, 316)

and

If I were Brutus now and he were Cassius, He should not humour me. (I, ii, 318-319)

seem to indicate baseness in his character. But more of this later.

Separate consideration of each of the three main groups of incidents dramatized in the first two scenes does not do full justice to Shakespeare's feat in unifying them. His procedure can be summed up by saying that he gives all the important details in Plutarch, but, in order to achieve unity and to avoid having too many short scenes, makes them occur in succession of even simultaneously, and thus creates a dramatic effect which a slavish following of his source would have made impossible. Thus the tribunes' scene is placed first because it provides a convenient

---

34Life of Brutus, p. 451.
opportunity for exposition, giving an insight into the Roman aristocracy's attitude toward Caesar and telling of the Feast of Lupercal. Then, in the second scene, the entrance of Caesar in his triumphal robes and the general feeling of gaiety and celebration in the air make a very impressive introduction for an emperor. The inclusion here of the soothsayer's warning is also effective, as a foreshadowing, even in the midst of evidences of Caesar's power, of his imminent downfall. The contrast between the elaborateness of the procession and the at first careful, guarded conversation between Cassius and Brutus is striking, as is Shakespeare's placing that conversation against the background of the excited shouts of the people at Caesar's rejection of the crown, and his having those shouts bring out or illustrate the thoughts of the characters.

Brutus. What means this shouting? I do fear, the people choose Caesar for their king.

Cassius. Ay, do you fear it?
Then must I think you would not have it so. (I, ii, 79-80)

And a little later, at the end of Cassius' narration of Caesar's displays of physical weakness:

Cassius. Ye gods, it doth amaze me
A man of such feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world
And bear the palm alone. \[Shout. Flourish\]
Brutus. Another general shout!
I do believe that these applauses are
For some new honours that are heaped on Caesar.
(I, ii, 128-134)
And so on. Then, at the reappearance of Caesar and his train, the actual incidents are discovered, but Brutus and Cassius, and, incidentally, the audience, gain the impression of them which the sardonic Casca has had. That impression is not perhaps what it would have been if formed on first-hand observation; but it is the only one which the interlocutors have, and it serves to augment their ill feeling toward Caesar. Cassius' soliloquy after his parting with Brutus is added by Shakespeare, perhaps as more exposition and as a foreshadowing of Brutus' eventual capitulation.

So much for the first two scenes. In the rest of the play Shakespeare follows much the same procedure of funneling elements in Plutarch for the sake of unity and dramatic effectiveness; therefore the remainder of this discussion will include much less detail.

Plutarch does not mention any one meeting of the conspirators like that in the third scene of Act I, but much from the Lives is found in that scene. The omens which are described are simply narrated in Plutarch; Shakespeare's rendering them more effective by showing Casca's reaction to them has already been mentioned. And one should note that Cassius' discounting of the supernatural, his shrewd arguments, and his turning the discussion of the omens into a

---

35 Life of Caesar, p. 448.

36 See p. 28.
discussion of Caesar's tyranny are all Shakespeare's, though based on remarks in Plutarch about Cassius' belief in Epicureanism and in his sometimes almost unethical cleverness. Most of the other elements in the scene are also in Plutarch; the main ones, Cassius' approaching a few carefully selected friends and their agreement to take part in the conspiracy provided Brutus is a member, having already been mentioned.

Brutus' ponderings and consequent sleeplessness come from Plutarch; but the latter, unlike Shakespeare, ascribes them to his worry about the dangers to his friends of the already formed plan to murder Caesar. His rather shaky argument in justification of his decision is Shakespeare's. The content of the note which Lucius brings him is an expansion of the ones which Plutarch gives. One of them says only, "O, that it pleased the goddes thou wert now alive, Brutus"; another reads, "Brutus, thou art a sleepe, and are not Brutus in deede." The implication here, of course, is that Brutus should emulate his namesake, Lucius Junius Brutus.

The second meeting of the conspirators is also an invention of Shakespeare, who creates an effect of stealth and evil by having it take

---

37 See *Life of Brutus*, pp. 458, 464. 38 See p. 34.

39 *Life of Brutus*, p. 444.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 442. These notes, as well as the other solicitations to Brutus to act against Caesar, were in Plutarch the results of the people's irritation with Caesar's flatterers for decking the images.
place late at night and by having the conspirators appear in disguise. The main events of the meeting, however, Brutus' refusing to let the conspirators bind themselves with an oath and his rejection of the suggestion that Antony be killed along with Caesar, are from the source. There the conspirators decided among themselves against the oath, 41 but the decision not to kill Antony was made by Brutus, who argued that a second murder "was not honest," 42 that the enterprise should be "clere from all villanie," 43 and that Antony, being a "noble and couragious man," 44 would probably, after Caesar's death lend his efforts and his great influence among the soldiers to "helpe his contry to recover her libertie." 44

Also in Plutarch, Cicero was left out of the conspiracy because he was thought too old and too "cowardlie" to be trusted with the secret. 45 The implications in the play of Brutus' constant rejections of the others' proposals will be discussed later; suffice it here to say that they may have been suggested by a remark in Plutarch to the effect that Brutus could never be moved from a decision which he believed to be right, and when pressed "used a kinde of forcible and vehement perswasion that calmed not, till he had obteyned his desire." 46

---

41 Ibid., p. 444.
42 Ibid., p. 449.
43 Life of Antonius, p. 301.
44 Life of Brutus, p. 449.
46 Ibid., p. 440.
inclusion of Ligarius in the conspiracy is mentioned in Plutarch, as is his ignoring his sickness in his wholehearted desire to follow where Brutus leads. The scene between Portia and Brutus is copied almost in its entirety from North's Plutarch; a discussion of Shakespeare's technique in putting North's prose into his own poetry will come later.

Calpurnia's dream too comes from Plutarch, as do Caesar's hesitation in face of the omens, his vacillation in deciding whether or not to go to the Senate that day, Decius Brutus' flattery of him, and his eventual decision to go to the Senate regardless. The omens which are reported to have been seen are mostly Shakespeare's; a few, however, are taken from Ovid. The meeting of the conspirators at Caesar's house before going to the Senate is an addition by Shakespeare, intended probably to heighten the effect of the blackness of the murderer's deed; for to an Elizabethan, murder of one who had given the murderer his hospitality was a deed much blacker than the murder of an avowed enemy. Shakespeare also adds a note of dramatic irony by giving some of the conspirators asides mentioning the deed they are about to do.


49 Life of Caesar, pp. 449-450.

50 Martha Hale Shackford, "Julius Caesar and Ovid," Modern Language Notes, XLI, 3 (March, 1926), pp. 172-174.

51 Tassin, p. 273.
Portia's last appearance in the drama (II, iv) comes from Plutarch, with all the details of her courage, her unwillingness to divulge the truth about what is happening, and her sending messengers to the Capitol who hardly know what they are expected to find out. Plutarch says that she finally fainted, and that Brutus was told that she was dying but did not allow himself to be distracted by the information in spite of his very real worry. One wonders why Shakespeare left this out. The entrance of the soothsayer and Portia's surprise at hearing that he is going to the Capitol to tell Caesar to "befriend himself" (II, iv, 30) are additions made by Shakespeare, obviously to heighten the tension before the murder.

The first scene of Act III is still another example of Shakespeare's achievement of effect. Tassin notes that there is much dramatic irony in even the first three lines, which show how Artemidorus and the soothsayer, the only two men who can save Caesar, get in each other's way. Tassin further comments that "the sublimity, or grandiloquence, of Caesar's answer to Artemidorus is a fine invention." In Plutarch Caesar "many times attempted" to read the letter which Artemidorus, telling him it contained matter of much importance to him, gave him, but was prevented by the press of people about him. In Shakespeare,

---

52 Life of Brutus, p. 447. 53 Life of Caesar, p. 450.
on the other hand, Artemidorus' offer of the letter interrupts the
soothsayer and incites Caesar to utter a pompous statement of his
lack of self-interest; then Decius Brutus, as if by plan, steps in and
distracts Caesar's attention, thus showing how carefully the conspirators
had prepared for every contingency. 54

The Popilius Lena episode is taken, with only minor changes, from
the source. Plutarch tells several more incidents which show the tense-
ness of the conspirators and their fears that their plot may be revealed;55
but Shakespeare, pressed for time, has to be content with using only
one and making that one more dramatic. Shakespeare follows Plutarch
in having Trebonius draw Antony away just before the murder, 56 and
in having the conspirators gather around Caesar on the excuse of asking
him to grant a petition. Casca's striking the first blow and Caesar's
giving up the ghost when he sees Brutus strike him are from Plutarch. 57
The famous "Et tu, Brute" (III, I, 77) is probably from Eedes' Latin
play on Caesar; at any rate, it was a conventional phrase of the time. 58
The confusion immediately following the murder and the conspirators'
assurances that they intend to kill no one else are in Plutarch. 59

54 Tassin, p. 274. 55 Life of Brutus, pp. 446-448.
56 Ibid., p. 448; but Decius Brutus Albinus is said in Life of Caesar,
p. 451, to have been the one.
58 Tassin, p. 275.
59 Life of Caesar, p. 452; Life of Brutus, p. 449; Life of Antonius, p. 301.
The message Antony sends is an invention of Shakespeare's, and Antony's subsequent request to be allowed to speak at Caesar's funeral did not, in Plutarch, occur until a few days later. Again Shakespeare compresses his incidents. Brutus' granting him permission and Cassius' misgivings are from Plutarch also, but the scene from this point on, including Antony's soliloquy, is all Shakespeare's. That soliloquy, by the way, is an evidence of Shakespeare's monarchic beliefs; the "domestic fury and fierce civil strife" which he predicts (III, 1, 263) do in fact take place while the country is without a ruler. Here there is a harking back to the belief that if a man interferes with the order of a monarchy by committing regicide he will bring about confusion. The appearance of Octavius did not in Plutarch occur until some time later. 61

The events in the second scene of the third act are basically from Plutarch, but Shakespeare adds much. The source places these events several days after the assassination, and says that in the interim the Senate, at the instigation of Antony, met and praised the conspirators for their deed, and Antony was reconciled with them. 62 Perhaps Shakespeare noted that seeming reconciliation in his having Antony, in the first scene, shake the bloody hands of the murderers of Caesar.

60 Life of Brutus, p. 450.
61 Ibid., p. 452; Life of Antonius, p. 302.
62 Life of Antonius, p. 301.
Plutarch says that Brutus made two speeches at different times, and that the people's reaction was mixed—they had great reverence for Brutus but regretted having lost Caesar. The wording of Brutus' speech in the drama is entirely the work of Shakespeare, who again takes as his point of departure the remarks Plutarch makes about Brutus' style. So is the crowd's complete acceptance of it; the shout of one of the commoners, "Let him be Caesar" (III, ii, 56), showing that the speaker has failed completely to understand Brutus' arguments, is an interesting ironic touch. Antony's speech has already been discussed.

The episode of Cinna the poet is from Plutarch, but the grim humor of the citizens' speeches and the portraying of them as a frenzied mob are Shakespeare's.

Between the incidents which end the third act and those beginning the fourth there is no transition; one is plunged from a scene of confusion to a quiet, tight-lipped discussion among the Triumvirate. Brutus and Cassius have flown from Rome, and their wanderings around the coasts of the Mediterranean, of which Plutarch tells, are not even mentioned.

---

63 Life of Brutus, p. 449; Life of Caesar, p. 452.
64 See pp. 35, 60-61.
65 See p. 21.
67 Ibid., pp. 452-457.
by Shakespeare; nor are the disputes and battles between Antony and Octavius for the rule of Rome. 68 Tassin calls Shakespeare's failure to include at least some explanatory material the only important structural error in the play. 69

The meeting of the triumvirate and the cold-blooded proscription are from Plutarch, who says, of the members' trading relative's life for relative's life, "In my opinion there was never a more horrible, unnatural, and crueller chaunge [exchange] then this was." 70 The feeling of mutual mistrust among the triumvirate and its followers, although perhaps suggested by Plutarch's narration of the contentions between them, is Shakespeare's. Here is another instance of the chaos and upheaval resulting from regicide.

The famous quarrel between Brutus and Cassius is from Plutarch, 71 but Brutus' claiming that Portia's death is the reason for his inability to control his temper is a touch by Shakespeare; in the source Portia died at a different time entirely, which is not given. 72 The entrance of the poet and the differing reactions of the two men are from Plutarch. 73

---

68 Life of Antonius, pp. 301-304.  69 Tassin, p. 283.

70 Life of Antonius, p. 305. See also Life of Brutus, p. 457.

71 Life of Brutus, pp. 462-463.  72 Ibid., pp. 478-479.

73 Ibid., pp. 462-463.
The conference of the generals, Cassius' expressing his desire to delay the battle with the triumvirate, and Brutus' insistence on an immediate meeting are all in Plutarch.  

The portrayal of Brutus as given to study and late hours comes directly from Plutarch, but the quiet exchange with Lucius is Shakespeare's creation, as, indeed, is the character of Lucius. The appearance of the apparition is told twice by Plutarch, but it is only Shakespeare who says that it is the ghost of Caesar that appears.

The parley before Philippi is Shakespeare's; as Craig notes, dramatists have to "fight many of their battles in words," and this is one such battle. Cassius' expression of his misgivings, his growing dissatisfaction with Epicureanism, his remarking that it is his birthday, and his telling Messala that he is being compelled to fight against his will are all found in Plutarch, as is Brutus' speech telling of his intention to commit suicide if he is defeated.

In the last few scenes Shakespeare makes only a few important changes in the events narrated by Plutarch. He gives Brutus full responsibility for giving the order for the premature charge that almost

---

74Ibid., p. 466.  
75Ibid., p. 464.  
76Ibid., p. 464; Life of Caesar, p. 454.  
78Life of Brutus, pp. 465-467.  
79Ibid., pp. 467-468.
caused his defeat in the first battle at Philippi, whereas Plutarch said that it was the result of precipitancy on the part of the soldiers. 80 The misunderstanding which caused Cassius' death, his having Pindarus kill him with the sword with which he had stabbed Caesar, Pindarus' flight, Titinius' suicide, and Brutus' grief at Cassius' death are all from Plutarch. 81

The second battle occurred in Plutarch twenty days from the first; but Shakespeare again compresses his time. Lucilius' passing himself off as Brutus, Antony's reception of him, the ghost's second appearance to Brutus, the manner of Brutus' death, and Antony's final speech over his body are taken from Plutarch, and left, as was indeed necessary, in about the order in which he tells them. 82

Several details of Shakespeare's treatment of source other than a bare outline of what is and what is not taken from Plutarch are of interest in a study of *Julius Caesar*. One is his compression of time, already mentioned several times in passing. As a writer in *Poet-Lore* comments, Shakespeare simply ignores the passage of time. The effect of his doing so is that the action of the play seems continuous, so that events which historically and in the source were separated by long intervals appear to take place in quick succession, and the play takes up only

---

80 Ibid., p. 468. 81 Ibid., p. 471.
a few "dramatic days." The effect is achieved, says the writer, by the inclusion of "transitional speeches." For instance, Cassius announces, at the last of Act I, Scene ii, his intention of leaving notes "in several hands" where Brutus will find them (I, ii, 319-324). Then in Scene iii, he has Cinna deliver some of those notes (I, iii, 142-146). The spectators thus gain the impression that Cassius is carrying out his plan for the night of the Feast of Lupercal. But there are other hints—the number of such notes Brutus has received (II, i, 49), the mention that Caesar will be at the Capitol the next day (I, iii, 36-38)—which make it clear that the scene is on the night of March 14. The truth, according to the writer, is that Shakespeare simply bridges over the "chasm" between the time of the Feast of Lupercal. One wonders, however, if the truth is not that Shakespeare was not aware of the date of the Feast of Lupercal, which Plutarch does not give, or of the fact that it was a full month before the Ides of March.

Besides compressing the length of time which the incidents in his source took up, Shakespeare often of necessity added details of setting and dialogue, many of which either allude to purely Elizabethan customs and objects or do not fit in with what is now known of Roman life and thought. Thus Brutus is portrayed as a Stoic but unlike real Stoics

83 Shakespeare's Legerdemain with Time in 'Julius Caesar,' " Poet-Lore, XI (April, 1899), 279.
does not believe in a life after death (V, i, 133 ff.); Pluto, god of the underworld, is confused with Plutus, god of riches (IV, iii, 112); Caesar's "augurers" are presented not as the officers of state which they actually were but as his own personal astrologers (II, ii, 5-6, 37); and Caesar wears, on the day of his murder, the "mantle" which he was wearing thirteen years before at the defeat of the Nervii, and is thus wearing military garb in the city (III, ii, 180 et seq). As always, Shakespeare takes Elizabethan dress for granted, and gives Casca's garment a "sleeve" (I, ii, 198), has Brutus and Cassius go out "unbraced" (II, i, 290; I, iii, 48), and makes his conspirators wear "hats" (II, i, 84). The famous striking clock (II, i, 192) is an example of Shakespeare's using anachronisms for dramatic effect. Shakespeare makes a few rather feeble attempts at romanizing his settings, such as allusions to "drachmaes" (III, ii, 253; IV, iii, 81) and, possibly, to the Roman custom of inscribing decrees on bronze tablets in the Capitol (III, ii, 40). 84 But such additions, as Draper remarks, are "trifling indeed" when compared with the mass of inaccurate detail that Shakespeare interpolates; 85 and that mass seems to indicate that Shakespeare "was making no serious effort to romanize the setting of his play." 86

84 Draper, pp. 227-230. 85 Ibid., p. 228.

86 Ibid., p. 230.
More striking than errors caused by ignorance, carelessness, or a desire for dramatic effect is a possible inclusion by Shakespeare of an allusion to a happening of his own time. Nathan believes that the Commoner's line, "I meddle with no tradesman's matters, nor women's matters, but with awl" (I, i, 25-26), besides containing a miserable pun, alludes to a play of about the same time as \textit{Julius Caesar}, Dekker's \textit{The Shoemaker's Holiday}. The author of this play and its producer, Simon Eyre, were meddling with tradesman's matters and women's matters. Another such suggestion is that, since Shakespeare himself is thought to have played the part of Cinna the poet, the line, "Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses" (III, iii, 33), may be a bit of atmosphere added by Shakespeare. Its spirit would, if this is true, be comparable to that of Chaucer's tale of Sir Thopas.

Shakespeare was of course pleased to find something in his source which as it stood fit Elizabethan practice. Kirschbaum notes that the use of stage blood in great profusion was a long-established convention of the Elizabethan stage, and when Shakespeare found in his source a detailed description of the bloodiness of Caesar's murder he was happy.

\textsuperscript{87} Norman Nathan, "'Julius Caesar' and 'The Shoemaker's Holiday,'" \textit{Modern Language Review}, XLVIII (April, 1953), 178-179.

\textsuperscript{88} Blanche Coles, \textit{Shakespeare Studies--Julius Caesar} (New York, 1940), p. 209.
to be able at once to use the element, follow the convention, and add a touch of his own. It is the respected citizen Brutus who suggests the murderers1 washing their hands in Caesar's blood as a sort of consecration of their deed. Thus, according to Kirschbaum, Shakespeare both achieves the effect of horror at the barbarousness of the conspirators' deed and symbolizes their degeneration, which begins at that moment.

Questions such as these, however, are important only because they show that Shakespeare's concern was with the major events of the story, those well-known to the public, rather than with historical accuracy for its own sake. This freedom with facts offended classicists like Ben Jonson, who were better educated and more meticulous, but Shakespeare had to cater to the public; he did, however, become a little more careful in the other two, later, Roman plays.90 And even with all these actually insignificant technical errors, Shakespeare does not break down on the spirit of his source; and, as Tillyard says, "he does succeed in giving his picture of antique Rome, of the dignity of its government and of the stoic creed of its great men."91

---


90 Draper, p. 242.

91 Tillyard, p. 252.
This rather tedious study of the Plutarchian and Shakespearean elements in the plot of Julius Caesar, although of course not so beneficial as actual firsthand study of the play and its source, will perhaps give some idea of Shakespeare's general procedure in treating his source material. Obviously he does a great deal more than simply follow where Plutarch leads him. He recasts, revises, omits, supplements, and reinterprets what he finds in Plutarch, according to his needs as a dramatist and to his inclinations as an Elizabethan thinker. He adds dramatic effectiveness by the use of well-placed irony and by showing his characters' reactions to Plutarch's situations, makes his characters show themselves in their speeches and in their general behavior, changes the implications and even the sequence of Plutarch's incidents to make them agree with his own philosophy, interpolates a little material from his own time, stirs well, and writes it all down. One critic says that his method is "to soak himself in Plutarch and then use his imagination." 92

There could be no more apt description.

The Language

Much has been said of Shakespeare's use and development of the wording of North's translation of Plutarch. Some of the comments seem

ill-considered, like that of Brandes, who says that Shakespeare often
uses North's wording verbatim, and quotes as an example Caesar's
famous remark about Cassius, which, he says, is taken "word for
word" from Plutarch: 93

Let me have men about me that are fat;
Sleek-headed men and such as sleep o' nights:
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous. (I, ii, 192-195)

An examination of North shows that in none of the three expressions
of this belief does he use this exact wording. The following is the nar-
ration in the version which Shakespeare's resembles most closely:

Caesar . . . had Cassius in great gelouxie, and suspected him
much: whereupon he sayed on a time to his frendes, What will
Cassius doe, thinke ye? I like not his pale lookes. An other
time when Caesars frendes complained unto him of Antonius, and
Dolabella, that they pretended some mischiefe towards him: he
answered them againe, As for those fatte men and smooth comed
heades, quoth he, I never reckon of them: but these pale visaged
and carian leane people, I feare them most, meaning Brutus and
Cassius. 94

Shakespeare follows Plutarch, certainly, but not "word for word."

A study of exactly what he takes from North, then, is of interest.

Sometimes Shakespeare follows his source very closely indeed.

One instance is Lucilius' speech to Antony after the former has been
taken for Brutus, which North gives as follows:

Antonius, I dare assure thee, that no enemie hath taken, nor shall
take Marcus Brutus alive: and I beseech God keepe him from that

93 George Brandes, William Shakespeare, translated by William

94 Life of Caesar, p. 448.
fortune. For wheresoeuer he be found, alive or dead: he will be found like him selve. 95

Shakespeare revises the speech little more than is necessary to make it scan:

Brutus is safe enough:
I dare assure thee that no enemy
Shall ever take alive the noble Brutus:
The gods defend him from so great a shame:
When you do find him, or alive or dead,
He will be found like Brutus, like himself. (V, iv, 20-25)

A better known example is the scene showing Brutus' relationship to Portia. Here it is as Plutarch tells it:

Then perceiving her husbande was marveloulslie out of quiet, and that he coulde take no rest: ... she spake in this sorte unto him. 'I being, O Brutus, (sayed she) the daughter of Cato, was married unto thee, not to be thy beddefellowe, and companion in bedde and at borde onelie, like a harlot: but to be partaker also with thee, of thy good and evill fortune. Nowe for thy selve, I can finde no cause of faule in thee touchinge our matche: but for my parte, howe may I shewe my duttie towaders thee, and howe muche I woulde doe for thy sake, if I can not constantlie beare a secret mischaunce or grieue with thee, which requireth secrecy and fidelity? I confesse, that a womans wit commonly is too weake to keepe a secret safely: but yet, Brutus, good educacion, and the companie of vertuous men, have some power to reforme the defect of nature. And for my selfe, I have this benefit moreover: that I am the daughter of Cato, and wife of Brutus. This notwithstanding, I did not trust to any of these things before: untill that now I have found by experience, that no paine nor grieue whatsoever can overcome me.' With those wordes she shewed him her wounde on her thigh, and tolde him what she had done to prove her selfe. Brutus was amazed to heare what she sayd unto him, and lifting

95Life of Brutus, p. 476.
up his handes to heaven, he besought the goddes to geve him the
grace he might bring his enterprise to so good passe, that he
might be founde a husband, worthie of so noble a wife as Porcia:
so he then did comfort her the best he coulde. 96

And Shakespeare:

Portia. Within the bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,
Is it excepted that I should know no secrets
That appertain to you? Am I yourself
But, as it were, in sort of limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
Of your pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.
Brutus. You are my true and honourable wife,
As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart.
Portia. If this were true, then should I know this secret.
I grant I am a woman; but withal
A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife:
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?
Brutus. O ye gods,
Render me worthy of this noble wife!
Hark, hark! one knocks: Portia, go in awhile;
And by and by bosom shall partake
The secrets of my heart.
All my engagements I will construe to thee,

96 Life of Brutus, p. 445.
All the character of my sad brows:  
Leave me with haste.  (II, i, 280-309)

MacCallum says of this passage,

Here we have "the marriage of true souls"; and though the prelude to this nuptial hymn, a prelude that heralds and enhances its sweetness, is veriest Shakespeare, when the main theme begins and the climax is reached, he is content to resign himself to the ancient melody, and re-echo, even while he varies, the notes. 97

Naturally enough, Shakespeare follows North's mistranslations as faithfully as the rest.  A striking example, and one that has caused critics no end of trouble, is Brutus' answer to Cassius' question as to what he will do in case they lose the battle of Philippi.  Amyot renders the passage thus:

Brutus luy respondit: "Estant encore jeune et non assez experimentée ès affaires de ce monde, je feis ne scay comment un discours de philosophie, par lequel je reprenois et blasmois fort: Caton d'estre desfait soymesme. . . ." 98

This might be translated:

Brutus answered him: "While still young and not too well versed in the affairs of this world, I wrote, I know not how, a philosophical discourse in which I strongly criticized and blamed Cato for having killed himself."

Of course, quotation marks were not used in the sixteenth century, and their absence led North into the following inconsistency, which is further complicated by two outright mistranslations:

Brutus aanswered him, being yet but a young man, and not over-greatly experienced in the world: I trust, (I know not how) a

97 MacCallum, p. 184.

98 Life of Brutus, translated by Amyot, cited in Ibid.
certaine rule of Philosophie, by the which I did greatly blame and reprove Cato for killing of him selpe, as being no lawfull nor godly acte, touching the gods, nor concerning men, valliant, not to give place and yeld to divine providence, and not constantly and paciently to take whatsoever it pleaseth him to send us, but to drawe backe, and flee: but being nowe in the middest of the daunger, I am of a contrary minde. For if it be not the will of God, that this batell fall out fortunate for us: I will looke no more for hope, neither seeke to make any new supply for warre againe, but will rid me of this miserable world, and content me with my fortune.  

North may have meant trust as a preterit, equivalent to trusted, as MacCallum notes, but Shakespeare took it for a present, and developed the contradiction into a telling stroke on Brutus' character. MacCallum says that he' produced a new effect and one very true to human nature, by making Brutus' latter sentiment the sudden response of his heart, in defiance of his philosophy, to Cassius' anticipation of what they must expect if defeated.  

The result is as follows:

Cassius. If we do lose this battle, then is this
The very last time we shall speak together:
What are you then determined to do?
Brutus. Even by the rule of that philosophy
By which I did blame Cato for the death
Which he did give himself, I know not how,
But I do find it cowardly and vile,
For fear of what might fall, so to prevent
The time of life: arming myself with patience
To stay the providence of some high powers
That govern us below.

Cassius. Then, if we lose this battle,
You are contented to be led in triumph
Thorough the streets of Rome?
Brutus. No, Cassius, no: think not, thou noble Roman,
That ever Brutus will go bound to Rome;
He bears too great a mind.  

(V, i, 98-113)
Another example of how Shakespeare turned to his own advantage one of North's errors is one already mentioned, concerning the running of blood from Pompey's statue at Caesar's murder.

Shakespeare was of course capable of much more than versifying North's language. His feat in reproducing Brutus' style in the latter's oration deserves a closer look than it has so far had herein. Here are the three letters which Plutarch cites as examples of Brutus' "briefe compendious manner":

I understand you have given Dolabella money; if you have done it unwillingly, you confess you have offended me; if against your wills, shewe it then by giving me willinglie.

Your counsels be long, your doinges be slowe, consider the ende.

The Xanthians despising my good will, have made their contrie a grave of dispaire; and the Patareians that put them selves into my protection, have lost no jot of their libertie. And therefore whilst you have libertie, either choose the judgement of the Patareians, or the fortune of the Xanthians.

In Brutus' oration Shakespeare skillfully imitates the phrasing of these letters.

Romans, countrymen, and lovers! hear me for my cause, and be silent, that you may hear: believe me for mine honour, and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe: censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say, that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer:--Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome

---

101 See p. 12.

102 Life of Brutus, p. 437.
more. Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him: but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his valour; and death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply. (III, ii, 13–37)

Shakespeare does even more in Antony's speech. Plutarch's comments on which deserve quoting.

Afterwards when Caesars body was brought into the market place, Antonius making his funerall oration in praise of the dead, according to the auncient custom of Rome, and perceiving that his wordes moved the common people to compassion: he framed his eloquence to make their harts yerne the more, and taking Caesars gowne all bloudy in his hand, he layed it open to the sight of them all, shewing what a number of cuts and holes it had upon it. There-withall the people fell presently into such a rage and mutinie, that there was no more order kept amongst the common people. ¹⁰³

And . . . when Caesars body was brought to the place where it should be buried, he made a funeral oration in commendacion of Caesar, according to the auncient custom of praising noble men at their funerals. When he saw that the people were glad and desirous also to heare Caesar spoken of, and his praises uttered: he mingled his oration with lamentable wordes, and by amplifying of matters did greatly move their harts and affections unto pitie and compassion. In fine to conclude his oration, he unfolded before the whole assembly the bloudy garments of the dead, thrust through in many places with their swords, and called the malefactors, cruel and cursed murtherers. With these words he put the people into such a fury, that they presently toke Ceasars body, and burnet it in the market place, with such tables and fourmes as they could gettogether. Then when the fire was kindled, they toke firebrands,
and ran to the murtherers houses to set them a'fire, and to make them come out to fight. ¹⁰⁴

From these two brief descriptions of the speech Shakespeare took a scene which is called one of the greatest in his work.

As has already, it is hoped, been made clear, Shakespeare used his own individual technique in molding North's language. It is interesting to note that many of the images he uses were suggested by Plutarch, and to note how he makes them conform to his own usage.

Most of the omens preceding the deaths of the main characters of Julius Caesar are suggested by Plutarch, but Shakespeare's use of them may be attributed at least in part to Elizabethan practice in general and to his practice in particular. Sister Miriam Joseph notes that Gloucester in King Lear holds the theory expressed by Calpurnia in her lines:

When beggars die there are no comets seen;  
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.  
(II, ii, 30)

In King Lear Gloucester tells Edward:

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: thought the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects: love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction;

¹⁰⁴Life of Antonius, pp. 301-302.
there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves . . . . And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished! his offence, honesty! 'Tis strange. (King Lear, I, ii, 112-127)

And in Macbeth the murder of Duncan is preceded by omens:

Old Man. On Tuesday last,
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and killed.
Ross. And Duncan's horses--a thing most strange and certain--Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience, as if they would make
War with mankind.

Old Man. 'Tis said they eat each other.
Ross. They did so, to the amazement of mine eyes
That look'd upon 't. (Macbeth, II, iv, 11-20)105

In Plutarch Calpurnia dreamed only that she saw "a certaine pinnacle" broken down from the top of the house, where the Senate had put it as an honor to Caesar. Shakespeare, in making the omens more frightful, adds more omens and uses many images, among them, as Spurgeon notes, the device, frequent in his plays, of discordant noises. Thus Calpurnia says that she has been told that

The noise of battle hurtled in the air,
Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan,
And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets. (II, ii, 22-24)

105 These similarities are noted in Sister Miriam Joseph, Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language (New York, 1947), p. 94.

106 Life of Caesar, p. 449.
Richard II similarly says that war

. . . so roused up with boisterous untuned drums,
With harsh-resounding trumpets' dreadful bray,
And grating shock of wrathful iron arms,
Might from our quiet confines fright fair peace . . .

(Richard II, I, iii, 134-138)\(^{107}\)

In describing the death of Caesar, Plutarch said that he "turned him no where, but he was striken at by some, and still had naked swords in his face, and was hacked and mangeled amongeth them, as a wilde beeste taken of hunters."\(^ {108}\) Shakespeare gives the following description (Antony speaks):

Here wast thou bay'd, brave hart;
Here didst thou fall; and here thy hunters stand,
Sign'd in thy spoil, and crimson'd in thy lethe.
O world, thou wast the forest to this hart;
And this, indeed, O world, the heart of thee.
How like a deer, strucken by many princes,
Dost thou here lie!\(^ {109}\)

(III, i, 204-210)

The use of an image from the hunt, with sympathy for the hunted animal, is from Plutarch, but it is also consistent with Shakespeare's practice; the quibble on \text{hart} and \text{heart} is of course all Shakespeare's.\(^ {109}\)

Of Caesar's reception of the conspirators' petition, Plutarch says only that he denied "their petitions, and offended with them one after another, because the more they were denied, the more they pressed upon him, and were the earnestest with him. . . .\(^ {110}\)


\(^{109}\) Spurgeon, p. 101.

Shakespeare uses a favorite figure to express disgust with flatterers and false friends, one which has to do with a fawning and licking dog and thawing or melting sugar or candy:

Be not fond,
To think that Caesar bears such rebel blood
That will be thawed from the true quality
With that which melteth fools; I mean, sweet words,
Low-crooked court'sies and base spaniel-fawning.
Thy brother by decree is banished:
If thou dost bend and pray and fawn for him,
I spurn thee like a cur out of the way. (III. i, 39-46)

Many more such examples of Shakespeare's developing a hint or a full-fledged figure from Plutarch according to his own methods could be given--there is really no stopping place--but perhaps these will be enough to give some idea. It can be seen that Shakespeare uses North's language with as much freedom as he uses Plutarch's incidents: he takes what he likes, blandly uses it almost as it stands if it fits his intention and his meaning and if he cannot better it, adds to it if he can achieve a more striking effect or simply achieve an effect where Plutarch does not. His additions reflect his own general poetic practices and thought, adapted as need be to the events of the action, but still his own. The result must be considered Shakespeare's work; one can only agree with MacCallum's conclusion that North's Plutarch influenced Shakespeare "more in the way of suggestion than of control." 112

The matters discussed so far are certainly important in a study of Shakespeare's treatment of Plutarch; but the most important have hardly been touched upon. These are the questions of Shakespeare's use and alteration of the characterizations he finds in the source, and the implications of the changes he makes. Here is where the critics and the pseudo-critics have found a field wide open for their theorizing; for the questions as to whether Shakespeare portrays Caesar as the hero or the villain and whether Brutus is a tragic hero or a self-righteous fool and scoundrel properly placed by Dante in one of the mouths of Lucifer can never really be agreed upon, it being possible to marshal evidence on every side of every question. It is difficult to categorize the opinions of the various critics, especially those concerning Brutus, since there is much overlapping even among those who most violently oppose one another; but the remaining chapters represent an ambitious attempt to do just that.
CHAPTER III

THE CHARACTER OF CAESAR

One of the questions about Julius Caesar over which the greatest quantities of the critics' ink have been spilled is that of Shakespeare's intentions in drawing the character of the man who gives his name to the play. Comments on him range from Brandes' furious "he makes Caesar a braggart. Caesar!"\(^1\) to Knight's "The figure of Julius Caesar stands out, brilliant."\(^2\) Obviously there is a little discrepancy here. It becomes necessary, then, to see what Shakespeare has done, and to see how critics who have not been ashamed to publish their beliefs are able to justify them.

Those who believe that Shakespeare plays down his title character find evidence in what is omitted from the drama, the career of Caesar as he worked his way up to the position he holds at the beginning of the play; Shakespeare has, of course, chosen to dramatize only Caesar's last days. Plutarch, naturally, tells the whole story of Caesar, and shows


\(^2\)G. Wilson Knight, *The Imperial Theme* (London, 1951), p. 64.
how his advancement was the result of a mixture of audacity and subtle cunning. His Caesar was a great orator, second only to Cicero.  

He won the people's regard by defying the forces in power. He was a perfect host, and a brave general who was not afraid to fight alongside his soldiers. Cicero and others early realized his "craft and malice, which he cunningly cloaked under the habit of outward curtesie and familiaritie," but no one was able to slow his progress.

Physically, Caesar was weak--once he was even unable to fight in an important battle because of an attack of the "falling sickness" but he overcame his weakness by taking "the paines of warre, as a medicine to cure his sicke bodie fighting alwayes with his disease, travelling continually, living soberly, and commonly lying abroad in the field." He was an excellent swimmer, who once jumped from a boat which was being attacked and swam to safety, carrying several books in one hand. In his later days his ambition became greater than it had previously been; he had himself named perpetual dictator.

---

3 Life of Caesar, p. 399.  4 Ibid., p. 400.
5 Ibid.  6 Ibid., p. 442.
7 Ibid., p. 400.  8 Ibid., p. 441.
9 Ibid., p. 411.  10 Ibid., p. 438.
of Rome. Plutarch says that "this was a plaine tyranny," and says further of Caesar:

. . . Caesar being borne to attempt all great enterprises, and having an ambitious desire besides to covet great honors: the prosperous good success he had of his former conquests bred no desire in him quittely to enjoy the frutes of his labours, but rather gave him hope of things to come, still kindling more and more in him, thoughts of greater enterprises, and desire of new glory, as if that which he had present, were stale and nothing worth. This humor of his was no other but an emulation with him selfe as with an other man, and a certaine contencion to overcome the things he prepared to attempt.

But Caesar was able to do much good in Rome. He distributed corn to the people who had been impoverished by the civil wars he had fought to gain ascendancy; he made a new calendar, which the Romans much needed; and he advanced schemes for draining the marshes around Rome and for making the Tiber more easily navigable, which were, however, never carried out.

Caesar had many enemies, who tried to disparage even his most obviously worthwhile accomplishments. Plutarch says that "the chiefest cause that made him mortally hated, was the covetous desire he had to be called king: which first gave the people just cause, and next his secret enemies, honest colour to beare him ill will." This desire of Caesar's led him to try the tenor of the people's feelings rather

11Ibid., p. 443.
12Ibid., p. 444.
13Ibid., p. 445.
14Ibid., p. 446.
often, usually by having some of his flatterers, in one of his public
appearances, call him king and by noting the reaction of the gathering.
Further, he made much of the position he already held, refusing once to
rise to several praetors who came to him to bestow new honors upon
him. This last deed was not an idea of his own, by the way, but was
done on the suggestion of one of his flatterers—he became rather overly
subject to such people in his later days. He attributed it, however, when
he saw that it displeased the people, to giddiness caused by his disease. 15

Plutarch's Caesar, then, was a man whose skill in securing the good
will of the people was unmatched; who was a capable governor to whom
everybody would have done well to listen; who in later life was subject
to the flattery of his associates; and who was possessed of a great am-
bition. Shakespeare's Caesar is similar in some ways and dissimilar
in others. Before any investigation of the different beliefs about him,
a firsthand look at him will not be out of place.

Caesar first appears onstage in all the glory of his "pride of place."
Casca, Antonius, Calpurnia, even Brutus listen to his every word, and
the procession halts at his will. When the soothsayer calls, Caesar
asks to look at him and then passes on. While he is offstage, Cassius tells
some of his ostensible reasons for hating Caesar—the ruler is so weak
physically that he cannot make good his own challenge to swim across

15 Ibid.
a river in flood, but must call for help from the one whom he has
challenged; when sick he loses self-control and cries "as a sick girl"
(I, ii, 128). But even Cassius must acknowledge Caesar's accomplish-
ments—Caesar, he says, "is now become a god" (I, ii, 116); "he doth
bestride the narrow world / Like a Colossus" (I, ii, 135-136); and
Cassius must bow to him.

Caesar reenters a little later, angry at the crowd's reception of
the offer and rejection of the crown. He makes a shrewd observation
about Cassius, but its good effect is somewhat marred by the way he
phrases it.

    ... I fear him not:
    Yet if my name were liable to fear,
    I do not know the man I should avoid
    So soon as that spare Cassius.
    ........................................
    I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd
    Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar. (I, ii, 198-201, 211-212)

Then there is a note of physical weakness, not mentioned in Plutarch:

    Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf,
    And tell me truly what thou think'st of him. (I, ii, 212-123)

Then he exits, and Casca remains to tell the incidents which have just
occurred offstage; and he tells them in his own sardonic manner, which
can hardly help influencing the effect they have on the audience.

Caesar is not seen again until the second scene of the second act,
and his second appearance is hardly as august as his first. He comes
onto the stage wearing a "nightgown"—that is a dressing gown—begins
telling the superstitious fears which have been excited in him by Calpurnia's dream, and sends a servant to find out the soothsayers' opinion of the auspiciousness of the day. This behavior seems to bear out what Cassius has said earlier of him, that he "is superstitious grown of late" (II, i, 195). Shakespeare has added this element; Plutarch said that it was Calpurnia, not Caesar, who had recently become superstitious.¹⁶ Calpurnia tries to persuade him to stay at home, and his apparent grandiosity comes out in his reply:

Caesar shall forth: the things that threaten'd me
Ne'er look'd but on my back; when they shall see
The face of Caesar, they are vanished. (II, ii, 10-12)

The sentiment about the inevitability of death gives the same effect; it, by the way, is directly from Plutarch, who, however, had Caesar express the thought in a different connection.¹⁷ Caesar's saying first that he will go, then that he will send Antony to say that he is not well, then that he will not send a lie, but will simply tell the Senate that he "will not come," his scorning to offer them excuses—all this is based on Plutarch,¹⁸ but is enlarged by Shakespeare. Decius Brutus' re-interpretation of Calpurnia's dream is expert flattery, and Caesar accepts it immediately, thus seeming to confirm what Decius Brutus has said of him previously:

I can o'ersway him; for he loves to hear
That unicorns may be betray'd with trees,

¹⁶Ibid., p. 449 ¹⁷Ibid., p. 444. ¹⁸Ibid., pp. 449-450.
And bears with glasses, elephants with holes,
Lions with toils and men with flatterers;
But when I tell him he hates flatterers,
He says he does, being then most flattered. (I, i, 203-208)

Caesar appears again in the first scene of Act III, and is even
more volubulous concerning his own virtue and inflexibility than he
has been before. In Plutarch he was not able to read the parchment
offered him by Artemidorus, because of the many people seeking his
attention, although he "many times attempted it";¹⁹ but Shakespeare's
Caesar rejects it with a grand gesture:

What touches us ourself shall be last served. (III, i, 8)

Then he waxes eloquent on the subject of his scorn for the petitioners,
his own superiority to them, and his inflexibility:

These couchings and these lowly courtesies
Might fire the blood of ordinary men,
And turn pre-ordinance and first decree
Into the law of children. Be not fond,
To think that Caesar bears such rebel blood
That will be thaw'd from the true quality
With that which melteth fools; I mean, sweet words,
Low-crooked court'sies and base spaniel-fawning.
Thy brother by decree is banished:
If thou dost bend and pray and fawn for him,
I spurn thee like a cur out of my way.
Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause
Will he be satisfied.

I could be well moved, if I were as you;
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me:

¹⁹Ibid., p. 450.
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, 
Unshak'd of motion: and that I am he, 
Let me a little show it, even in this; 
That I was constant Climer should be banish'd, 
And constant do remain to keep him so.

Hence! wilt thou lift up Olympus? (III, i, 36-48, 59-73, 74)

The only one of his utterances, in fact, which does not seem filled with
self-conceit is his last one, showing his shock at finding Brutus one of
his murderers:

Et tu, Brute! Then fall, Caesar! (III, i, 77)

Caesar is dead; and from this point on, what is learned of him
comes only from the mouths of others. Most of it is praise, or at
least recognition of his importance. The strongest explicit praise
comes from Antony, whose very first words on seeing his body are
"O mighty Caesar!" (III, i, 148), and who says that the assassins'
swords are

made rich
With the most noble blood of all this world. (III, i, 155-156)
When he is left alone and cannot be acting hypocritically, he calls Caesar's body

. . . the ruins of the noblest man
That ever lived in the tide of times. (III, i, 256-257)

And he prophesies that chaos will follow this deed, with 'Caesar's spirit ranging for revenge!' (III, i, 270).

In the next scene Caesar is accused by Brutus of ambition, but Mark Antony again, in his famous oration, builds him up as a great man, who had no ambition, but on the contrary lived only for his countrymen. He is not mentioned explicitly again—and it is only explicit references that are being dealt with here—until the third scene of the fourth act, when Brutus calls him "the foremost man of all this world" (IV, iii, 22). Then the Ghost of Caesar enters, warning Brutus that they will meet again at Philippi.

Caesar is mentioned only a few more times in the play, but those few times are important. Cassius kills himself with the sword he used to kill Caesar (V, iii, 41-42), and when Brutus finds his body, his comment is

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails. (V, iii, 94-96)

The Ghost of Caesar appears once more to Brutus, who knows that this second vision means the end of him (V, v, 17-20), and his last words as he runs on his sword are

Caesar, now be still:
I killed not thee with half so good a will. (V, v, 50-51)
What can be made of Shakespeare's Caesar? Certainly he is, at least while living, quite different from Plutarch's Caesar. Furness says of the differences between the two treatments:

The reader of North's Plutarch is at once struck with the nobility of Caesar, the intrepid warrior, astute statesman, and sagacious governor, and although his biographer does not disguise the fact that in his later years Caesar became vain and arrogant, that side of his character is not given undue prominence. Very different is, however, the Caesar of Shakespeare. He is a braggart, inflated with the idea of his own importance; speaking of his own decrees as those of a god. The Roman Senate is his Senate, and himself like Olympian Jove. In fact, nothing in his life becomes him like the leaving of it; his most dignified action is that of his death, with his face muffled in his mantle. Wherefore then did Shakespeare depart thus from his authority?  

Many answers to Furness' question have been given; they can be grouped into a few overlapping schools of thought.

Hudson, writing in 1872, expresses his belief to be that although Shakespeare did understand the real greatness of Caesar, he added the objectionable elements in the characterization in order to justify the conspirators' deed, to make it seem less unreasonable and wicked. Hudson notes that almost everyone who speaks of Caesar speaks favorably: Brutus respects, even admires him, and Cassius must grudgingly admit

---


his greatness. And the spirit of Caesar triumphs in the end; dead, he "tears them and their cause all to pieces." Dowden too believes that Caesar is not meant to be seen as the complete egotist he would seem to be, but as a man who has so many great exploits in his past that he has lost touch with reality. "The real man Caesar," he says, "disappears for himself under the greatness of the Caesar myth." Dowden lists Caesar's faults, but believes that as a great man he is entitled to them, even though he indulges them, and that he is the hero of the play in spite of them—not the physically weak Caesar who is seen on the stage, but the spirit of Caesar, which has established an empire so strong that even the weaker Octavius can take Caesar's place, and which appears to Brutus and is invoked by him and by Cassius at their respective deaths. Dowden offers no explanation for the impression made by the living Caesar.

Another who believes that Caesar is presented as he is in order to justify the conspirators is Julia Wedgwood, who says that the idea of a monarchy was "taboo and horrible" in the ancient Rome about which

---

22 Ibid., p. 239.  
23 Ibid., p. 240.  
25 Ibid., pp. 254-256.
Plutarch wrote, and that in Plutarch, whereas Cassius merely dislikes Caesar because of jealousy, Brutus is actually worried about the strong possibility of the citizens' not being loyal to a man instead of to the state; and, she says further, Shakespeare too seems to hold Brutus' belief, or at least to pretend to for the sake of his audience's understanding the conspirators' viewpoint.  

Brandes too finds the explanation of Caesar's character in Shakespeare's source, saying that in the first place Plutarch, who lived in a Greece conquered by Rome, was hardly in a position to appreciate Caesar's greatness, and therefore emphasized his bad qualities.  

Shakespeare follows Plutarch in the portrayal, believing that "the Republic which Caesar overthrew might have continued to exist but for him, and it was a crime on his part to destroy it."  

Further, he says, Caesar is of secondary importance in the play, Brutus being the hero, and therefore his greatness cannot appropriately be portrayed therein.  

Still another who believes that Plutarch furnished Shakespeare's Caesar is Rolfe, who calls him only a figurehead and says that "some of his boastful speeches are directly suggested by Plutarch. . . . "  

---

28 Ibid., p. 310.  
29 Ibid., p. 307.  
Allen believes that Shakespeare's treatment of Caesar is the result of his misunderstanding his source. Finding there that Caesar was of delicate frame and suffered from epilepsy, says Allen, Shakespeare may have assumed that he must have been "self-conceited and overbearing, foolishly ambitious, vain, and unable to conceal his natural feelings." 31

One who believes that Shakespeare did not intend to play down the titular hero of his play is Boas. This critic concurs with the others who believe that the hero of the play is the spirit of Caesar, but refuses to accept their belief that the flesh-and-blood Caesar is such a weak man as he is said to be. Boas finds that Shakespeare's having him take part in the Lupercalian festivities means not that he is intended to be thought superstitious, but that he is a shrewd politician who merely upholds the ancient rites in order to please the people. He never seems to fear anything regarding himself—witness his ignoring the soothsayer's warning, the prophecies of his own soothsayers, and the parchment offered him by Artemidorus. His faults are only his vacillation about a really unimportant matter and his grandiloquent pretense of inflexibility. 32


Moulton offers a somewhat different explanation of Caesar's character. Caesar, he says, "appears before us perfect up to the point where his own personality comes in." He seems to vacillate, but he does so because he is a strong man of action, a "complete type of the practical," who is almost at a loss among men who accomplish their purposes by means of subtlety and intrigue. Thus he mistrusts Cassius, who, he says, "thinks too much." Thus he falls into the trap laid by Decius Brutus, whom Moulton calls a "fifth-rate intriguer." Thus he calls for help when he feels himself sinking in the Tiber—he is practical, and, when he needs help, calls for it, whereas Cassius would have died rather than admit defeat and seek aid from someone competing with him. Caesar's yielding to Calpurnia is not a sign of weakness, for he is too great a man to have to do anything to display his greatness. Then, when he yields to Decius Brutus' persuasions to go to the Senate, he does so because he is curious about the danger he will meet.

However, Moulton continues, the effect which Caesar's character seems to give is not unintentional; it is a part of the rising action of the play, which seems to give an impression in favor of the conspirators.


34 Ibid., pp. 178-184.
But after the climax the tables are turned, and the falling action decides against them and in favor of Caesar, the importance of whose spirit is recognized almost from the time of his death. 35

A study of the character of Caesar which gives more importance to source than do most of the others which have so far been cited is that of MacCallum, first published in 1910. His view is founded on Shakespeare's omissions of material in the source almost as much as on his inclusions. Thus he notes that, although Shakespeare does include and even invent several details which would seem to lessen Caesar's greatness, he omits several incidents narrated in the source which if included would have detracted from it even more. Shakespeare tells of Caesar's vacillation and invents his deafness, his failure in an attempt to swim a river in flood, and his having a temperature, but omits the fact that he had supported the wicked Clodius, which Plutarch calls the "shamefullest part" he ever played. Further, Caesar must possess many of the good qualities with which he credits himself, such as independence, resolution, courage, and insight, or he would never have been able to reach the position he holds. 36 And the faults which Caesar has are counterbalanced, at least to some extent, by virtues: he knows men well enough to make a shrewd judgment of Cassius, he remains inflexible when he is petitioned to allow Publius Cimber to return to Rome, and he makes a magnanimous gesture in

refusing to read Artemidorus' parchment because it is concerned with him personally.  

The key to Caesar's character, says MacCallum, is to be found in the scene in which Calpurnia and Decius Brutus argue with Caesar about his going or not going to the Senate. Caesar first says that he will send Mark Antony to say that he is not well; but then, when Decius Brutus asks him why he does not intend to go, he refuses to send a lie, but simply says that he will not go, and that the Senate need be told no more. MacCallum believes that this behavior indicates that "in a certain sense he is aping the Immortal to be seen of men. . . ."

Caesar has great aims for Rome, and Shakespeare considers him a capable and virtuous man who is its rightful ruler, but portrays him as posing in his role somewhat because he is a politician and must sometimes be almost a little dishonest in his efforts to attain his purposes; he has created an ideal which is great, and must try to live up to it even though he is only a man and cannot hope always to succeed. However, he has made it powerful enough, created such a strong feeling for it among the people, that it remains after his death, and Octavius can step into the place he has left.

\[37\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 226.\]  
\[38\text{Ibid.},\ pp.\ 227-232.\]
Another belief, which is almost entirely different from those discussed so far, is that expounded by Ayres in a famous article published in 1910. This critic believes that Shakespeare departs materially from Plutarch's presentation of Caesar, but says that there are explanations of the differences between the two treatments which, when considered carefully, show that Shakespeare is not playing down Caesar, even if his delight in humanizing his heroes does cause him to bring out such things as Caesar's deafness.  

Ayres says:

Shakespeare has, that is at times, suggested the heroic qualities of the man, although the striking episodes of his career . . . fall outside the period which Shakespeare has chosen to dramatize. And he has, indeed, done Caesar little wrong in touching here and there on the human infirmities in the interest of the design of the play as a whole. His error comes, if error there be, in the words he puts in Caesar's mouth.

Ayres suggests several possible reasons for Caesar's "pomosity of manner and of language." One is that Shakespeare undoubtedly held the belief that the great always lack, to some extent, contact with commonplace reality, and that Caesar in particular may be laboring under "the infatuation, the judicial blindness laid by the gods on those whose destruction they are meditating. . . ." This idea, he says, "may be considered a literary commonplace.

---

39 Ayres, p. 191.
40 Ibid., pp. 193-194.
41 Ibid., p. 194.
42 Ibid., p. 197.
43 Ibid., p. 198.
Another of Ayres' suggestions, the most important and the one for which he is remembered, is the tradition that had grown up around Caesar between the respective times of Plutarch and Shakespeare. Popular opinion of the Roman figure had been subjected to strong influence which had caused him to be regarded as a braggart and a blusterer. The original sources of this impression were the already mentioned Muret-Grévin-Alexander play and the anonymous Caesar and Pompey or Caesar's Revenge. In the first of these, which set the tone for the rest, Caesar was presented as resembling the character of the braggart Hercules in the dramas of Seneca and his imitators. Ayres says:

In its developed form the character closely resembles Tamburlaine, triumphing over a world too lost in amazement at his wondrous victories to make effectual resistance; the heaven-storming conqueror whose large utterance is filled with the pomp and circumstance of his own greatness. Craig comments that in these plays "Caesar's pride and blindness, even his superstition, were . . . the tragic weaknesses over which brooded the vengeance of the gods." On the strength of the existence of the plays, Ayres says that one may "more than guess" that Elizabethan audiences would expect any presentation of Caesar.

---

to show him as possessed of "a little strut, a touch of grandiosity. . . ." 47

Still another suggestion which Ayres advances is that most of the impressions of Caesar which a spectator or a student of the play receives come from the speeches of his enemies, such as Cassius and Casca, who, jealous as they are of him, would hardly have unbiased opinions of him. 48

Another who offers a theory all his own is Brooke, who notes that Julius Caesar was written not long after Queen Elizabeth had tried to impose her own will upon Parliament, which defeated her efforts by insisting on its ancient rights. This example of an attempt at tyranny, thinks Brooke, may have disgusted Shakespeare with tyrants in general and thus led him to portray Caesar as a man with many faults whose tyrannical activities needed to be checked. 49 However, Brooke continues, the Caesar "who has been," rather than the Caesar who is presented on the stage, is the hero of the play, and dominates the action before and after his death. 50

47 Ayres, p. 226. For further support of this view, see also, by the same author, "Caesar's Revenge," Publications of the Modern Language Association, XXX (September, 1915), 771-787.


49 Stopford A. Brooke, Ten More Plays of Shakespeare (London, 1913), p. 64.

50 Ibid., p. 65.
The belief that Caesar is portrayed by Shakespeare as a vainglorious although physically weak man who is past his intellectual prime but whose spirit is at last triumphant had considerable currency for some time. Tassin, in his otherwise painstaking and thorough study of the play, considers this interpretation of the character too well established to need much comment, and so does Matthews. But in 1922 a book bringing out a new belief was published. The author of this work, Schücking, believes that those who find fault with Shakespeare's Caesar have been misled by Shakespeare's practice of making his characters say what they are. He cites several speeches which have already been mentioned to show that the other characters admire Caesar, and says that Caesar's "greatness is shown less in his own person than in the enormous influence which he exercises over his environment." He insists that Caesar's faults, although a few are present, "do not show much" in a stage performance, but become apparent only when the play is given much more attention than it would be on the stage. Schücking says further that the fact that Caesar's apparent faults come from the source proves nothing, since Shakespeare would not have hesitated to leave them out if he had so desired. And even though Caesar has those faults, "the

51 Tassin, p. 256.

vastness of his figure is tacitly presupposed in all the happenings of the play." (The italics are Schücking's.) Schücking does make some concession to Ayres in admitting that the tradition which the latter discusses is felt in the play, but he calls it no more than an "alien element" there. But Schücking's main belief is that Caesar is a great man who tells the truth about himself.

In The Imperial Theme, first published in 1931, G. Wilson Knight sets forth a view of Caesar which shows much resemblance to that of MacCallum. The "Caesar-idea," he says, is everywhere accompanied in the play by "all the usual Shakespearian suggestions of world-glory and life-beauty." The priests wear their best attire for his triumph and strew flowers in his way, and his images are decked in honor of him. Everyone listens when he has something to say. But the man himself is nothing compared to the idea, even in his own mind. Thus he persuades himself not to show fear of the Senate, for the ideal Caesar does not know fear. His agreeing to go to the Senate after he has already decided not to go is vacillation, prompted either by Decius Brutus' presence or by "his sudden attempt to live up to the Caesar-idea." The result of this simultaneous presentation of two men in one produces some confusion, but the

---


54 Ibid., p. 51.

55 Ibid., p. 52.
ideal Caesar is triumphant after death, and the fact that his assassination is intended to be seen as a catastrophic crime is proved by the supernatural signs before and after his death and by the few but telling references to him made by his murderers.

Kittredge has little new to say of Shakespeare's Caesar. He cites Ayres' findings about the theatrical Caesar of Shakespeare's time, and notes again that Shakespeare dramatizes Caesar's later life, when the ruler was "drunk with dominion, forgetful of his own mortality—careless, therefore, of the ordinary rules of prudence and self-protection."

As proof Kittredge cites Calpurnia's lines:

    Alas, my lord!
    Your wisdom is consum'd in confidence.  (II, ii, 48-49)

This conception of Caesar may or may not, Kittredge says, correspond to history, but it does agree with the ancient idea that the gods send a sort of blindness or infatuation to one who profanely aspires to divinity.

Van Doren has his own theory about Caesar. Shakespeare has made of him, he says, an Elizabethan man, rather than a noble Roman or a Plutarchian man. "While he lasts," says Van Doren, "he reveals himself in his irregularity, not in his symmetry, in picturesqueness rather

56 Knight, pp. 64-70.

57 Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, edited by George Lyman Kittredge (Boston, 1939), Introduction, p. xvi.
than in pose." 58 His faults are those of a man who is not noble, who
does not suppress himself, and whose difference from his enemies
would alone almost be a basis for their hatred for him. Van Doren too
seems to believe that Caesar is in spite of his faults the spiritual hero
of the play.

Blanche Cole spends many pages on the character of Caesar, but
says very little worth saying that has not already been said. She lists
five points which she says should be considered in study of the char-
acterization. Concerning the time of Caesar's life which Shakespeare
dramatizes, she suggests that, since at the time of this play Shakespeare
considered his stage inadequate, he chose a subject which he could
dramatize on it. Desiring to write a play about Julius Caesar, and
being unable to do much in the way of battles, he had to limit his choice
to one of Caesar's stays in Rome. Since Caesar's character had not
fully developed when, at forty-three, he began his stay in Gaul,
Shakespeare had to be content to portray him as he was after his return
to Rome, when he was past his prime. Many possible objections to this
one of Coles' theories, as well as to some of the others, might be
raised; all that can be said in answer is that she seems to presuppose


59 Ibid., p. 186.
that Shakespeare was familiar with the accounts of Caesar's reign to be found in the Cambridge Ancient History and in the works of Stobart, Buchan, Glover, Merivale, Moore, and Parsons. Second, Coles says, the Elizabethan audiences knew all about the historical Caesar and did not need to be told how great he was. Third, Shakespeare uses two methods in developing the character, that of having him talk about himself and that of having others talk about him. Those who say most about him are Brutus, a man whom he loved; Antony, a man who loved him; and Cassius, a man who envied him. Brutus says that he knows no actual existent reason for assassinating Caesar; Antony places him above all other men in history; and Cassius tells of petty faults which have little or nothing to do with Caesar's capability and virtue as a statesman. Of what Caesar says about his own inflexibility, Coles says that in his Rome, where every man changed his mind like a weathervane, Caesar must have felt called upon to declare himself as an inflexible ruler. And as for Caesar's wanting to be king, Shakespeare shows the people of Rome "so dependent on him that, at his death, they want someone else to be Caesar. . . ." 60

Coles' fourth point has to do with Caesar's physical weaknesses, which she says are perhaps signs that his physical decline is only

60 Coles, pp. 221-223.
beginning. And her fifth and last point has to do with Shakespeare's killing off his titular hero in the middle of the play. She very profoundly comments that Shakespeare did not name the play The Life and Death of Julius Caesar or even simply Julius Caesar, but The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, and says,

Now the tragedy of Julius Caesar may be said to have begun when he returned to Rome with a new way of life for his fellow men, only to meet with opposition and misunderstanding, and the tragedy did not end until the murderers were brought to justice and something of Caesar's ideals were put into effect by Augustus.  

Further, Coles states, Caesar is never shown in a serious exchange of thought with anyone; could this, she wonders, indicate that no one in Rome is capable of understanding him? Coles is remarkable as an historical critic who is so reliant on history that she almost ignores both Shakespeare and his critics.

Several scholars find in the political beliefs of Shakespeare evidence which leads them to believe that Caesar is the spiritual hero of the play named for him. One of them, Phillips, says that the idea of the benefits of a monarchy is a constant one in Shakespeare, and that the dramatist brings it out in Julius Caesar by showing a nation's breaking away from that form of government and then slowly and painfully returning to it. Shakespeare, then, shows Caesar regarding

61 Ibid., pp. 224-225.  
62 Ibid., p. 225.  
the Roman Senate as his own, and believes that as an emperor he should so regard it. Of course, the qualities on which Ayres remarks are not to be discounted, but neither should they be overemphasized, since they tend only to humanize Caesar and to prepare the way for his fall, and do not detract from the general impression he gives of an able emperor. 64 Caesar, continues Phillips, has done no wrong, has in fact done much good in war and in peace, even after death, as his will shows regardless of Antony's use of it. Further, Caesar's character as a "just and benevolent sovereign of the Roman state" is enhanced by the Elizabethan belief that kings were divinely appointed. Though this idea is not directly brought out in the play, it is hinted at in Calpurnia's interpretation of the omens preceding Caesar's assassination:

When beggars die there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.

(II, iii, 30) 65

Brutus, then, is mistaken, however honestly, in his desire for the preservation at least in name of a limited monarchy. However, his desire prevails, Caesar is murdered, and the chaos of civil wars which Antony predicts comes about. Even the three main factions, conspirators, senators, and triumvirate, are split among themselves, and at the end of the play there is still some promise of trouble. Caesar's spirit, however, has triumphed, for the conspirators are defeated. 66

64 Ibid., pp. 176-178. 65 Ibid., pp. 178-179.
66 Ibid., pp. 180-188.
Palmer's opinion of Caesar is a sort of combination of all those which went before it. He believes that Shakespeare takes Caesar's greatness for granted, as all the other characters' comments on him show, and plays on it by giving the man human characteristics. This method of presentation, he says,

gives reality to Caesar, the man; it suggests that Caesar's spirit is mightier than his person, a suggestion which is essential to the unity of the play; it enables the dramatist to present him in flesh and blood without reducing in stature the men who murder him; finally, it permits the audience to sympathise with Brutus just sufficiently to give poignancy to the disaster which overtakes him. 67

Palmer notes that most of Caesar's infirmities are not Shakespeare's inventions, and that his superstition, his referring to himself in the third person, and his insistence upon enforcing his will even though he knows it to be wrong are traits "common to all dictators," but still believes that Shakespeare did not intend for him to be seen as a complete tyrant. 68

In An Interpretation of Shakespeare, Craig states a belief much like that of Schücking. He believes that though there certainly is "strut" in Shakespeare's Caesar, Shakespeare's sympathies still lie with him. He says:

It has been said that he has been made deaf, vain, superstitious, and boastful. The truth of the matter is that Caesar was these


68 Ibid.
things and was at the same time the greatest man in the world. The effect of vanity and boastfulness is an accidental result of the compression of the characterization. If one considers the Caesar scenes in the light of Antony's "mighty, bold, royal, and loving" (III. i, 27), one will find that they carefully project each of these epithets. 69

Shakespeare, says Craig, simply has Caesar state what he is. 70

Stewart holds a view showing a family resemblance to those of MacCallum and Knight. He notes a few of the already mentioned modifications which Shakespeare makes in those of Caesar's infirmities which he takes from Plutarch, and says that they indicate that

Shakespeare is creating two Caesars, the popular and the deeper Caesar; and is leading the judicious to discern that the overwhelming, immediate and public Caesar is the creation of an inflexible will, is a rigid mask which has proved so potent that its creator himself can scarcely regard it but with awe. 71

Plutarch, he notes, gives a hint for this duality in Caesar, in the already quoted passage saying that Caesar's life was "an emulation with him selfe as with an other man. . . ." The various faults, such as the vacillation, are present, but Caesar overcomes them and strives with his grandiloquent utterances to cover them up and give those around him the impression of the Caesar he is creating. And that Caesar is triumphant at last, at Philippi. 72


70 Ibid.


72 Ibid., p. 54.
A somewhat similar view of Caesar is that of Stauffer, who, however, attributes even less importance to Caesar's weaknesses than does Stewart. He notes that although Caesar appears only a few times, he yet has time for shrewd appraisals of Cassius and Antony, and special glancing words that show how affairs stand between him and Brutus, or Caius Ligarius, or Trebonius, or the unnamed Soothsayer. He listens to everyone, is aware of everything. 73

He is sensitive to popular sentiment, he humors his wife, he ignores the soothsayer with the disregard for portents which a governor should have. His minor faults are explained by the suggestion that he "could afford to be above consistency, emulation, and the outward show of perfection. His casualness demonstrates his power." 74

A belief that Shakespeare fully realizes Caesar's good qualities but represents him as a hero who has achieved all he can and can only go downhill is that of Goddard, who believes that Angus' comment on Macbeth in his decline applies to Caesar as well:

[Verse]

... now does he feel his title
Hang loose upon him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief. (Macbeth, V, ii, 20-22)

All Shakespeare's heroes, says Goddard, undergo such a decline if they

73 Donald A. Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images (New York, 1949), pp. 113-114.

74 Ibid., p. 114.
live past the time of their great triumphs, and Caesar has definitely
outlived his.\(^{75}\)

It would seem by now that almost no comparatively new suggestion
about Caesar's character could be thought of, but Hardin Craig does so.
This critic discusses the Greek idea of nemesis, according to which
the lives of great men were thought to ebb and flow. A hero achieved
great triumphs, and then the jealous gods struck him down. Caesar
has passed the summit and must make way for the rising fortunes of
Brutus and Antony, each of whom later must suffer in turn from changes
of fortune. The play of Julius Caesar is partly his tragedy, for it
shows his downfall and its causes; but mainly it is a story of his death
and its revenge.\(^{76}\)

Thomson has an entirely different idea of Caesar's fortune. Ac-

According to him, the Greeks held a belief that every man was accom-
panied from birth by an "angel," "genius," or "daemon"—whichever
word is preferable—which determined the train of his fortune through-
out his life. If his daemon happened to be benevolent, then he was
consistently fortunate; if it happened to be malignant, then he was con-
sistently unfortunate. In Plutarch, Caesar had a benevolent daemon

\(^{75}\)Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago,

\(^{76}\)Shakespeare, Complete Works, edited by Craig, pp. 771-772.
and knew it—thus his constant successes and his self-confidence. After Caesar was killed, his daemon, liberated from the weak body, was able to go unfettered about its business of avenging his death. Shakespeare utilizes this idea both to unify his drama and to show why Brutus must fall. 77

A critic who finds the political theme of basic importance in

Julius Caesar is Whitaker, who says of the play that

its very structure results from applying to the sources in Plutarch two postulates . . . --namely, that monarchy is necessary to social order and that wrong conduct results from a failure in reason. 78

Shakespeare, then, cannot agree with Plutarch's characterization of Caesar as the destroyer of Roman liberty, nor with his characterization of Brutus, who as a republican was to Plutarch an example of the ideal Roman; he considers Caesar a great man and the rightful ruler of Rome, and Brutus a misguided bungler. In fact, he does not even understand many of the ideals of Plutarch's conspirators; their arguments, based on their cause of liberty, have no meaning for him, since obedience was the prime virtue in his political philosophy. Therefore he proceeds to make few changes in his source which convert Plutarch's


78 Virgil K. Whitaker, Shakespeare's Use of Learning (San Marino, California, 1953), p. 224.
republican bias--accentuated by his choosing to dramatize the latter period of Caesar's life--to his own monarchic bias, to mute the references to Caesar's weaknesses, and to give great emphasis to the only element in his source which he feels proves Caesar's greatness, that is, the omens preceding his death. Other events which seem to emphasize Caesar's importance are the already mentioned utilization of what Plutarch says about the "daemon" and the use by Cassius in his suicide of the sword which he used to kill Caesar.

Further, the "civil strife" prophesied by Antony in his speech after the assassination, as has been mentioned, involves everyone concerned; and it is intentionally that Shakespeare shows Brutus and Cassius, in their first appearance on the stage after Caesar's funeral, having a quarrel, and that they are finally defeated because of their inability to work together. And what is even more striking, says Whitaker, is that even the conspirators in Shakespeare's version never give as a reason for assassinating Caesar the fact that he wants to be king, which is their main reason in Plutarch, but only argue that if he were king he might abuse his power. 79

It seems almost impossible to make any generalizations about the different critical interpretations of Caesar; about all that can be said with any sureness is that they are varied. However, a few general

79 Ibid., pp. 225-240.
trends can be found. Some critics, especially the earlier ones, tend to emphasize his faults and to find explanations for them in Shakespeare's adherence to his source—either to the political beliefs expressed in it or to his judging from what he found there that Caesar was a tyrant, and treating him as such. Or they believe that he was attempting to give at least some dignity to the conspirators' deed, which he considered such a senseless one that he had to make Caesar faulty to justify it. Others believe that Caesar's apparent faults are not intended to be seen as faults at all, or are at most unimportant, being the results of Shakespeare's practice of having his characters speak the truth about themselves. Still others believe that Caesar is intended to be seen as a man who is playing a great role but sometimes slips out of character. And then there are those who find in him evidence of the Senecan dramatic tradition which characterized him as a braggart. Their theory is supported by those who believe that he is portrayed as a man who has been great but is past his prime. And almost all of them find that he is to be seen as the spiritual hero of the play, whose spirit is triumphant even after his death.
CHAPTER IV

THE CHARACTER OF BRUTUS

Critical disagreement about Shakespeare's treatment of Caesar is more sharply divided than is that about his treatment of Brutus. Opinions of the former range between two opposite poles, but those of the latter are little more than quibbles about the amount of Shakespeare's sympathy he has. Virtually all of them are agreed that he is the dramatic hero of the play—that is, the character in whom Shakespeare's interest is centered; but many have been puzzled and have disagreed with one another about his motives. Before he is taken up, however, his original in Plutarch must be considered.

Plutarch presents Brutus as a man of the highest ideals, saying of him:

... this Marcus Brutus..., having framed his manners of life by the rules of vertue and studie of Philosophie, and having imploied his wit, which was gentle and constant, in attempting of great things: me thinkes he was rightly made and framed unto vertue. ¹

Brutus fought on the side of Pompey in the latter's war with Caesar in spite of his love for Caesar and his personal dislike of Pompey, for he felt that Pompey's cause was the just one. While in Pompey's camp

¹ Life of Brutus, p. 436.
he spent all his time reading, even the day before the battle of Pharsalia, in which Pompey was defeated. Caesar, who had much regard for Brutus, ordered that he not be slain in the battle, and afterward pardoned him, perhaps, says Plutarch, because of his feeling that he might be Brutus' father, since he had been having an affair with Servilia, Brutus' mother, before he was born. Brutus, apparently, in return for the favors Caesar had granted him, divulged his former general's hiding place. Also, he obtained Caesar's pardon of Cassius, who had also fought on the side of Pompey, and used his influence for the aid of some others as well. Plutarch narrates that once when Brutus was pleading one of his various causes, "I knowe not, sayd Caesar, what this man woulde, but what he woulde, he willeth it vehementlie." A remark Plutarch makes about Brutus' method of arguing has already been quoted.

Caesar made Brutus governor of Italian Gaul, and Brutus acquitted himself well there, restoring order and prosperity, but gave credit for everything to "Caesars grace and goodness." He was given preference by Caesar in his contest with his brother-in-law Cassius, for a praetorship, even though Caesar admitted that Cassius' claim to it was the stronger of the two. Caesar did not greatly trust Brutus, as has been

---

2 Ibid., p. 438.  
3 Ibid., p. 439.  
4 See p. 41.  
5 Life of Brutus, p. 440.  
6 Ibid.
mentioned, but intended him to take over the rule of Rome after his death. Cassius, however, hated tyrants in general and Caesar in particular, and incensed Brutus against him by pointing out Caesar's growing tendency to act as a tyrant. Cassius did not himself write the notes which were one cause of Brutus' taking part in the conspiracy, but he was still influential in bringing Brutus over. Brutus' honor and good name made him almost essential to the conspirators, and when he was known to have taken up their cause it was made easier for them to attract others. He was worried about the outcome of his activities, and caused Portia much anxiety also by his unusual behavior.

On the day scheduled for the murder, Brutus was the calmest of the conspirators, taking part in the day's regular activities with no indication of what was going on in his own mind. After the assassination of Caesar, Brutus spoke twice, but the people's silent reception of his speeches indicated that although they respected him they still resented Caesar's death. Brutus had prevented Antony's death, and let him speak at Caesar's funeral just as in Shakespeare.

---

7See p. 55.
8Life of Brutus, pp. 441-442.
9See p. 37.
10Life of Brutus, p. 442.
11Ibid., pp. 443-444.
12Ibid., p. 445.
13Ibid., pp. 446-448.
14Ibid., p. 449.
While Brutus was necessarily absent from Rome and was staying in Antium, he took it upon himself to provide, at great expense, all sorts of plays and sporting events for the entertainment of the Romans, in order to win back their good will, and had some success, although not enough to make him feel that he would be safe in returning. Once he acted as a self-appointed counselor to the young Octavius, when the latter had attempted to raise an army made up of Caesar's former followers. 15 However, during his campaigns around the Mediterranean, Brutus behaved admirably, treating his men and the people of the regions through which he passed with the utmost fairness. 16 And he showed his sense of justice again in punishing Lucius Pella for robbery and abuse of his praetorship, reminding Cassius that they had killed Caesar for countenancing such dishonesty. 17

Brutus again spent his nights in camp taking care of business matters and, if he had time, reading; and it was on one of those nights that Caesar's ghost appeared to him, only to be dismissed boldly by Brutus. 18 His boldness was revealed again when Cassius tried to persuade him not to place all their hopes in one battle; he insisted on knowing his fate at once, 19 and had already decided on his plan to kill himself in case of

15 Ibid., p. 452.
16 Ibid., p. 458.
17 Ibid., p. 463.
18 Ibid., p. 464.
19 Ibid., p. 466.
defeat even though he had once deplored the idea of suicide. In the battle itself, his men became overexcited and charged before he gave the order. Cassius' death affected him deeply. Brutus showed great clemency to the prisoners taken at the first battle of Philippi, although, because he was of course busy, he unintentionally allowed his soldiers to treat some of the enemy officers in a manner which was rather unseemly at the time of Cassius' funeral ceremonies; and he became very angry when Casca remonstrated with him about permitting such activities. And at this time he committed what Plutarch calls his "only fault": he allowed his soldiers to sack the cities of Thessalonica and Lacedaemon. But this fault is, in the words of North's marginal note, "wisely excused" by Plutarch, who remarks that Octavius and Antonius permitted far worse crimes to be perpetrated.

Brutus exhibited his "valliantnes and great skill in warres" in the second battle of Philippi, and fought long after he should have been exhausted. It was during this battle that Lucilius showed his great love for Brutus by drawing off some of his attackers by telling them that he was Brutus.
At last Brutus was defeated, and he began approaching his men to ask them to hold his sword while he ran on it, but they would not hear of letting him kill himself, and tried to persuade him to flee. However, he at last persuaded Strato to perform the office, and was dead when Antony found him.

These are some of the actions of Plutarch's Brutus which reveal the most about his character. Some call the portrait an idealized one, but whether it is or not does not matter; what matters is that it is the one from which Shakespeare worked. Now a look at what Shakespeare does to him can be taken.

Shakespeare's Brutus, like his Caesar, shows some similarities and some dissimilarities to his counterpart in Plutarch. He is of a serious, thoughtful, quiet nature:

I am not gamesome: I do lack some part
Of that quick spirit that is in Antony. (I, ii, 28-29)

He lets his inner conflict influence his outward behavior:

Vexed I am
Of late with passions of some difference,
Conceptions only proper to myself,
Which give some soil perhaps to my behaviours . . .
(I, ii, 39-42)

He does not wish to see Caesar made king, even though he loves the man:

Brutus. What means this shouting? I do fear, the people
Choose Caesar for their king.
Cassius. Ay, do you fear it?
Then must I think you would not have it so.
Brutus. I would not, Cassius; yet I love him well. (I, ii, 79-82)

He is brave and loves honor:

... I love

The name of honour more than I fear death. (I, ii, 88-89)

He fears the consequence of Caesar's being made king, saying:

Brutus had rather be a villager
Than to repute himself a son of Rome
Under these hard conditions as this time
Is like to lay upon us. (I, ii, 172-175)

He has already given thought to the kind of action which must be taken against Caesar, but does not at first feel that he can parallel his ancestor's feat in driving out a tyrant; when Cassius mentions that ancestor, he says:

Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
That you would have me seek into myself
For that which is not in me? (I, ii, 63-65)

As in Plutarch, the conspirators agree that his good name is essential to them; Casca says of him:

O, 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, 157-160)
Brutus' thoughts about the deed which he is to do keep him awake (II, i, 61–62) just as they do in Plutarch, although there, as has already been mentioned, he was worried for a different cause. **27** His soliloquy stating his motives, which has been the subject of much critical disagreement, is worth quoting in full here for future reference:

> It must be by his death; and for my part,  
> I know no personal cause to spurn at him,  
> But for the general. He would be crown'd;  
> How that might change his nature, there's the question.  
> It is the bright day that brings forthe the adder;  
> And that craves wary walking. Crown him?--that--;  
> And then, I grant, we put a sting in him,  
> That at his will he may do danger with.  
> The abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins  
> Remorse from power: and, to speak truth of Caesar,  
> I have not known when his affections sway'd  
> More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof,  
> That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,  
> Where to the climber-upward turns his face;  
> But when he once attains the upmost round,  
> He then unto the ladder turns his back,  
> Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees  
> By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.  
> Then, lest he may, prevent. And, since the quarrel  
> Will bear no colour for the thing he is,  
> Fashion it thus; that what he is, augmented,  
> Would run to these and these extremities:  
> And therefore think him as a serpent's egg  
> Which, hatch'd, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,  
> And kill him in the shell. (II, i, 10-34)

Brutus' being influenced by the letters placed in his way comes from Plutarch, and of course their being written by Cassius rather than by the people in general makes no difference as far as he is concerned.

---

**27** See p. 40.
Brutus' analysis of his warring emotions (II, i, 63-69) is added by Shakespeare, as is his expression of distaste for the methods of conspiracy (II, i, 77-85). His refusals of the oath and of the proposals to include Cicero in the conspiracy and to kill Antony along with Caesar have already been mentioned; the critics' ideas as to their implications of self-righteousness and impracticality will be discussed later. The scene with Portia has already been discussed. Brutus' expression of disgust with having to pretend friendship to Caesar (II, ii, 128-129) is added by Shakespeare.

Brutus is seen again in the first scene of Act III. His being calm enough to watch faces when it is feared that Popilius Lena is divulging the plot to Caesar (III, i, 22-24) is another addition of Shakespeare's, as is Caesar's remark, emphasizing his love for Brutus, that even he "doth... bootless kneel" (III, i, 75). Brutus' having the murderers "consecrate" their deed by bathing their hands and arms in Caesar's blood (III, i, 195-207) and his implicit trust that Antony will be convinced of the justice of the conspirators' deed and converted to their cause (III, i, 142) imply much confidence on his part that he has done the right thing; the contrast between his idealistic assurances to Antony that the deed can be explained and Cassius' promise that his voice will be as strong as any man's

In the disposing of new dignities (III, i, 177-178)

---

28 See p. 41.
29 See pp. 56-58.
is of course famous, as is Brutus' allowing Antony to speak at Caesar's funeral in spite of Cassius' objections. Brutus is thoroughly convinced that he is right; thus he feels that he can convince the people quite as thoroughly, and that nothing Antony can say in praise of Caesar will have any effect on them. The contradiction in his instructions to Antony about the speech is worth noting:

You shall not in your funeral speech blame us,
But speak all good you can devise of Caesar... (III, i, 245-246)

Brutus' oration has already been quoted and commented upon.30

His feeling so sure of having convinced the people with his arguments that he is not afraid to leave Antony alone with them shows his lack of respect for Antony's ability.

Brutus, then, leaves the stage to Antony, and is not seen again until the second scene of Act IV. He is protesting wrongs which Cassius has done him, and in the famous quarrel of the next scene it is found that he is angry because, although he will not extort money from the cities around him and has been forced to ask Cassius for the money which the latter has extorted, he has been refused (IV, iii, 69-77). Cassius, in turn, is angry with Brutus for having prosecuted Lucius Pella for taking bribes (IV, iii, 1-5). Brutus still seems convinced of the rightness of his deed, for he tells Cassius:

Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?
What villain touch'd his body, that did stab,

30 See pp. 60-61.
And not for justice? What, shall one of us,
That struck the foremost man of all this world
But for supporting robbers, shall we now
Contaminate our fingers with base bribes,
And sell the mighty space of our large honours
For so much trash as may be grasped thus?
I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon,
Than such a Roman. (IV, iii, 18-28)

Brutus comes closer in this scene to losing his head than he does any-
where else in the play; but he and Cassius are both quick to recover
their tempers and be reconciled. Then, after the Poet has interrupted
them, Brutus reveals that part of the cause of his anger is his having
just heard that Portia is dead; but the revelation is couched in rather
objectionable phrasing:

   No man bears sorrow better. Portia is dead. (IV, iii, 147)

Then comes a perplexing passage. Brutus has just told Cassius of
Portia's death, but he asks Messala for news of her, and, when the report
is confirmed, says:

   Why, farewell, Portia. We must die, Messala:
   With meditating that she must die once,
   I have the patience to endure it now. (IV, iii, 190-192)

Critics have wondered voluminously about these two contradictory
passages; for if taken as they stand, they seem to indicate that Brutus
is parading his Stoicism. But more of this matter later.

   Brutus again, in the council of war, overrules Cassius, this time
about the advisability of going to meet the forces of the triumvirate.

After the meeting is over, he shows his consideration for others by having
his guards lie down and sleep instead of having them stand and keep watch as they would ordinarily have done, and by his gentleness toward the sleepy Lucius. He reveals himself as always studious, just as Plutarch said he was, and displays great bravery in his laconic replies to the Ghost of Caesar (IV, iii, 245-287).

In the first scene of Act V, it is made evident that Brutus has, with his decision to meet the enemy at Philippi, played into their hands (V, i, 1-4). He is not as dignified, in the parley before Philippi, as one might wish, sounding rather spiteful and grandiloquent:

Octavius. I was not born to die on Brutus' sword.
Brutus. O, if thou wert the noblest of thy strain,
Young man, thou couldst not die more honourable. (V, i, 58-60)

The parley over, Brutus again does something perplexing, in the already mentioned passage in which he first spurns the idea of suicide and then resolves to kill himself, if he is defeated, rather than be taken captive. 31

In the third scene, Brutus shows his deep feeling for Cassius in his reaction to the general's death, and also shows his awareness of the fact that Caesar's ghost is responsible for it (V, iii, 94-104). In the next, his subordinates' regard for him is demonstrated with Lucilius' passing himself off as Brutus to some of Antony's soldiers. And it comes out again in the fifth and last scene, in which Brutus must

31 See pp. 58-60.
approach four of his men before he can find one who will hold his sword while he runs onto it. Then Antony’s famous speech over him (V, v, 68-75) shows that even his enemies respect his honor and his selflessness.

Such is Shakespeare’s Brutus, if an impression of him can be drawn from this hasty sketch. Now let the critics have their say about him.

Coleridge frankly admits his perplexity concerning Brutus’ motives as stated in his soliloquy, saying:

Surely nothing could be more discordant with our historical preconceptions of Brutus, or more lowering to the intellect of this Stoic-Platonic tyrannicide, than the tenets here attributed to him, to him, the stern Roman republican; viz., that he would have no objection to a king or to Caesar, a monarch in Rome, would Caesar be as good a monarch as he now seems disposed to be. . . . How could Brutus say he finds no personal cause; i. e., none in Caesar’s past conduct as a man? Had he not passed the Rubicon? Entered Rome as a conqueror? Placed his Gauls in the Senate? 32

Hudson too finds apparent contradictions in Brutus’ character. Admitting that there is much faulty logic in the soliloquy and in some of Brutus’ other speeches and actions, he still says that “the character . . . is full of beauty and sweetness.” 33 Brutus, he says, is a student,

33 Hudson, p. 245.
who sees everything as fitting into his Platonic and Stoic beliefs, and who therefore is unfitted for life in a changeable, confused world. He is, in short, the wrong man for the task which he has taken upon himself, and shows his unfitness in trying to attribute his own selflessness, his virtue, his republican ideals, and his propensity for reasoning things out to the other, more selfish conspirators and to the Roman people in general. In short, he is a cloudy thinker, a good man whose faulty reasoning leads him to do a bad deed, and who should have kept to his study rather than attempt to cope with practical issues.  

Another who believes that Brutus is a man of high but mistaken ideals is Stapfer, who says that Brutus' mistake is his believing that by killing Caesar, an obviously breaking ruler who can only pretend to command respect, he can bring back the republicanism from which the nation has slipped away. Actually, Caesar has already so accustomed the people to the idea of monarchy that, when he is dead and they have for a moment been convinced of the justness of his death, they can only look for another monarch. Hence one of them, after hearing Brutus' speech, cries, "Let him be Caesar!" (III, ii, 54). With that shout is the futility of Brutus' attempt illustrated, says Stapfer.  

---

34 Ibid., pp. 246-250.

Holding an opinion of Shakespeare's Brutus which in most respects resembles that of Hudson, Dowden says that the character is "predestined to failure, [but] nevertheless retains to the end the moral integrity which he prized as his highest possession, and ... with each new error, advances a fresh claim upon our admiration and our love." 36 Caesar, says Dowden, is the rightful king of Rome and has been accepted as such by the people. Brutus errrs in not perceiving his greatness and the actual necessity of his rule. He is, in fact, divorced from reality, is unable to understand anything which is different from his ideas or anyone who is different from him. Thus he cannot realize Antony's ability, which is the ability to do rather than to think. 37 Dowden notes that Brutus is made to love music, as he shows in asking Lucius to play and sing for him, and compares a famous passage from an earlier play:

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted.

(The Merchant of Venice, V, i, 83-88) 38

The addition of this element, he says, shows Shakespeare's sympathy for the man, and Brutus' unwillingness to wake Lucius--Brutus, who had killed Caesar--shows his tenderness toward people with whom he has

36 Dowden, p. 249. 37 Ibid., p. 255.
38 Ibid., p. 271.
to do in the course of daily life. And he remains faithful to his ideals even when they bring about his fall; the only real failure for him would have been not to do so. Therefore, says Dowden, "... the purest wreath of victory rests on the forehead of the defeated conspirator."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 271-272.} Dowden, then, believes that Shakespeare has much sympathy for his dramatic hero, if not for his cause.

Boas too believes that Shakespeare emphasizes Brutus' unfitness for his task and his choosing a completely wrong course, but agrees that even though the play "is a demonstration throughout of the inevitable triumph of Caesarism," Shakespeare "exhibits \textit{Brutus}' motives and aims in the most favourable light."\footnote{Boas, p. 472.}

Moulton sees \textit{Julius Caesar} as a study in contrast between the man of action and the man of thought. The man of thought, he says, concerns himself with justice to individuals whereas the man of action thinks of general causes, of policy, of man in the mass. Brutus is a perfect union of the two; he is a strong man who can resist his own bent--his love for Caesar--for what he feels is the common good, and who preserves his own ideals regardless of the consequences to himself or others. He has a soft side too, as his love for Portia and for Lucius and his tastes for the fine arts show. He errs only in letting his idea of the common good override even his own perception of Caesar's
guiltlessness. This error brings about his fall, but even in his fall he is glorious, since he has been loyal to his ideals and has shown men how a Stoic should live and die. 41

MacCallum notes omissions by Shakespeare of elements in the source the inclusion of which would have tended to lessen the auditor’s good opinion of Brutus. He comments that although Brutus’ cause may seem without justification, it is still strong in his mind, and he is not bound in Shakespeare, as he is in Plutarch, by ties of gratitude or of kinship. Plutarch hints that it is possible that Caesar was the father of Brutus, 42 and says that the latter was charged with ingratitude for murdering Caesar after he has spared him in spite of his fighting on the side of Pompey. 43 MacCallum believes that the reason for this omission is that the inclusion of the two hints would have complicated the issue and made Brutus look too evil; Shakespeare therefore chooses to concentrate only on Brutus’ mistaken feeling of duty. 44

And, MacCallum says further, Brutus dies in a sort of triumph: he has his faith in the purity of his motives; he has friends who will not kill him when he asks them to; and he is contented with his fate,


43 Plutarch, The Comparison of Dion with Brutus, IV, op. cit., p. 480.

44 MacCallum, p. 239.
for the triumvirs' Rome holds nothing for him. He is until his death a "rare and lofty nature."  

Still another critic who interprets the character of Brutus sympathetically is Brooke, who calls attention to Brutus' loneliness. Brutus, he says, "far apart from the rest in his own ideal world, thinks, stands, lives, and dies alone." The other conspirators act according to their own selfish motives, and their cause fails because of their lack of unity.  

Although he considers Caesar the hero of the play, Brooke says that its main subject is "the working out of the fate of Brutus as the last hero of Roman liberty; and the fall of Republicanism in his death is the true catastrophe of the drama." Brutus is not ignoble, for he is "high-hearted" and noble as a thinker, and his republican idea is morally right, even though he is "ridiculous" as a politician.  

Although Matthews' opinions on Julius Caesar were published in the same year as Brooke's, 1913, they show a train of thought which has since then become fairly firmly entrenched in criticism of the play; that is, Matthews shows less sympathy with Brutus than do the earlier critics. Brutus, he says, though noble, is vain; he is an impractical idealist, with a close kinship to many professional reformers of our own day; in that he always takes himself too seriously, and in that

46Brookes, p. 61.  
47Ibid.  
48Ibid., p. 69.  
49Ibid., pp. 70, 78.
he lacks the saving sense of humor that springs from an understanding of one's fellowman. 50

He is egotistical and pedantic, unfit for the part he plays, as his oration alone would serve to show. 51 In the quarrel scene he reveals himself for what he is—touchy of temper, self-sufficient and self-satisfied, and, consequently, unable to get along with men and to accomplish his purposes. He "abounds in conscious rectitude," as one of his speeches in particular shows:

There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats,
For I am arm'd so strong in honesty
That they pass by me as the idle wind,
Which I respect not. (IV, iii, 66-69)

He is an impractical politician, a theorist of government, with the loftiest ideals, which he cannot disentangle from his own ambitions." It is a proof of Shakespeare's skill, says Matthews, that he is able to make Brutus, even with all these faults, worth the important position which he holds in the play, as a man who is even "massive of soul," and who "towers over the other characters, as a tragic hero should, larger in mold than any of them." 52

Tassin is quite definite in his interpretation of Brutus. His view, mentioned earlier, is that Shakespeare follows his source as closely as possible. 53 The only departure from this adherence, he believes,

---

50 Matthews, p. 262.  
51 Ibid.  
52 Ibid., p. 263.  
53 See pp. 261-27.
is the character of Brutus, who he says is made much less admirable in Shakespeare than in Plutarch. He cites many examples of changes the dramatist made in his source material—changes of omission, addition, and alteration—which go to make the play, he says, a tragedy with Brutus as the "actual and visible hero" and Caesar's "great daemon" the "spiritual hero." Shakespeare, says Tassin, did not consider Brutus "a hero of the grand style," for if he had he would have made him boast; however, he does take pains to gain sympathy for the character by the addition of "humanizing and tender minor episodes." Even so, he presents Brutus as having many faults, the same ones that other critics have mentioned, most of which are not found in Plutarch. Tassin, it will be remembered, believes that Shakespeare alters nothing in his source but the one character under discussion; the explanation of all these changes in Brutus, he says, is that Shakespeare was striving for historical truth. He seems to believe that the historical Brutus gave an impression something like that for which Shakespeare appears to have striven, but that Plutarch, being a militant republican, attempted to soften the evidences of the bad qualities which the story reveals about him. Perhaps, Tassin says, Shakespeare was led to this course by the comparison of Dion with Brutus, in which "Plutarch's partiality for Brutus is hard beset by

\[54\] Tassin, p. 258.  
\[55\] Ibid., pp. 258-268.
his patriotism for Dion," and the Greek mentions some of Brutus' faults for the first time and condemns him for them. 56 The point of all this, says Tassin, is that Shakespeare is not simply trying to play down his hero for political reasons, but is trying to bring out the truth about him as he sees it. 57

It will be remembered that Schuckling believes that Shakespeare's characters simply say what they are, and that in Julius Caesar at least, they can hardly be accused of self-conceit. According to this theory, Brutus can perhaps be cleared of one fault of which he has been accused. Shakespeare, says Schuckling, overemphasizes a little the traits in Brutus which he is trying to show: when Brutus says that he is "arm'd so strong in honesty," or that it would be an honor to be slain by his sword, he is not being arrogant, but only telling what Shakespeare considers the truth. 58

Knight sees the whole of Julius Caesar as a study of Brutus, who lets his sense of honor govern him in spite of everything. Brutus says that he loves honor more than he fears death; and honor leads him to kill Caesar, to endanger his cause by refusing to let the conspirators swear an oath of secrecy, to defeat it by letting Antony live and speak, and to hamper Cassius and himself by his attitude about expedient

56 Ibid., pp. 266-267. 57 Ibid., p. 270. 58 Schuckling, p. 39.
semi-dishonesty. Because of his honor he loses Portia, almost
loses Cassius' friendship, and eventually dies, with Strato, whose
"life hath had some smack of honour in it" (V, v, 46), holding the
sword; and Octavius commands that his funeral be "order'd honourably"
(V, v, 79). Brutus, says Knight, is "impossibly noble; and when we
forget his nobility he becomes just 'impossible'" His honor, however
sincere, is essentially not honorable, for it is selfish; it is "a quality
to be rigidly distinguished from love," and he sacrifices love to it.
It is proper, then, that when he dies he has nothing left but his honor,
and must, in his last speeches, "take what crumbs he can to solace him
in the darkness." 59 Knight even writes an extended comparison of
Brutus and Macbeth in which he shows how their ruling passions,
although different, cause them to wreak their separate but similiar
havocs. 60

Ridley shows, to put it mildly, little sympathy for Brutus. He
does not put it mildly, but says of Brutus that

he is one of those disastrous persons whose exalted morals seem
to have caused an atrophy of their brains, so that they do more
damage in the world than people of much lower standards. Brutus,
in plain terms, is a fool. 61

59 Knight, pp. 70-81.
60 Knight, "Brutus and Macbeth," The Wheel of Fire (London,
Ridley elaborates on this theme, calling Brutus a conceited, self-indulgent prig possessed of no common sense, and says that the play has no hero.

Van Doren too emphasizes Brutus' faults, although not quite so vehemently as Ridley. Brutus' mistakes, he says, are "the mistakes of a man whose nobility muffles his intelligence." He lacks humor, is even smug sometimes, and parades his Stoicism for Messala's benefit when he is informed for the second time of Portia's death.

Shakespeare can do little with him because of his great reticence, which prevents his being known as intimately as are some of the other Shakespearean heroes and his being as interesting as they are.

Kittredge believes that the inconsistency concerning Brutus' knowledge of Portia's death is the result of a printer's error; the exchange with Messala, he believes, was in the play originally, but Shakespeare later added Brutus' telling Cassius the news, and neglected to note the deletion of the exchange with Messala on the manuscript the printers used. Kittredge feels that Brutus has the faults which the other critics say he has, but believes that Shakespeare does not side with anyone in the tragedy.

---

62 Ibid., pp. 119-120.  
63 Ibid., p. 117.  
64 Van Doren, p. 87.  
65 Ibid., pp. 88-89.  
67 Ibid., p. xix.
Phillips' interpretation of the drama has already been discussed. 68

This critic believes that Shakespeare very definitely is a partisan in
Julius Caesar, a partisan on the side of Caesar and his followers, and
that Brutus is completely wrong in his ideals. 69

One more critic who believes that Brutus is the dramatic hero of
the play is Alexander, who comments that, in choosing something
from Plutarch to dramatize,

Shakespeare found his chief interest in the connection between
character and action, deed and motive, which underlies all history;
and . . . Shakespeare, if he felt that Brutus provided the most
interesting problem on these lines, could hardly have chosen better
than he did. 70

Brutus, says Alexander, is working against forces beyond his control:

Shakespeare follows Plutarch in representing the conspirators as
opposed to the irresistible current of affairs in Rome. Plutarch's
sympathies are republican, but he recognizes that the Republic was
at an end, and he tells us how "men of deep judgment and discretion,
seeing such madness and fury of the people, thought themselves
happy if the commonwealth were no worse troubled than the absolute
state of a monarch and sovereign to govern them." 71

Palmer holds much the same opinion of Brutus; his study contains nothing
original enough to need going into. 72

---

70 Peter Alexander, Shakespeare's Life and Art (London, 1944), p. 149.
71 Ibid. 72 Palmer, pp. 1-64.
Just as Stewart finds that Shakespeare creates two Caesars, he believes that there are two Brutuses in the play. One is Schucking's Brutus, a great hero who speaks in the grand style. The other is a confused thinker who never makes his motives quite clear because he does not know them himself; he will not admit "the lure of the pedestal" which he feels, for he is "concerned for his own disinterestedness." He shows intellectual dishonesty, or at least blindness, in lending his efforts to the conspirators' cause; and the consequences of his deed lead him almost to realize his having failed to reflect sufficiently on his actions, so that he is forced to maintain boldly a façade of virtue. Thus the vanity of his speeches "is the instinct of a man over the threshold of whose awareness a terrible doubt perpetually threatens to lap."  

Stauffer too notes Brutus' vanity, calling attention to his being subject to flattery. Portia learns his secret from him by reminding him that though she is only a woman, she is "A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife" (II, i, 293). Antony appeals through his kneeling servant to the "noble, wise, valiant, and honest" Brutus (III, i, 126) and asks only for "reasons" why Caesar has been killed (III, i, 221). And Cassius,  

---

73 See p. 94.  
74 Stewart, p. 50.  
75 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
to stem the tide of Brutus' anger, says that he is "Hated by one he loves; braved by his brother" (IV, iii, 96), and offers to let Brutus kill him. Brutus is swayed by all this flattery because it appeals to the ego and to his better nature, to the qualities he likes to think he has, and builds up his idea that he is never wrong. 76

Goddard is another who believes that Brutus is one of Shakespeare's heroes who attempt deeds for which they are not fitted. 77 He says that Brutus must be thought of as noble--witness the good opinion of him shared by all the other characters in the play--until the time of his participation in Caesar's assassination, after which, since he cannot justify it even to himself, he must exaggerate his own virtue. 78 In one scene there is a clear symbol of his error: he denies the dictates of his wisdom, represented by Portia, and the innocence which was his before he was corrupted, represented by Lucius, and welcomes sickness, in the person of Ligarius. 79 But he is never convinced that his murdering Caesar was a justifiable deed, as his carefully phrased, artificial oration shows. 80 His behavior in the quarrel scene, in which he goes beyond all reasonable bounds in his attempt to make himself appear virtuous and Cassius as selfish and mercenary, is an admission

---

76 Stauffer, pp. 114-115.  
77 Goddard, p. 308.  
78 Ibid., pp. 310-311.  
79 Ibid., p. 319.  
80 Ibid., p. 322.
that he has been guilty of "terrible errors." Goddard, then, believes that Shakespeare intends to portray Brutus the conspirator as a wicked man, although Brutus the loyal Roman citizen had been virtuous and honorable.

Craig's beliefs about cadent and decadent heroes apply to Brutus as well as to Caesar. Brutus' star is on the ascendant, he says, until the time of the murder of Caesar; but from then until the end of the play his fate becomes less and less favorable, finally bringing about his failure and his death.

Walker suggests another possible reason for Shakespeare's giving Brutus his many faults. He believes that, since "only the royal blood of England is more precious than Caesar's," and since the general topics of deposition and regicide were dangerous ground in Shakespeare's time, Shakespeare "had to be careful how he told of political assassination far away and long ago. To show the killing of Caesar as other than a catastrophic crime might itself have been a capital offence." Therefore, Walker says, one must bear in mind that Brutus' crime is intended to be seen as a dire one, no matter how high the ideals that precipitate it.

---

81 Ibid., p. 324. 82 Ibid., p. 328.
83 Shakespeare, Complete Works, edited by Craig, p. 772.
85 Ibid., p. 289. 86 Ibid.
An interesting suggestion of a way in which Shakespeare may have tried to show at once Brutus' high ideals and his unrealistic manner of thinking is made by Stirling. This commentator holds the opinion that ritualistic elements are an integral part of the structure of *Julius Caesar*, and are particularly important in reference to the character of Brutus, who attempts to

exalt not only the mission but the tactics of conspiracy; having accepted republicanism as an honorable end, he sets out to justify assassination, the means, by lifting it to a level of rite and ceremony.

He therefore plans the murder as a sort of ritual, speaking and even thinking of it as such. Still, he is something of a politician, as the following speech shows:

> And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,  
> Stir up their servants to an act of rage,  
> And after seem to chide 'em. This shall make  
> Our purpose necessary and not envious;  
> Which so appearing to the common eyes,  
> We shall be called purgers, not murderers. (II, i, 175-180)

But his main object is to remove from the deed, by making it seem like a ritual, all taint of barbarousness and cruelty.

87 Brents Stirling, "Or Else This Were a Savage Spectacle," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, LXVI (September, 1951), pp. 766-768.


Plutarch, on the other hand, describes the murder with great emphasis on its cruelty:

They ... that had conspired his death, compassed him in on everie side with their swordes drawn in their handes, that Caesar turned him no where, but he was striken at by some, and was hacked and mangeled amongeth them, as a wilde beaste taken of hunters. 90

This description resembles both Brutus' warning to the conspirators to the effect they should avoid and Antony's description of the actual murder. First Brutus:

Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;  
Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,  
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds. ...  
(II, ii, 172-174)

And Antony:

Here wast thou bay'd, brave hart,  
Here didst thou fall, and here thy hunters stand,  
Sign'd in thy spoile, and crimson'd in thy lethe.  
.........................  
How like a deer, strucken by many princes,  
Dost thou here lie!  
(III, ii, 204-206, 209-210)

Antony expresses elsewhere his contempt for Brutus' ritualization of the murder, both in plain terms and in counter-ritual. Examples of the latter are the messenger's speech, his asking to be slain where Caesar has been, and his shaking hands with all the murderers. This he does with the one intent, of course, of obtaining their favor and receiving permission to speak; he is not for a moment fooled by Brutus'
attempt, as he reveals in the speech above quoted and in his following soliloquy, but realizes, as does Shakespeare, the true horror of the conspirators' deed. 91

The purpose of all this ritualization, as has been said, is to emphasize Brutus' willful blindness, partly, at least, by contrasting it with Antony's realistic view of the facts. Stirling says that

near the center of Shakespeare's characterization lies the decision by Brutus to purify assassination through ceremonial. This act, not to be found in Plutarch, is the clear symbol of the "Elizabethan" Brutus who combined tragically wrong ends with high dignity of means. 92

There is evidence that men of Shakespeare's time may have thought of Brutus as a wicked man. Brewer cites many references to him in medieval literature which indicate that he was thought of as the archetypal of treacherous murderers. Chaucer, making the two main conspirators one monster, tells of "false Brutus-Cassius," who envying Caesar's high place, "stikede" him with "boydekins." 93 Gower mentions him only once, calling him "the noble Cesar Julis." 94

91 Stirling, pp. 770-772. 92 Ibid., p. 773.


Lydgate tells how a poor man named Longilius (Shakespeare's Artemidorus) "secretly the treason did espie" and how Caesar neglected him, and bursts out,

But, o alas, ambicious negligence
Caused his mordre bi unwar violence. 95

He then tells how, Fortune waiting to bring about Caesar's fall, "he mordred was, with many a mortal wounde." 96 The envoy of each of the seven stanzas of the story of Caesar is the following or a variant:

"Moordred at Rome bi Brutus Cassius."

All these works, says Brewer, were well known in the sixteenth century and can be presumed to have had some influence on thought of the time concerning the slaying of Caesar. And the Mirror for Magistrates, too, expresses an attitude at least part of which seems to follow this trend. After speaking of his own former glory and power, the dead Caesar is made to say

This they envied that sude aloft to clime,
As Cassius, which the Praetorship did craue,
And Brutus eke his friends which bare the crime
Of my dispatch, for they did first deprae
My life, mine actes, and sought my bloud to haue,
Full secretly amonst them selves conspirde, decreede
To bee attemptors of that cruell bloody deede,
When Caesar in the Senate house from noble hart did bleede. 97


96 Ibid., i. 2869.

But, in what Brewer calls the "last moralizing stanza" of the poem,

Caesar says:

I deeme therefore my stony harte and brest
Receiu'd so many wounds for lust revenge, they stood
By justice, right of love, the sacred sentence good,
That who so slayes, hee payes the price, is bloud for bloud.98

Brewer calls the attitude expressed here "equivocal, not to say contra-
dictory," and says that Shakespeare may parallel it in Julius Caesar,
especially in the characterization of Brutus.99 Brewer further notes
that there was in Shakespeare's time a popular misconception that
Caesar had actually reigned as emperor of Rome, which "died hard,"
and may have influenced Shakespeare.

Thus, tradition seems to stamp the slaying of Caesar as "murder
most foul," Brutus as a murderer, and Caesar, usually, not as a
tyrant but as a noble emperor. And Shakespeare seems to follow the
tradition in his earlier plays. In 3 Henry VI, one of the characters
uses his death as an example of cruel and treacherous murder:

... O traitors! murderers!
They that stabbed Caesar shed no blood at all,
Did not offend, nor were not worthy blame,
If this foul deed were by to equal it... (3 Henry VI, V, v, 52-55)

98 Ibid., p. 302, 11. 401-408.
99 Brewer, pp. 52-53.
And there is another slighting reference to the assassins in an early play, which, as Brewer notes, contains the only hint in Shakespeare at the strong rumor that Brutus was Caesar's illegitimate son:

Great men oft die by vile bezonians:
A Roman sworder and banditto slave
Murder'd sweet Tully; Brutus' bastard hand
Stabb'd Julius Caesar; savage islanders
Pompey the Great; and Suffolk dies by pirates.
(2 Henry VI, IV, 1, 134-138)

Brewer, to sum up his arguments, believes that the medieval opinion of Brutus is held by Shakespeare; it is modified and made more complex by Shakespeare's reading of Plutarch's "idealized" life of Brutus, but Brutus is still to be considered guiltier than some think he is. 100

In his interpretation of Brutus, Whitaker mentions virtually the same changes from the source as does Tassin, but comes to a conclusion which is somewhat different and, it must be remarked, more logical in view of the known facts. He says:

There may be question as to what Shakespeare was trying to accomplish by the changes he made in portraying Caesar. There can be no doubt whatever as to what he was trying to do to Brutus. To Plutarch Brutus was an almost perfect example of the antique and heroic republican mould. To Shakespeare he was a very great man, but, because of fundamental defects in his own mind and character, he made a horrible and tragic error—in short, he was a tragic hero.

Shakespeare therefore emphasized both Brutus' self-righteousness and his impractical and muddled head. His deviations from his source indicate that such was his intention. 101

100 Brewer, p. 53-54.  101 Whitaker, p. 234.
Shakespeare had that intention because his "Tudor absolutism at complete odds with Plutarch’s idealization of Brutus as the epitome of the old Republican virtues," and because, unable even to comprehend, much less to believe, that a man could believe in liberty as a positive good, he considers Brutus’ basing all his thinking on that belief "simply self-deception." Therefore he brings Brutus down from the pedestal where Plutarch put him, and points him out as a tragic hero, who because of wrong beliefs and faulty thinking does an evil deed against the only true positive good in government, absolute monarchy.

This summary of critical interpretations of the character of Marcus Brutus in Shakespeare shows much similarity in critical thought down through the years; indeed, its constant repetition makes it sound almost like Gertrude Stein gone scholarly. But although critics find much the same fundamental qualities in Brutus, they differ widely in their ideas of the true implications of Shakespeare’s treatment of the character. The earlier critics, as has been noted, believe that Shakespeare treats him rather sympathetically, letting his faults be seen, perhaps, but not greatly emphasizing them. Those same critics usually believe that Shakespeare either shares Brutus’ convictions or pretends to for his own purposes. Later critics differ about the question of Shakespeare’s sympathy with Brutus himself, either emphasizing

---

102 Ibid., p. 240.
103 Ibid., p. 238.
104 Ibid., p. 236.
his faults or considering them evidences of an effort to humanize the character. But they find evidence of little or no sympathy with Brutus' cause, and believe that Shakespeare's royalist sympathies and general opinion of the time lead him to treat Brutus, a republican, as a cloudy and self-deceptive thinker whose lofty sense of honor either allows him to be seduced or causes him to seduce himself into taking a completely foolish and unjustifiable course, and who then must attempt to justify it by insisting on his honor and on the rightness of his deed. But whatever opinion may be held, it is clear that Shakespeare is thought to have taken Plutarch's Brutus as a starting point but to have treated him according to his own Elizabethan beliefs.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This study of Shakespeare's adaptation of his sources in Julius Caesar has almost necessarily had a dual purpose. It has required that the play and its sources be considered first-hand for the differences between them; and, since this consideration must bring up questions of interpretation, the critics' suggested answers to those questions have been discussed fairly thoroughly.

Although the conclusions which have been arrived at in the various chapters have been discussed there, a final statement of them here will perhaps be worthwhile. First, Shakespeare found in North's translation of Plutarch's Lives a great work, in the utilization of which he did not demean himself, as he may perhaps be said to have done elsewhere in his choice of material to dramatize. Plutarch was an artist of merit, who was so interested in the revelations of a man's character found in his actions that he may be said to have been almost a dramatist himself. He gave Shakespeare interesting characters and a good story with which to work. Amyot was a more than capable translator, an artist himself in fact, who put the old Greek's writings into a French version which is generally correct and is exemplary in its style. North, in turn,
took the *Lives* into English literature, making a translation which is
as accurate as could reasonably be expected and is famous in its own
right for its idiomatic, muscular Elizabethan prose.

But North's Plutarch, though certainly the most important source,
is not all that Shakespeare used or that influenced him. As was always
his practice, he borrowed ideas and lines from many other works. And,
writing in a time when religious and political concepts were combined in
their support of the monarchical form of government, Shakespeare could
hardly have kept from having that form of government in the back of his
mind as he wrote a political play. By the same token, the all-pervasive
influence on the Elizabethan stage of the Senecan dramatic tradition was
bound to have its effect on any serious drama of the time.

The basic source itself and Elizabethan beliefs and traditions are
not all that make *Julius Caesar* what it is; Shakespeare has something
to do with it. He mixes together into one plot events chosen from three
of Plutarch's *Lives*, and even changes the order of incidents in one
biography. Further, he does not hesitate either to omit incidents
narrated by Plutarch or to add new ones of his own. And those he uses
are combined and compressed so that they have new bearings on one
another, their effects on the various characters are shown, and, although
they were actually the events of several years, they seem to follow one
another in a closely knit plot. These changes are of course the results
both of the dramatist's need to make a unified play of a certain length
out of Plutarch's sometimes rambling stories and of Shakespeare's
own wishes to heighten the dramatic effect of the incidents he presents.

Shakespeare demonstrates in *Julius Caesar* either carelessness or
ignorance of details of Roman culture, for he is guilty of many
anachronistic errors. But at least one of these, the famous striking
clock, is justified by its dramatic effect.

This same freedom with source is demonstrated by Shakespeare's
use of the language of the North translation. Shakespeare uses words
and intact phrases direct from North, or even borrows whole passages,
but his changes, whether seemingly slight or obviously major, are enough
to make the difference between good prose and dignified, effective
poetry; and they are always made according to Shakespeare's char-
acteristic poetic techniques.

It is difficult enough--actually, in fact, impossible--to define with
any exactness Shakespeare's techniques in adapting plot and diction.
It is well-nigh ridiculous to attempt to make any definite statements
about the two characters in the play who have received the most of
the critics' attention. All one can do is to discuss the different theories
about them that have been evolved.

About Caesar, then, the critics are divided. One school feels that
his apparent faults--his physical weakness, his deafness, his vacilla-
tion, his being subject to flattery, his ambition, and especially his
grandiloquent way of expressing his own praises—are given him so that
the conspirators will have at least some justification for assassinating
him. Some of these critics believe that Shakespeare's real sympathy
lies with the conspirators; others hold that it lies with Caesar and his
monarchism, but that Shakespeare pretends otherwise for the sake of
the structure of the play. Those of the first group hold that Caesar may
have been great in his day, but is now possessed of a self-conceit which
is contradicted by his physical and mental weaknesses; in short, his
pride is so great that he has lost contact with reality. Their stand is
supported by the findings of Ayres, which show that in the Elizabethan
dramas written under the Senecan influence Caesar was portrayed as a
sort of braggart hero.

Another school of critics holds that Caesar's apparent faults are
not intended to be seen as faults, but are merely evidences of his acting
as the rightful ruler of Rome should act, and that his physical weaknesses
are insignificant except as they tend to humanize the man. A few others
find that Caesar is certainly breaking but that he is struggling to uphold
his ideal of himself as emperor of Rome—he is only a man but his ideal
is a great one, and he is doing right in striving to maintain the appearance
of greatness. That he is divinely appointed as the king of Rome is proved
by the supernatural occurrences before his murder.
Much as students of this play may disagree about the character of the living Caesar, they are almost universally agreed in their opinions of his importance after his death. His spirit, they say, is much more powerful after it is released from its body than before; for in seeking its revenge it brings chaos to Rome in general and defeat and death to those responsible for the assassination.

The critics have also disagreed about Brutus. The earlier ones tend to interpret his character sympathetically, finding in him a man of the strictest honor and virtue, with many qualities, such as his love for books and his gentleness in personal relations, which prove that he is intended to be taken as a hero who attempts something beyond him but who has only one fault, that of persistence in an honest misconception. The later critics find many more faults in him; they say that he is self-righteous, that he thinks hazily if at all, and that he refuses to admit his error, even after realization of it is forced upon him, and tries to justify it by harping on his honor more and more insistently.

But no matter how one may choose to interpret the play and its characters, he cannot deny that, heavily as Shakespeare relies on Plutarch, his *Julius Caesar* is an independent work rather than simply a dramatization of someone else's story. Acknowledgment of this fact is implicit in almost all the studies of the play, for many critics discuss it at great length, comparing it to other Shakespearean plays in style.
and in technique, with few or no references to the source. The plot, the language, and the characters of *Julius Caesar* may have been originally suggested by North's Plutarch, but they all bear the Shakespearean stamp.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Boas, Frederick S., Shakespeare and His Predecessors, London, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902.


Coles, Blanche, Shakespeare Studies—Julius Caesar, New York, R. R. Smith, 1940.


Matthews, Brander, Shakspeare as a Playwright, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.


Raleigh, Walter, editor, Johnson on Shakespeare, New York, Humphrey Milford, 1908.


Whitaker, Virgil K., Shakespeare's Use of Learning, San Marino, California, The Huntington Library, 1953.

Articles


Cipriani, Lisi, "A Source of Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar,' " Nation, XC (June 2, 1910), 556.


Sabier, Cecil, "Who Wrote 'Julius Caesar'?" The Shakespearean Quarterly, III (October, 1924), 30-33.

Shackford, Martha Hale, "Julius Caesar and Ovid," Modern Language Notes, XLI (March, 1926), 172-174.

"Shakespeare's Legerdemain with Time in 'Julius Caesar,' " Post-Lore, XI (April, 1899), 276-282.

Stirling, Brents, "Or Else This Were a Savage Spectacle," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXVI (September, 1951), 765-774.
