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Shakespeare's Cassius: A Critical Re-appraisal

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Abstract

This thesis examines Shakespeare's characterisation of Cassius in *Julius Caesar*. Although a faint figure in the historical tradition that Shakespeare inherited, Cassius emerges as the second most prominent character in the play (at least in terms of words spoken). My aim is to explain how (and why) Cassius comes to enjoy such a primary role in the tragedy. In Chapter One, I examine the historical information Shakespeare may have consulted to fashion his Cassius. As I hope to show, Shakespeare adapts and appropriates Plutarch to provide a far more nuanced portrait than the predominantly one-dimensional foil for Brutus. In Chapter Two, I examine the Caesar plays of several contemporary European dramatists (e.g., Muret, Pescetti, and Kyd) to compare their depictions of Cassius to Shakespeare's. In Chapter Three, I examine Elizabethan England's influence on Shakespeare's depiction of Cassius. Additionally, I will explore whether or not Shakespeare sought to connect Cassius with the contemporary figure Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex.

The overarching questions that connect these chapters together are: can Cassius be considered the hero or a villain of the play? Is he neither? Is he a "mixed" character? These questions are important, as critics have long been divided over Cassius since the play was first performed. Hopefully, this thesis will show that Cassius is, by the end of the play at least, closer to Vikram Chopra's "Elizabethan patriot" than he is to any other critical iteration. Shakespeare has created a character who is intelligent, patriotic, and passionate, but also personally vindictive. In short, he is every bit as flawed as every other major character in the tragedy.

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Note on Abbreviations and Texts

Journal abbreviations, when employed, conform to the style set out in the *PMLA International Bibliography*. Abbreviations for ancient authors and their works follow the conventions used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th edition) edited by Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth (Oxford: OUP, 2012). All block English translations of ancient sources are taken from the most recent Loeb Classical Library editions (for details, see the Primary Sources section in the Bibliography). For definitions of Latin words I reference the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (abbreviated to *OLD* in the footnotes) edited by P.G. Ware (Oxford: OUP, 1982). The edition of Thomas North's Plutarch I consulted is: *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes Translated by Sir Thomas North*. 8 Vols. (Oxford: OUP, 1928). All other textual and translation matters are explained in the footnotes.

Shakespeare's lineation is the subject of unending scholarly debate. Accordingly, for the sake of simplicity, I have followed the lineation used in David Daniell's *Julius Caesar: The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Arden, 1998).

INTRODUCTION

WHY CASSIUS?

An extended study of the character of Cassius immediately calls for justification. He certainly does not rank amongst the most famous characters in the Shakespearean canon. Indeed, unlike the recurring figure Falstaff or Antony, Cassius only appears in one play, *Julius Caesar*,¹ and even then he is not often regarded as a hero or character who compels attention (as opposed to the Janus-like Iago). He does not deliver a genre-defining speech, as does Antony;² he does not, arguably, serve as the fulcrum of the dramatic action, as do Brutus and Caesar; and he does not even offer any obvious choric insights into the play's themes, as does Cicero.³ Nevertheless, Shakespeare's Cassius merits close study for important reasons.

Despite being a relatively obscure figure in the historical tradition that Shakespeare inherited,⁴ Cassius emerges as the second most prominent character in the tragedy, at least in terms of dialogue. He delivers over 500 lines, and speaks more than 3700 words, which constitutes around 20% of the entire play, statistics that dwarf Antony's and Caesar's contributions.⁵ Only Brutus has more to say. Evidently, in spite of the meagre scraps of historical biography at Shakespeare's fingertips, he clearly felt that Cassius had an important rôle to play in his tragedy.

¹ He is alluded to twice in *Ant*: II.vi.14-15, III.xi.38.

² Anthony's funeral orations is considered the best known speech in the English language; see the excellent anthology of William Safire, *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History* (Norton, 2004).

³ At I.iii.33-35, Cicero says: "Indeed, it is a strange-disposed time: / But men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves." Even Cinna the Poet (III.iii.1-4) offers a keynote in Shakespeare's themes: Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge, 1983) 78-79.

⁴ Certainly when compared with Antony, Brutus, Caesar, and Cicero, all of whom were the subject of extended Plutarchean biographies.

⁵ Cassius has 505 lines, and utters 3709 words, which constitutes almost 20% of the play's dialogue: Lines: Horst Zander, ed. *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays* (Routledge, 2005), 6; Garry Wills, *Rome and Rhetoric: Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (Yale University Press, 2011), 157, gives 513 Lines; words: David Daniell, *The Arden Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series (Arden, 1998), 152. Percentage of dialogue: Horst Zander, ed. *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*, 6, credits Cassius with 19.5% of the play's lines.

In a departure from other known European Caesar plays that had gone before, Shakespeare focuses on Cassius' principal role in bringing the conspiracy to fruition (a role which dominates the action of scenes two and three of the first act).⁶ It is not an exaggeration to say that, as far as can be established, this emphasis is something of an innovation. Indeed, as Shakespeare learned from reading Plutarch, Cassius (and not Brutus) was the architect of the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar.⁷ Plutarch obliquely alludes to this fact in his *Life of Brutus*, ceding Cassius a role which sat uneasily with the Greek moralist's own biographical purposes. Shakespeare, however, sensed the dramatic potential of this revelation,⁸ and masterfully dramatizes Cassius' recruitment of both Brutus and Casca. Thus, Shakespeare re-imagines for his audience how the conspiracy came into existence, with Cassius shepherding the venture through to its bloody conclusion. In no uncertain terms, then, Cassius is the prime mover (or instigator) in Shakespeare's version of the conspiracy, even though Brutus serves as the figurehead and moral compass of the movement.⁹

That Shakespeare makes Cassius the driving force of the tragedy appears to be a dramatic innovation. But that is not the only reason for Cassius' unusual prominence in the play. Cassius is also important to Shakespeare because his motives for conspiring against Caesar are murkier than those of Brutus.¹⁰ He is a compromised conspirator, who mixes principle and personal hatred of Caesar in articulating the case against the

⁶ One facet of Cassius' biography that unquestionably fascinated Shakespeare was Cassius' leading role in the conspiracy, which he unequivocally alludes to at *Ant.* II.vi.14-15.

⁷ *Plut. Brut.* 8-9; cf. I.iii.145-46, and previous note.

⁸ Most Renaissance plays prior to Shakespeare portray Brutus as the mastermind of the conspiracy. See further Chapter Two, p. 58, n.10.

⁹ René Girard, "Collective Violence and Sacrifice in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *Salmagundi* (1990): 402. Interestingly, Shakespeare's close engagement with Plutarch has furnished a fairer interpretation of Cassius' significance than many modern historians provide. It would be all too easy to judge Cassius solely on the surface-level language of his so-called seduction scene with Brutus. But Cassius, and the play in general, are much too sophisticated for such an approach. It also jars with his actions in Act 5.

¹⁰ Consider Antony's eulogy of Brutus at the end of the play, V.v.78-6: "All the conspirators save only he / Did that they did in envy of great Caesar."

Colossus. As in the case of the contradictory Caesar mythos that Shakespeare inherited from Renaissance writers, so too previous material on Cassius had been characterised by an almost Manichaean approach. Plutarch's portrait was one-dimensional, certainly in the *Life of Brutus*. But Cassius' career was open to a far more nuanced interpretation. Shakespeare's Cassius is far more representative of this than previous literary incarnations.¹¹ Thus dramatically and politically Cassius looms too large in this play to be overlooked.

And yet, as we shall see scholars and literary critics alike have expended little energy on Cassius, preferring instead to ruminate over the perceived hero of the play, whether Brutus or Caesar.¹² Character studies, as exemplified by A.C. Bradley, abound in the Shakespearean criticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, prior to L.C. Knights' famous critique of them.¹³ Even after Knights' important article, however, such investigations continued, if more sporadically than before. In spite of this output, Cassius has, with some notable exceptions, often been treated as an ancillary figure of study. This thesis seeks to address this imbalance. It seeks, in short, to give Cassius the attention that Shakespeare allots him.

Survey of Literature

Whilst *Julius Caesar* itself has been the subject of vigorous and unending scholarly debate, Cassius has not been so fortunate.¹⁴ Indeed, despite the appearance of two major

¹¹ John W. Velz, "Cassius as a 'Great Observer'," *The Modern Language Review* 68, no. 2 (1973): 256., speaks of the "radical inconsistencies" of the characters. See discussion below.

¹² L.L. Harris and M.W. Scott, *Shakespearean Criticism: Excerpts from the Criticism of William Shakespeare's Plays and Poetry, from the First Published Appraisals to Current Evaluations*, vol. 7 (Gale Research Company), 140. The authors note one exception is the focus on the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius in Act 4, Scene 3. See further, Survey of Literature below.

¹³ L. C. Knights, *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?: An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism* (The Minority Press, 1933).

¹⁴ However, a recent article suggests the popularity of *Julius Caesar* has waned as a subject of critical study: Laura Estill, Dominic Klyve, and Kate Bridal, "'Spare Your Arithmetic, Never Count the Turns':

anthologies on the tragedy,¹⁵ there is still no detailed modern treatment of him. Instead, a lot of scholarly attention has focused on more traditional issues: the play's structure; the hero of the tragedy (or lack thereof);¹⁶ and even if *Julius Caesar* can be considered a tragedy.¹⁷ These questions all merit close study, but it is my contention that a better understanding of his Cassius will yield profitable insights into Shakespeare's dramatic intentions. Thus there is a *desideratum* for a study of Cassius, especially because he has continually divided scholarly opinion. Is his emotion towards Caesar to be regarded as envy or justifiable indignation? Should he be viewed as an insidious schemer or a clear-headed patriot?¹⁸ Or has Shakespeare created a deliberately ambivalent figure?¹⁹ Arguments have been put forth in favour of all these positions. No consensus, then, has been reached on the characterisation of Cassius.

The earliest modern criticism was dismissive. The famous French critic Paul Stapfer identified Cassius as a man of "disappointed vanity and selfishness" who was "devoid of any merciful scruples."²⁰ Though he wrote in the nineteenth century, Stapfer's is still one of the fullest treatments of Cassius available. He paints Cassius as

A Statistical Analysis of Writing About Shakespeare, 1960-2010," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2015): 1-28.

¹⁵ Leonard F. Dean, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Julius Caesar: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Prentice-Hall, 1968); Zander, ed. *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*.

¹⁶ Lack of a clear hero: John W. Draper, "Hero and Theme in *Julius Caesar*," *Rivista di letteratura moderne e comparate* 20 (1967): 30-4.

¹⁷ Hugh Grady, "The End of Shakespeare's Machiavellian Moment: *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's Historiography, and Dramatic Form," in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories: Anglo Italian Transactions*, ed. Michelle. Marrapodi (Ashgate, 2011).

¹⁸ Edward Tetsuya Motohashi, "The Suburbs of Your Good Pleasure': Theatre and Liberties in *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Studies (Shakespeare Society of Japan)* 26 (1987): 41-75, argues that Cassius' Liberty, Freedom, Enfranchisement speech (III.i.77-80) is an authentic celebration of the death of a tyrant, not simply redundant sloganeering.

¹⁹ Adrien Bonjour, *The Structure of Julius Caesar* (Liverpool University Press, 1958), 2, describes the play as a "drama of divided sympathies", which achieves a "grand simplicity" through its "ambivalence" (p.24); Robert S Miola, "*Julius Caesar* and the Tyrannicide Debate," *Renaissance Quarterly* (1985): 271-89, likewise describes the play as "supremely ambiguous"; cf. René E. Fortin, "*Julius Caesar*: An Experiment in Point of View," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1968): 341.

²⁰ Paul Stapfer, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, trans. Emily J. Carey (CK Paul & Company, 1880), 352.

a “mere political malcontent” (p.353), before conceding that Shakespeare endows his character with qualities that “contradict” this fundamental unity of character (p.355).²¹ Stapfer, like others after him, sees Cassius as a political realist,²² self-aggrandizing in nature, and “not over-scrupulous in the choice of means, if only he can attain his end.” (p.359) In short, Cassius is Machiavelli in a toga. Nevertheless, Stapfer confesses that Shakespeare’s true skill is to make the audience feel “even a kindly interest” in this “hard, insensitive egotist”.²³

In his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Harley Granville-Barker continues where Stapfer left off. He pigeonholes Cassius as a Puritan and a “fanatic”, who is too “thin skinned” and quick to resent imagined slights.²⁴ Such black-and-white criticism is outdated now, although Granville-Barker does concede that, despite his flaws, Cassius is “loveable” in a way that Brutus is not.²⁵ He also believes that Cassius’ affection for Brutus rings true. And yet, ultimately Cassius is a man of “catastrophic nature” who behaves “intolerably” (p.365). Thus the traditional critical image of Cassius has tended towards caricature. Above all, he has been labelled the “Machiavel” of the play, an interpretation that has dogged him since modern criticism began.²⁶ And in one early extreme case he

²¹ There has been much discussion about unity of character in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*; see, for example, E. Pearlman, “The ‘Unity of Character’ and Shakespeare’s Two Caskas,” *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 10 (1997): 1-12.

²² Cassius as a personification of political realism (and Brutus as a political idealist) has been well documented, for instance: James S. Mullican, “Brutus and Cassius: A Timely Contrast,” *Clearing House* 38 (1963): 178; Norman N. Holland, “The ‘Cinna’ and ‘Cynicke’ Episodes in *Julius Caesar*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11 (1960): 439-44.

²³ Stapfer, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 362. Several other scholars have labelled Cassius an egotist, for example: George V. Zito, “Durkheimian Suicides in Shakespeare,” *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 4 (1973): 293-304; Vikram Chopra, “The Last of All the Romans’--a Case for Cassius,” *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* 54, no. 5 (2003): 222.

²⁴ Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1930), 360-5, p.361 for quotes.

²⁵ Henry Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (1930) II.362; cf. Paul Stapfer, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, trans. Emily J. Carey (London, 1880) 357: Cassius is a “logical machine” in stark contrast to a man of “rich humanity” like Brutus.

²⁶ Machiavel: Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (Routledge & Paul, 1963), 41. Robin Headlam Wells, “*Julius Caesar*, Machiavelli, and the Uses of History,” in *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 55, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge, 2002), 213-14. However, Indrani Deb, “The Machiavel in *Julius Caesar*,”

has been compared to Al Capone.²⁷ Estimates of Cassius, therefore, have often been far from favourable.

It is little wonder, then, that some scholars began to take issue with this one-sided assessment of Cassius. The opening salvo came from David Klein in his revisionist article "Has Cassius Been Misinterpreted?" (1939).²⁸ Klein rebuts the Cassius-as-villain school. As with many revisionists, Klein suffers from literary Stockholm syndrome: Cassius is *not* the villain of the play; he is, in fact, "one of Shakespeare's noblest characters" (p. 27).²⁹ To back up his claim, Klein makes useful points. He does realise that Shakespeare shows the audience a different side of Cassius (a more human one) in the latter half of the play. He also understands that Cassius inspires tremendous loyalty in Pindarus and Titinius (p. 28). It stretches the bounds of logic, however, to maintain (as Klein does) that because other characters in the play consider him noble, Cassius *is* noble (consider "Honest Iago").³⁰ Naturally, such arguments did not stave off the barrage of negative criticisms.

This notwithstanding, Klein's observations regarding Caesar's assessment of Cassius are eminently sensible. Cassius is charged with reading and thinking too much and examining the underlying motives of men's deeds. These, as Klein rightly points out, are admirable traits (p.29). Perhaps we should conclude, as Klein does, that Caesar

in *Renaissance and Modern Shakespeares*, ed. Subir Dhar (Avantgard Press, 2008), 384-96, argues that being a Machiavel is not necessarily a bad thing in *Julius Caesar*, since Machiavelli is the "yardstick" by which leadership is judged. It is important to bear in mind also that Machiavelli's work did not have the negative connotations that modern readers now often associate with it.

²⁷ David Klein, "Has Cassius Been Misinterpreted?" *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin* 14, no. 1 (1939): 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-36.

²⁹ Mungo William MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (Macmillan, 1925), 275-83, speaks of Cassius as a "fine figure", whose good traits outweigh his admittedly serious flaws.

³⁰ However, see the more nuanced argument of Mandel (below).

is here “arraigned” rather than Cassius.³¹ Unfortunately, Klein misinterprets Antony’s assessment of Cassius as “well-given”, which Shakespeare designed to be deliberately ironic (cf. Chapter One, p.41): “Nobody”, Klein opines, doubts Antony’s “ability to judge human nature” (p.28), and yet this is exactly what Caesar does immediately thereafter.³² Ultimately, in Klein’s article the pendulum of critical opinion swung too far in the direction of revisionism. Or, to put that another way, Cassius should not be considered one of Shakespeare’s “noblest” characters based solely on the evidence Klein adduced.

Far more substantive defences followed, however. In an article entitled “Lovers in Peace”, Dove and Gamble re-examine Cassius, arguing against the view that he is the “scheming malcontent” of the play, who sets in train the tragedy for his own ends.³³ Like Klein, they dismiss this pervasive view because it is incongruous with the “human afterthought” of the Cassius who emerges in the final acts of the play.³⁴ Shakespeare, they suggest, was not a “botcher” (p.544).³⁵ He did not create such a contradictory character, though he does show characters in different lights. They conclude that Shakespeare offers a more “sympathetic” Cassius than Plutarch, whose own Cassius is not so sincere in his republicanism.³⁶

³¹ Given the Elizabethan context, Caesar here sounds like a censor. Cf. Girard’s observation that Caesar sees Cassius as a self-tortured intellectual: Girard, “Collective Violence and Sacrifice in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*,” 399-419.

³² Moreover, Caesar suggests to Antony that he is holding back his true opinion of Cassius as they are in public (I.ii.215: “...tell me truly what thou think’st of him.”) Cf. John W. Velz, “Caesar’s Deafness,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 22 (1971): 400-1, who suggests Caesar’s deafness is figurative and that he is inviting Antony to indict Cassius here.

³³ John Roland Dove and Peter Gamble, “Lovers in Peace’: Brutus and Cassius: A Re-Examination,” *English Studies* 60, no. 5 (1979): 543-54, p. 544 for the quote.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 544.

³⁵ Richard Levin, “Shakespearean Defects and Shakespeareans’ Defenses,” in *Bad Shakespeare*, ed. Maurice Charney (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 23-26, holds that this radical change in Cassius’ character is simply a defect of Shakespeare’s inconsistent writing.

³⁶ Dove and Gamble, “Lovers in Peace’: Brutus and Cassius: A Re - Examination.”

More recently, Vikram Chopra (2003) has put forward a case for Cassius in which he argues that he should be viewed in terms of an Elizabethan patriot.³⁷ Chopra, I believe, makes a crucial point:

It is interesting to note that from no more than an outline in Plutarch, Cassius becomes in Shakespeare a full-blown Elizabethan figure: friend, patriot, rebel, egotist or a self-sacrificing ascetic evoking a mixed admiration from different characters and critics.³⁸

Chopra maintains that hardly any critics have appreciated Cassius' "deep patriotism".³⁹ He also notes that though Cassius appears to be personally motivated against Caesar, this does not (necessarily) invalidate his cause. Rather, Cassius' grievances against Caesar highlight some significant flaws in the dictator's character. Nor can this totally detract from the arguments he makes on behalf of the nobility and Rome. Indeed, as Chopra concludes: "Cassius' concern for the honour and dignity of the Romans is as firm and fierce as that of Brutus."⁴⁰ Ultimately, Chopra was the first critic to really adduce strong evidence that Cassius could be viewed as "in the galaxy of the essentially noble characters of Shakespeare."⁴¹ Yet, to my knowledge, Chopra's revisionism has not trickled into mainstream critical debate about Cassius. At present, then, there has been no concerted mainstream re-appraisal of Cassius as a central figure in the tragedy.

The loyalty that Cassius inspired around him also piqued the interest of revisionists. In 2012, George Mandel challenged notions of Cassius as a cold-hearted manipulator in his article "The Other Brutus: On Decius in Shakespeare's *Julius*

³⁷ Vikram Chopra, "The Last of All the Romans: A Case for Cassius," *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* 54, no. 5 (2003), 221-28.

³⁸ Chopra, "The Last of All the Romans"--a Case for Cassius," 222.

³⁹ Moody E. Prior, "The Search for a Hero in *Julius Caesar*," *Renaissance Drama* 2 (1969): 81-101. He argues that Brutus and Cassius are "both equally patriotic but different in character and political methods" (p.91).

⁴⁰ Chopra, "The Last of All the Romans"--a Case for Cassius," 223.

⁴¹ Chopra, "The Last of All the Romans"--a Case for Cassius," 228.

Caesar.⁴² Decius, a loyalist of Cassius (in Shakespeare, not in Plutarch), demonstrates that Cassius at least inspired others to join his cause. Moreover, when Titinius realises that Cassius' has committed suicide fearing that his friend has perished fighting, he lays a garland (a symbol of military victory) on Cassius' brow (V.iii.96) and then kills himself using Cassius' sword (V.iii.100). This devotion to Cassius is indicative of a man not wholly bereft of merit.

Drawing on Renaissance theories of medicine, Maria Del Sapio Garbero (2010: 33-56) argues that Cassius is the quintessential anatomist, the only character able enough to anatomise the "mythological layer of skin" from Caesar's body so as to expose the mortal frame of the man behind the title.⁴³ Caesar is, metaphorically speaking, flayed by Cassius' words, to the point where he becomes an *écorché*. Cassius' inspection of Caesar's body (and Caesar's manliness, one might add) exposes the bare bones of a man whose body (like the 'anatomical theatre' that anatomist like Vesalius engaged in) unmasked his human frailty. Only in this way, Garbero argues, can Cassius legitimise the violent act of tyrannicide.

When critical treatments on Cassius have appeared they have not always inspired confidence. Indeed, in 1970 Earl John Clark's promising-sounding "The Final Irony of Cassius"⁴⁴ put forward a case that, sensing Cassius' pessimism at Philippi, his slave, Pindarus, deliberately misreported the battle situation in the hope that his master would commit suicide, thereby freeing Pindarus (he hoped) from his servile condition. Admittedly, false reporting plays a significant role in the tragedy of *Julius Caesar*.

⁴² George Mandel, "The Other Brutus: On Decius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *Notes & Queries* 59, no. 1 (2012): 68-69.

⁴³ Maria Del Sapio Garbero, "Anatomy, Knowledge, and Conspiracy: In Shakespeare's Arena with the Words of Cassius," in *Questioning Bodies in Shakespeare's Rome*, ed. Maria Del Sapio Garbero, Nancy Isenberg, and Maddalena Pennacchia (V & R Unipress, 2010), 33-56.

⁴⁴ Earl John Clark, "The Final Irony of Cassius," *Wisconsin English Journal* 12 (1970): 29-30.

Cassius, of course, forges notes to make Brutus believe that Rome's citizens want Caesar removed from power (I.ii.311-16). So there would be a strong irony if Cassius, like Caesar, also died as a result of false reportage. Nevertheless, to my mind this bold hypothesis is not supported by the text (or its tone, which is important).⁴⁵ Pindarus, whose life had been saved by Cassius (V.iii.40), was oath-bound to perform any duty, even running his master through. Moreover, Cassius frees Pindarus on the proviso that he assist in his master's suicide. Pindarus does so and gains his freedom, but "yet would not so have been, / Durst I have done my will. O Cassius!" (V.iii.52-3). Pindarus' emotion here is genuine. If not honour bound by his master he would not have killed Cassius. It was not, then, deliberate misreporting on the part of Pindarus, but an inadvertently tragic misconstruing of events,⁴⁶ a theme that comes to the fore in the final act (esp. V.iii.94).

Numerous articles and book chapters discussing an aspect of Cassius' character have begun to nuance his depiction. Employing Roman concepts of manliness (*virtus*), gender critic Jan H. Blits argues that Cassius (in contrast to Brutus) is found wanting in *Julius Caesar*.⁴⁷ Whilst she concedes that he is austere, she rightly notes his passions and feelings can overrun him, a trait Shakespeare's contemporaries attributed to women. Blits also posits that Cassius lacks Brutus' "manly constancy and reserve".⁴⁸ Though Cassius is the character who most conspicuously bemoans the "womanish" (I.iii.85) Roman aristocracy, he consistently acts in an unmanly fashion, especially

⁴⁵ The ancient author Valerius Maximus preserves a rumour that Pindarus had murdered Cassius at Philippi (6.8.4; cf. App. *B Civ.* 4.113; Plut. *Brut.* 43.8), though the author (highly critical of Cassius elsewhere) goes to some length to refute the allegation.

⁴⁶ "The problem of knowledge" when construing events is discussed by David Willbern, "Constructing Caesar: A Psychoanalytic Reading." ed. Zander, *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays* (Routledge, 2005): 213-26.

⁴⁷ Jan H. Blits, "Manliness and Friendship in *Julius Caesar*," in *William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 31-46, 37

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-8.

when he makes the decision to commit suicide.⁴⁹ Admittedly, Cassius is sometimes prone to emotional outbursts, but the point of this may not be to emphasise his lack of manliness, but rather to accentuate Brutus' Stoicism, a philosophy diametrically opposed to Cassius' own Epicureanism. Indeed, Cassius' philosophical belief in Epicureanism is an important battleground in *Julius Caesar*. Myron Taylor, for instance, believes that Cassius' atheistic materialism is rejected in favour of Caesar's supernaturalism. Moreover, Cassius' steadfast commitment to empiricism and purported belief that he is the master of his own fate are exposed as wishful thinking; rather, Cassius, like Caesar, is an agent of destiny.⁵⁰

Psychoanalytical critics have also found studying Cassius profitable. Cassius' patent jealousy of Caesar –and his use of an Aeneas-Anchises metaphor– have occasioned considerable discussion of the Oedipal complex. E.P. Toubiana (1983),⁵¹ for instance, describes Cassius and Brutus as “cannibals” driven by an “oedipal impulse” to slay Caesar; in a different vein, Bernard Paris has argued that Brutus, Cassius, and Caesar all have hidden personalities which manifest in their susceptibility to each other.⁵² Conversely, Franco-American critic and philosopher René Girard holds that “mimetic rivalry” is responsible for the “foundational violence” in *Julius Caesar*.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38. Blits' description of Cassius' suicide as “unmanly” seems to me to be wrongheaded. Historically, Cato the Elder had committed suicide along with many other Republicans. In the play, Cassius believes he has caused the death of a friend and thus kills himself out of shame (and as penance). There is nothing unmanly about that to my mind; other scholars have classed it as an altruistic suicide: e.g., Zito, “Durkheimian Suicides in Shakespeare,” 2It;93-304.

⁵⁰ Myron Taylor, “Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Irony of History,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1973); Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, “Providence and the Dialectic of Fate in Shakespeare's Roman and Greek Plays,” *Constructions of Identity: Proceedings of the National Conference*, ed. Ileana Galea, et al., (Napoca Star, 2000) 36-47; Judah Stampfer, *The Tragic Engagement: A Study of Shakespeare's Classical Tragedies* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968).

⁵¹ Eric-Pierre Toubiana, “De L'emprise Au Vampirisme: Les Ides De Mars,” *Psychanalyse a l'universite* 9 (1983): 125-51.

⁵² Bernard Paris, “Brutus, Cassius, and Caesar: An Interdestructive Triangle,” in *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Literature and Film*, ed. Maurice Charney and Joseph Reppen (Rutherford: Dickinson University Press, 1987), 139-55.

⁵³ Girard, “Collective Violence and Sacrifice in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*,” 399-419.

Cassius, the “father” of the conspiracy, works assiduously at “instilling in his associates his own desire to kill Caesar.”⁵⁴ Cassius desires what Caesar has; he is plagued by envy. Of course, Cassius serves as a quintessential example of one of Girard’s fundamental philosophical principles –“mimetic rivalry”: to a lesser extent, Cassius is to Girard what Oedipus was to Freud. It is Cassius who mimetically incites the others to kill Caesar. He is the dominant figure; but a successful rival torments him. It would be unfair, however, to accuse Cassius of only desiring Caesar’s power (or position). His interests are much more mixed than that.

Sagacity and perception are also important themes in the play that are especially relevant to Cassius.⁵⁵ Reynolds (1973)⁵⁶, shows that Cassius could see through Caesar’s façade: the Colossus image was double-edged: ultimately beneath the veneer it was all hollow. Yet even though Cassius is praised as being a great observer by Caesar (I.ii.201), even he fails to anticipate (or fails to stop) events. Though he is “ironic and realistic” in contrast to the idealistic Brutus,⁵⁷ even he is not the master of his fate. Cassius commits suicide as a result of limitations of physical sight.⁵⁸ A detail mentioned in Plutarch, Shakespeare uses this to demonstrate that there are limits to everyone’s perception. In fact, Fortin argues that Cassius is just as susceptible as others (if not occasionally more so) to misconstruing events. Consider, for instance, the Popilius Lena incident (III.1.12-24) and Philippi (V.iii.84). In this way, Cassius provides crucial insight into one of Shakespeare’s most poignant themes.

What do we make of such contradictory interpretations of Cassius? One point is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 402.

⁵⁵ Fortin, "Julius Caesar: An Experiment in Point of View," 341-7; Velz, "Cassius as a 'Great Observer'," 256-9; MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background*, 281, speaks of Cassius' "sagacity".

⁵⁶ Robert Reynolds, "Ironic Epithet in *Julius Caesar*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24 (1973): 329-33.

⁵⁷ Holland, "The 'Cinna' and 'Cynicke' Episodes in *Julius Caesar*," 442.

⁵⁸ Fortin, "Julius Caesar: An Experiment in Point of View," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1968): 345.

certain: scholars must move beyond painting Cassius in broad strokes, as either a hero or villain. His characterisation is not that black and white. Shakespeare's greatest skill is capturing the subtlety of human character; he has moved far beyond the unrealistic figures of the morality plays. Cassius appears in the worst light at the beginning of the play and in the best light towards the end. Whatever the audience might feel about him overall, by the end he enjoys a modicum of our sympathy, especially after the quarrel scene (but also in the loyalty he inspires in Pindarus and Titinius).

Briefly, a word on methodology. The first two chapters of this thesis engage predominantly in comparative analysis and close reading. In Chapter One, I explore how Shakespeare uses his ancient source material to create his own distinctive Cassius. I aim to show the ways in which he has amplified, appropriated, conflated, omitted, developed, transferred, and (re)-invented his ancient material, particularly Plutarch, to create a unique and compelling Cassius, far more interesting than the caricature (whether saint or, more often, sinner) that exists in his source material.

In Chapter Two, I again engage in comparative analysis to show how Shakespeare drew upon –and occasionally sharply reacted against– contemporary dramatic depictions of Cassius. The use of comparative analysis will show how distinctly different Shakespeare's *Caesar* play was, an important criterion given that by the 1590s the story had been done to death.

In Chapter Three, however, I employ New Historicist approaches in an attempt to place Shakespeare's characterisation of Cassius in its context. Cassius' criticism of an ailing Caesar, for instance, may certainly have resonated with an England worried about the succession crisis and quietly frustrated with an elderly queen who seemed more concerned with her cult of *Gloriana* than the stability of England. Cassius' critique of tyranny, furthermore, certainly felt timely in the last days of Elizabeth's increasingly

authoritarian state. As a famous dissident, it may also not be out of place to assess Cassius in light of the actions of ambitious courtiers like the Earl of Essex.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis, like Caesar's Gaul, is divided into three parts: Shakespeare's ancient sources; his contemporary dramatic models; and his socio-political environment. Shakespeare's characterisation of Cassius, as Chapter One highlights, is not wholly derived from the ancient tradition, which had far less to say about Cassius than about Brutus. As we shall see, Shakespeare evidently 'fleshes out' Cassius, dramatizing and re-inventing crucial episodes that the ancient tradition neglected or only hinted at (for instance, the so-called 'seduction' scene). Shakespeare also sharply reacts to the one-dimensional portrait that emerges in North's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*.⁵⁹ Shakespeare has clearly read beyond this *Life*, perhaps consulting Plutarch's *Crassus*, a work that contains a far more favourable assessment of Cassius. He also appears to have read another Roman historian, Appian, who offers a notably more positive depiction of Cassius than Plutarch's. The result of all this reading is a far more nuanced Cassius than appears in other contemporary Caesar dramas.

In Chapter Two, I will offer a comparative analysis of several prominent European Caesar plays from the sixteenth century. These plays help to contextualise Brutus and Cassius' place in Renaissance drama. They also emphasise what strands of the tradition Shakespeare drew upon, and which he chose to ignore. Indeed, whilst this chapter primarily seeks to demonstrate that Shakespeare was building on a longstanding dramatic tradition when he penned *Julius Caesar*, it also stresses how he put his own

⁵⁹ Pace John Palmer, *Political Characters of Shakespeare* (Macmillan, 1948), 1-64, who held Cassius was a "foil" for Brutus in Shakespeare's play too.

stamp on the story. For instance, though he was certainly influenced by Act Four of Thomas Kyd's *Cornelia*, I argue that he was far less interested in Kyd's Cassius' argumentation than some scholars maintain. Ultimately, Shakespeare incorporates material and sometimes sharply reacts to it.

In Chapter Three, I examine how Shakespeare's social and political milieu affected his composition. I look at a range of issues, for instance, from debate over the succession, Catholic Resistance tracts, the influence of Machiavellian thought on Elizabethan culture. Thus, I hope to show how Shakespeare's environment is reflected in his characterisation of Cassius. To take only one example, Cassius falsifies notes and serves almost like a pamphleteer when he seeks to bring Brutus into the conspirators' fold. Falsifying documents and writing tracts encouraging dissent against a ruler were incredibly potent issues in the 1590s. Moreover, Cassius makes similar arguments to those in Catholic Resistance tracts. Shakespeare's Cassius, I conclude, is very much a product of the Elizabethan England of the 1590s.

I end with my conclusions. I hope to demonstrate that Shakespeare's Cassius can be viewed as an Elizabethan patriot and rebel, flawed, but committed to his compromised belief that Caesar should not rule over the Roman aristocracy. Shakespeare had no intention of making Cassius the villain of *Julius Caesar*; rather, he serves as an imperfect revolutionary.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHARACTERISATION OF CASSIUS IN SHAKESPEARE'S ANCIENT SOURCES

Introduction

This chapter seeks to illuminate how the ancient historical tradition that Shakespeare inherited informed his characterisation of Cassius. It is divided into three sections. The first section (I) examines the historical Cassius' career to demonstrate that he was a complex figure, neither solely a diehard Republican nor a political opportunist. Hopefully, this will allow us to see which elements of Cassius' story received the most attention from the (often prejudiced) ancient historians, whose accounts naturally determined Cassius' Renaissance reception. The second section (II) will examine several non-Plutarchan ancient sources that Shakespeare may have drawn upon, either at first-hand or through intermediate sources (some of these potential intermediate sources, such as Richard Eedes, are discussed further in Chapter Two). Specifically, I will focus on Roman historians like Velleius and Appian, but also on the epic poet Lucan. The third Section (III) examines how Shakespeare has appropriated, conflated, omitted, developed, transferred, and (re)-invented his Plutarchan source material. I will conclude by arguing that Shakespeare's Cassius is more nuanced than his Plutarchan model.

I. The Historical Cassius: A Very Brief Account

Gaius Cassius Longinus was the architect of the conspiracy to assassinate Julius Caesar.¹ Like Brutus, he hailed from a distinguished, albeit relatively new, family;²

¹ Cic. *Fam.* 12.3; Plut. *Brut.* 8.5, App. *B Civ.* 2.113. All dates in this chapter refer to BCE unless otherwise indicated. Cassius is described as *dux partium* "Leader of the cause" in Tac. *Ann.* 16.7.

² Tac. *Ann.* 6.15, describes the family as *antiquum* ("ancient") and *honoratum* ("distinguished").

the first member of his name to attain the consulship, Rome’s highest magistracy, did so in 171 BCE.³ What made his family unusual, however, is that since 171 every male ancestor of Cassius (father, grandfather, and great-grandfather) had attained the consulship.⁴ This must have placed a tremendous burden on Cassius, as he was born into a family that expected him to reach the top of the political ladder.⁵ In addition, his house’s fame was irrevocably intertwined to the *res publica*, the ancient system of timocratic meritocracy that Caesar overthrew when he came in “triumph over Pompey’s blood” (I.i.53).

Born on 2 October 86 BCE, Cassius grew up in a Rome that was increasingly vulnerable to power-hungry aristocratic generals –Sulla, Marius, Pompeius, Crassus, and finally Caesar.⁶ Sulla, perhaps an enemy of Cassius’ father,⁷ had unleashed a pogrom against his political enemies, a brutal act that came to be known as ‘the proscriptions’ (the deed that Antony and Octavius engage in at Act IV, Scene I). It is in the aftermath of these bloody actions that Plutarch furnishes us with a story about a young Cassius and Sulla’s son, Faustus Sulla (Plut. *Brut.* 9.2-4):

ἔξ ἀρχῆς γὰρ <έν>ῆν τῆ φύσει τοῦ Κασσίου δυσμένειά τις καὶ
χαλεπότης πρὸς τὸ γένος τῶν τυράννων, ὡς ἐδήλωσεν ἔτι παῖς
ὦν βαδίζων εἰς ταῦτὸ τῷ τοῦ Σύλλα παιδὶ Φαύστῳ διδασκαλεῖον.
ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς παισὶ μεγαληγορῶν τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ἐπήνει
μοναρχίαν, ὁ δὲ Κάσσιος ἐπαναστὰς κονδύλους ἐνέτριβεν αὐτῷ.

³ The Cassii Longini, the house (or clan) to which Cassius belonged, achieved the consulship seven times, consecutively over four generations: 171, 164, 127, 124, 107, 96, 73: Graham Sumner, *The Orators in Cicero's Brutus: Prosopography and Chronology* (University of Toronto Press, 1973), 50-1. Famously, Brutus traced his ancestry right back to the republic’s founding (509) and L. Junius Brutus, who Cassius refers to at I.ii.160: “there was a Brutus once...”

⁴ Father: Liv. *Per.* 96; Plut. *Crass.* 9.7; grandfather: Front. *Aq.* 1.8; great-grandfather: Liv. 42.29.1; Oros. 4.20.36.

⁵ On the burden of obtaining the consulship, see Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal: Volume 2: Sociological Studies in Roman History* (Cambridge University Press, 1985) 2.55-56, who shows how surprisingly difficult it was for consular families to maintain the consulship successively over several generations.

⁶ Plut. *Brut.* 40.4; Birth in 86: Graham Sumner, “The *Lex Annalis* under Caesar (Continued).” *Phoenix* 25 no. 4 (1971): 357-71.

⁷ Cassius’ father had been a moneyer for Cinna, the enemy of Sulla, in 84: On 84 as the date Cassius was *monetalis*, see Sumner, *Orators in Cicero's Brutus: Prosopography and Chronology* 50; Crawford *RRC* 1.370-1.

βουλομένων δὲ τῶν ἐπιτρόπων τοῦ Φαύστου καὶ οἰκείων ἐπεξιέναι καὶ δικάζεσθαι, Πομπήϊος ἐκώλυσε καὶ συναγαγὼν εἰς ταῦτ' οὓς παῖδας ἀμφοτέρους ἀνέκρινε περὶ τοῦ πράγματος. ἔνθα δὴ λέγεται τὸν Κάσσιον εἰπεῖν· "ἄγε δὴ ὧ φαῦστε, τόλμησον ἐναντίον τούτου φθέγγασθαι τὸν λόγον ἐκεῖνον ἐφ' ᾧ παρωξύνθην, ἵνα σου πάλιν ἐγὼ συντριψῶ τὸ στόμα.

For from the outset there was in the nature of Cassius great hostility and bitterness towards the whole race of tyrants, as he showed when he was still a boy and went to the same school with Faustus the son of Sulla. For when Faustus blustered among the boys and bragged about his father's absolute power, Cassius sprang up and gave him a thrashing. The guardians and relatives of Faustus wished to carry the matter into court, but Pompey forbade it, and after bringing the two boys together, questioned them both about the matter. Then, as the story goes, Cassius said: "Come now, Faustus, have the courage to utter in this man's presence that speech which angered me, and I will smash your face again.⁸

Though likely apocryphal, a similar version of this story is found in the earlier source Valerius Maximus (3.1.3), a popular school text in Elizabethan England, and one that Shakespeare may very well have come across.⁹ Nevertheless, Cassius' longstanding dislike of tyrants is not a point that Shakespeare labours in his play, despite Plutarch's emphasis on it here in his *Life of Brutus*. Provided an anecdote that alleges Cassius demonstrated life-long hostility to tyrants (a trait connected to his family's reputation for *severitas*) Shakespeare chose to ignore the detail, which itself is suggestive. The bard prefers to make Cassius a compromised conspirator, who is as much defined by his jealousy and self-interest as by his Republican fervour (cf. Kyd's Lucanian Cassius, Chapter Two).

⁸ Loeb Classical Library translation. For details, see the Primary Sources section of the Bibliography.

⁹ T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (University of Illinois Press, 1944), I.67, 543; II.576.

As a young man, Cassius and his family nailed his colours to the mast, choosing to study under a renowned Latin teacher, Lucius Staberius Eros, a brave former slave who taught children of families who had been proscribed by Sulla.¹⁰ This sent a clear message that the Cassii did not tolerate would-be tyrants or their associates. Hardly anything else is known about Cassius' early years, other than the fact he finished his education off in Rhodes, a fashionable Roman rhetorical finishing school.¹¹

When Cassius returned to Rome in around 60/59 BC, Rome had undergone a dramatic political transformation: the so-called First Triumvirate. This was the uneasy association of three very powerful men, who had fallen out of senatorial favour and united against the Republic: Crassus, Pompey, and Caesar. The ramifications of this development were clear: now young nobles such as Cassius enjoyed careers that fluctuated at the whims of a few men. It is at this time that Cassius marries Junia Tertia, the sister of Marcus Brutus, and the niece to the dogmatic and intractable Cato Uticensis, a lifelong enemy of Caesar.¹²

Cassius' first known political position was as quaestor of the triumvir Marcus Licinius Crassus, on the ill-fated Parthian expedition.¹³ Unlike Crassus and his son, Cassius managed to survive the infamous battle of Carrhae and its aftermath.¹⁴ Fortuitously, he escaped into Syria, where he rallied the Roman forces.¹⁵ With the remnants of Crassus' army, he held the Roman frontier until he was relieved of his duty, repeatedly repelling Arsacid incursions, as well as one major-scale invasion

¹⁰ Suet. *Gramm.* 13.

¹¹ In terms of rhetoric and philosophy, Athens and Rhodes were the Roman equivalent of Cambridge and Oxford. See generally, A.S. Wilkins, *Roman Education* (Cambridge, 1905).

¹² Tac. *Ann.* 3.76: *Catone avunculo genita.*

¹³ Vell. Pat. 2.46.4; Liv. *Per.* 108; App. *B Civ.* 4.59; Plut. *Crass.* 18; Cass. Dio 40.25.4; [*Auct.*] *de vir. Ill.* 83; Eutrop. 6.18; Fest. *Brev.* 17.

¹⁴ Plut. *Crass.* 23.3-4; cf. Plut. *Crass.* 29.4.

¹⁵ Plut. *Crass.* 29.4; Joseph. *Jud. Ant.* 14.119.

(however, see section on Velleius, p.30-1). If Shakespeare consulted the “Table of the Principallest Things Contained in this Volume”¹⁶ (in the 1595 edition of North’s Plutarch, which he likely used) he would have discovered the references to Cassius here. This is an important point because the portrait of Cassius in the *Life of Crassus* is far more favourable than the one in the *Brutus*.¹⁷ Cassius leaps off the pages as the only officer with any military and political nous (*Crass.* 20.2):

But, nevertheless, Cassius once more had a conference with Crassus, and advised him above all things to recuperate his forces in one of the garrisoned cities, until he should get some sure information about the enemy; but if not this, then to advance to Seleucia along the river. For in this way the transports would keep them abundantly supplied with provisions by putting in at their successive encampments, and, by having the river to prevent their being surrounded, they would always fight their enemies on even terms and face to face.

When he returned to Rome, civil war loomed between Caesar and Pompey. Elected as a tribune of the plebeians,¹⁸ Cassius couriered messages for Pompey, although he did not seem overly eager to join the cause of the Republicans in Greece, where they had established their Republican headquarters. He discussed the matter with Cicero,¹⁹ who was also reluctant to join Pompeius and the Republicans in Greece. In the end, Cassius found himself in command of the so-called Syrian naval fleet, charged with patrolling Sicily and the west coast of Italy. In short, he was stationed in an area as far removed from the centre of battle as geographically and aristocratically permissible.²⁰ This is important as it shows he was not always a diehard Republican.

¹⁶ E. A. J. Honigmann, “Shakespeare’s Plutarch” *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter, 1959), pp. 25-33: 30. Honigmann points out that this edition of North’s Plutarch even cross-references the *Lives of Brutus* and *Crassus*.

¹⁷ Plutarch’s *Brutus* had been a principal source for Renaissance dramatists in earlier times. Cf. Chapter Two, especially on Muret.

¹⁸ Tribune: *Cic. Att.* 7.21.2.

¹⁹ *Cic. Fam.* 15.15.1.

²⁰ *Caes. B Civ.* 3.5.3. As this passage demonstrates, Caesar publicly commended Cassius’ conduct in the war, despite Cassius fighting against him.

After Caesar's triumph at Pharsalus, Cassius reluctantly decided to seek the victor's clemency.²¹ Since Caesar's victory against the Republicans was far from assured at this point, and he suffered a significant and famous setback in Egypt, where he was forced to swim vigorously to safety (Plut. *Caes.* 49.7; cf. Caesar in the Tiber: I.ii.111), Cassius' decision to abandon the cause of the Republicans was a potentially treasonous move, despite the assurances of his uncle Cato that all those who wanted to seek pardon from Caesar were free to do so.²² Indeed, the guilt and wretchedness that Cassius feels at Caesar's victory –and his eventual acquiescence in it– are brilliantly evinced in Kyd's *Cornelia* (Cf. Chapter Two). Shakespeare realised this, too; his Cassius feels emasculated (“womanish”: I.iii.85) in *Julius Caesar*.²³

Having been made Caesar's legate, Cassius petitioned him to forgive many others who had been on the *wrong* side, perhaps even prostrating himself before the dictator in the process (as he does in the play just before the assassination: III.i.61-2).²⁴ Political retirement followed, he adopted Epicureanism,²⁵ and whiled away his time in oratorical and literary pursuits.²⁶ When Caesar returned triumphant from Spain, however, Cassius returned to politics and stood for the urban praetorship.²⁷ Here he was to be disappointed: Caesar appointed Brutus to the prestigious post, all the while acknowledging that Cassius was the superior candidate (the significance of

²¹ Cic. *Fam.* 15.15, *Att.* 11.15.2; Plut. *Cat. Min.* 55.3. The act may have been considered desertion by the Republican die-hards who fought on.

²² Plut. *Cat. Min.* 55.3.

²³ On masculinity and femininity in the play, see Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (Routledge, 1997) 77-109.

²⁴ Cic. *Fam.* 15.15.2: *quae si fuisset, eandem clementiam experta esset Africa quam cognovit Asia, quam etiam Achaia te, ut opinor, ipso legato ac deprecatore.* (“Had that been forthcoming, Africa would have experienced the clemency, which Asia came to know, as did Achaia also, whose ambassador and *intercessor* [my emphasis] was, I believe, none other than yourself”). The word *deprecator* implies supplication, perhaps kneeling and prostration. See D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero: Epistulae ad Familiares* (Cambridge, 1977), 2.310, who provides the translation. Cf. *JC* III.i.61-2: “Pardon, Caesar; Caesar, pardon! / As low as to thy foot doth Cassius fall...”

²⁵ Epicureanism: Cic. *Fam.* 15.16, 15.18, esp. *Fam.* 15.19.2-3; Plut. *Brut.* 39.6.

²⁶ Cic. *Fam.* 15.16, 15.18.

²⁷ Praetorship: Plut. *Brut.* 7.1-5. The Urban Praetorship was a position akin to that of deputy prime minister.

Shakespeare's omission of this episode is discussed below). After this setback, Cassius began conspiring against Caesar, and organised and recruited men for an assassination attempt.

The historical Cassius was an ambivalent man. He lacked the constancy and conviction of Cato, and the *humanitas* of Brutus; he did not possess the intellectual brilliance and political shrewdness of Caesar, nor the oratorical prowess of Cicero; and yet, when all is said and done, Cassius stood for an ideal greater than himself, no matter how tainted that stance was by his own personal animosity towards Caesar.

II: Non-Plutarchan Source Material

Shakespeare penned *Julius Caesar* at a time when there was a tremendous influx of (and vernacular translations of) ancient masterpieces into England. In the second half of the sixteenth century, Arthur Golding's translation of Caesar (1565), W[illiam] B[arker's] (?) Appian (1578), and Sir Thomas North's Plutarch (1579), to name only a few, had whetted the reading public's appetite for Roman history and literature.²⁸ By 1590, according to Paulina Kewes, there was a "proliferation" of ancient originals and English translations, as well as new editions of previous translations, such as North's Plutarch –the second edition of which (reprinted in 1595), Shakespeare drew upon. There can be little doubt that the history and literature of ancient Rome had captured the imagination of Elizabethan England, especially the learned, reading public. Shakespeare, a voracious reader, was clearly affected by the appearance of some of the greatest intellectual and artistic treasures of ancient Greece and Rome.²⁹

²⁸ Paulina Kewes, "Henry Savile's Tacitus and the Politics of Roman History in Late Elizabethan England," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2011): 518. See especially, Robert Cummings and Stuart Gillespie, "Translations from Greek and Latin Classics 1550–1700: A Revised Bibliography," *Translations and Literature* 18, no. 1 (2009): 1-42.

²⁹ Indeed, arguably reading Plutarch may have shaped his mature dramatic art more than any other work: Horst Zander, "Introduction", *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays* (Routledge, 2005): 4-5.

Any study of his characterization of Cassius, then, must first address the ancient tradition he utilised, which of course would colour his understanding. Yet this raises an important methodological issue. For a long time, scholars have debated which ancient sources Shakespeare may have consulted.³⁰ Rather than be impeded and distracted by this intractable and unending debate, it may be more beneficial to paint a brief picture of the *kind* of information available to Shakespeare first. The danger of this approach, of course, is to imply that Shakespeare read *everything*. This is far from my aim. I wish only to show the variety and volume of ancient material flooding into England in Shakespeare's time.

It is not out of place, I hope, to offer some brief remarks on Shakespeare's education, which will establish the fundamental importance of the classics in the Elizabethan curriculum.³¹ Though he had not attended university³² as Marlowe had (he probably left school at around the age of 14), Shakespeare would have been thoroughly grounded in the classics, especially Latin grammar and rhetoric.³³ One of the reasons *Julius Caesar* is so ambivalent,³⁴ perhaps, is that schoolboys would be taught the Peripatetic rhetorical practice of arguing both sides of an argument, a drill as popular in the Renaissance as it had been in antiquity.³⁵ Trained to think about the positive and negative aspects of an issue or historical figure, Shakespeare could push beyond the

³⁰ For a detailed assessment of the sources used in *Julius Caesar*, see T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (University of Illinois, 1944); Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 5 (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957).; Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (Routledge, 1977); Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1977); and especially, Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources* (Bloomsbury, 2001).

³¹ John W. Velz, "Shakespeare's Early Education," *Discovery: Research and Scholarship at the University of Texas at Austin* 12, no. 1 (1991): 24-9.

³² In fairness, some scholars have mooted the possibility: Robert F Fleissner, "Shakespeare at Oxford?," *PMLA* (2006): 1743-44.

³³ See generally, Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

³⁴ Mildred E. Hartsock, "The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*," *PMLA* (1966): 56-62.

³⁵ Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: 1977) 16; cf. Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Politics: A Contextual Introduction* (Continuum, 2009) vii.

superficially ‘black-and-white’ worldview of the Morality Plays and their stock characters.³⁶

What curriculum of ancient authors would Shakespeare have studied? The question does not invite as much speculation as one might first think. Terence and Cicero, for instance, were staples.³⁷ Thomas Elyot, author of the standard handbook on the education of children in sixteenth century Tudor England, *The Governor*, drew heavily on Erasmus’ model curriculum, *De ratione studii*.³⁸ The importance of all this is that, by the middle of the sixteenth century, humanist syllabi had established themselves even in the humbler grammar schools.³⁹ At his school in Stratford, then, Shakespeare would have enjoyed a selection of important Roman writers, perhaps Caesar, Seneca,⁴⁰ and Livy.⁴¹ Yet even if he had not read many ancient originals, either widely or deeply, by the 1590s there were translations of a range of classical authors and (notably) historians.⁴²

One early Roman source that clearly had a profound impact on Renaissance thinking about Brutus and Cassius was Velleius Paterculus. As we shall see in Chapter Two, Velleius was a crucial source for Richard Eedes when he composed *Caesar*

³⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, (W.W. Norton, 2004), 34: "Shakespeare had as much to free himself from the old morality plays as to adapt them".

³⁷ Stefan Daniel Keller, *The Development of Shakespeare's Rhetoric: A Study of Nine Plays* (Tübingen, 2009) 18; Quentin Skinner and Luc Borot, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 2 ed., (Cambridge, 2004) 19-23, on the Tudor school curriculum.

³⁸ Skinner and Borot, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 20. Elyot, as he himself makes clear, was also indebted to Quintilian, who had also outlined a model curriculum of authors in the tenth book of his influential *Institutio Oratoria*.

³⁹ Skinner and Borot, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 23.

⁴⁰ Seneca’s influence on Shakespeare is well attested, for example: Brian Arkins, "Heavy Seneca: His Influence on Shakespeare's Tragedies," *Classics Ireland* 2 (1995): 1-16.

⁴¹ Livy appears to have been at Shakespeare’s fingertips in the composition of several plays such as *Coriolanus* and *Titus Andronicus*: Anne Barton, "Livy, Machiavelli, and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985); Ronald Berman, "A Note on the Motives of Marcus Brutus," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23 (1972); Jack D'Amico, "The Politics of Madness: Junius Brutus in Machiavelli and Shakespeare," *Midwest Quarterly* 30 (1989) 405-22.

⁴² Kewes, "Henry Savile's Tacitus and the Politics of Roman History in Late Elizabethan England," 515-20.

Interfectus, a play Shakespeare may have known.⁴³ Though Eedes clearly admired Velleius' incisive writing, classicists have not been so kind. One has gone so far as to describe the imperial (new regime) historian as a "toady".⁴⁴ More importantly, Velleius' uncle had served as a *subscriptor* (prosecutor) at Cassius' trial for the murder of Caesar.⁴⁵ Like his uncle Capito, the Tiberian historian is just as prosecutorial in his treatment of Cassius. To take a single, albeit sensational, example, Cassius is first described by Velleius as the author of a "most atrocious" deed (*atrocissimi auctor facinoris*), lest his readers should forget.⁴⁶ This comment comes as Velleius describes the aftermath of the infamous Battle of Carrhae (53 BCE). Other historians praise Cassius for saving the remnants of Crassus' army and for repelling a Parthian invasion; Velleius refuses to credit Cassius with the impressive defence of Syria, which he instead puts down to a fortunate series of events (*felici rerum eventu*).⁴⁷ Even here, then, at a noted career highpoint, Cassius is deprived of meritorious conduct.

His personality comes under fire too. Unlike the man he slew, Velleius suggests Cassius despised *clementia* (clemency), which was *repugnans naturae suae* ("repugnant to his nature").⁴⁸ And in a set-piece comparison of Cassius and Brutus, Velleius constructs an artificial antithesis between the two men, which allows him to damn by faint praise the former.⁴⁹ A not insignificant amount of Velleius' details find

⁴³ On Shakespeare's possible acquaintance with Richard Eedes, see the section on the latter in Chapter Two.

⁴⁴ Tyrrell and Purser (1933) VI².xciv. *The Correspondence of M. Tullius Cicero*. VII vols. Eds. R.Y. Tyrrell and L.C. Purser, (Hoges, Figgis, 1885-1901).

⁴⁵ Vell. Pat. 2.69.5 with Sumner, *The Orators in Cicero's Brutus: Prosopography and Chronology*, 264. cf. Plut. *Brut.* 27; Aug. *RG.* 2. Elizabeth Rawson, "Cassius and Brutus: The Memory of the Liberators," (Oxford, 1991) 493, concluded that Velleius was "basically hostile" to Cassius.

⁴⁶ Vell. Pat. 2.46.4.

⁴⁷ Vell. Pat. 2.46.4.

⁴⁸ Vell. Pat. 2.69.6. *Contra Cic. Fam.* 15.19.4. The ancients believed that everyone, even the worst man, contained minor elements of good. Cf. Vell. Pat. 2.68.5 on Caesar's unusual harshness. Yet as this thesis will endeavour to show, the reality was not so black and white.

⁴⁹ Vell. Pat. 2.72.2.

their way into the Renaissance tradition concerning Brutus and Cassius. Here is his comparison (*synkresis*) of the two men (2.72.2):

Fuit autem dux Cassius melior quanto uir Brutus: e quibus Brutum amicum habere malles, inimicum magis timeres Cassium; in altero maior uis, in altero uirtus: qui si uicissent, quantum rei publicae interfuit Caesarem potius habere quam Antonium principem, tantum retulisset habere Brutum quam Cassium.

Cassius was as much the better general as Brutus was the better man. Of the two, one would rather have Brutus as a friend, but would stand more in fear of Cassius as an enemy. The one had more vigour, the other more virtue. As it was better for the state to have Caesar rather than Antony as emperor, so, had Brutus and Cassius been the conquerors, it would have been better for it to be ruled by Brutus rather than by Cassius.⁵⁰

As Chapter Two shows, Richard Eedes basically incorporates this *synkresis* into his epilogue, barely paraphrasing the Latin when he translates it. This is significant because Velleius uses Cassius as an unwitting foil for Brutus. Cassius is censured, whereas Brutus is positioned as a man of exemplary character. Cassius, therefore, serves as the “villain” of the Republicans: Brutus has virtue, whereas Cassius has vigour (*vis*), a double-edged Latin word that has negative connotations, including uncontrollable violence.⁵¹ Too much *vis* was not a good thing. These attributes will dog the reputation of Cassius throughout the Renaissance.⁵²

Brutus’ importance to the cause of the Republicans is magnified at Cassius’ expense, a trend that began in antiquity itself.⁵³ Many later writers, who lavish praise on Brutus, adopt Velleius’ unfavourable assessment of Cassius. And so, many of Brutus’ faults were ascribed to Cassius, leaving the former an almost irreproachable

⁵⁰ Vell. Pat. 2.72.2. Loeb Translation (For details, see Bibliography).

⁵¹ P.G. Ware ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1982) s.v. “vis” 2a.

⁵² Similarly to Velleius, Valerius Maximus describes Cassius as a traitor to the state (1.8.8). He censures the tyrannicide for his ruthless treatment of Rhodes, which he described as *rapacissimi victoris insolentiam* (1.5.8). And he several times calls Cassius a parricide (1.8.8, 3.1.3, 6.8.4).

⁵³ See the seminal article of Elizabeth Rawson, “Cassius and Brutus: The Memory of the Liberators.” *Roman Culture and Society: Collected Papers* (Oxford, 1991) 484-507.

symbol of Republicanism.⁵⁴ Thus Velleius handed down an asymmetrical and unfair assessment of Cassius to the Renaissance, which is clearly reflected in much of the literature and drama concerned with these symbolic conspirators. Shakespeare, however, does not paint his characters in such broad strokes. Indeed, his Cassius is not solely defined by his *vis* (which is certainly on display in the early parts of the tragedy: I.ii.35-175), quite the opposite. At key moments in the play he is passive and deferential to Brutus (e.g., on Cicero: 2.1.159; Antony: 2.1.190-1; and Caesar's funeral: 3.1.157), and this deference compromises –if not dooms– the cause of the conspirators.

If Shakespeare had dug a little deeper into Roman military history, he may have come across Sextus Iulius Frontinus.⁵⁵ In 1539, Sir Richard Morison had published an English translation of this important war manual, which he entitled *The stratagemes, sleightes and policies of warre*.⁵⁶ Notably, as Morison's translation reveals to his readers, Frontinus draws on material that was favourable to Cassius, probably the writings of his devoted lieutenant, Messala Corvinus, who was with Cassius at the battle of Philippi (*Strat.* 4.2.1):

In the tyme of ciuyl warre, whan Brutus and Cassius hoste shuld take their iourney togyther throughe Macedonia, and Brutus came fyrst to a ryuer, in whiche he must nedes make a bridge to passe ouer: yet Cassius army both in makynge of the brydge, and spedy passynge ouer, out went Brutus. The whiche vygour or strength of knyghtly discipline, brought to passe, that not only in

⁵⁴ Dante, of course, is a famous exception. Dante consigned both Brutus and Cassius to the same fate as Judas Iscariot in the *Inferno* of his *Divine Comedy* –that is, to be eternally devoured in Satan's mouths (*Inf.* 34.61-7). On Brutus' post-antique reception, see generally M.L. Clarke, *The Noblest Roman: Marcus Brutus and his Reputation*, (Thames and Hudson, 1981).

⁵⁵ Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition* (Ashgate, 2010) 91, argues that war manuals were relatively rare before the last two decades of the sixteenth century, at which time they "invaded the printing market."

⁵⁶ Cummings and Gillespie, "Translations from Greek and Latin Classics 1550–1700: A Revised Bibliography," 15.

warkes, but also in the chiefe poynt of warre, Cassius and his men, excelled Brutus and his.

[When, during the Civil War, the armies of Brutus and Cassius were marching together through Macedonia, the story goes that the army of Brutus arrived first at a stream which had to be bridged, but that the troops of Cassius were the first in constructing the bridge and in effecting a passage. This rigorous discipline made Cassius' men superior to those of Brutus not only in constructing military works, but also in the general conduct of the war.]⁵⁷

Cassius, then, the ancient tradition agrees, was a much better disciplinarian and general than Brutus.⁵⁸ He was strict and imperious; no one questioned his orders; and his troops were better trained.⁵⁹ The importance of this tradition of Cassius as a better general relates to the quarrel scene, in which Cassius claims he is a soldier that is “older in practice, abler than yourself to make conditions” (IV.iii.30-2).⁶⁰ Brutus takes offense to this suggestion:

You say you are a better soldier:
Let it appear so; make your vaunting true,
And it shall please me well: for mine own part,
I shall be glad to learn of noble men. (IV.iii.53-56).

Brutus' self-righteous indignation falls flat; as Barbara L. Parker has noted, Brutus begins to function and think like Caesar.⁶¹ There is an irony here for Shakespeare's learned audience, who would have been well aware that Brutus paled in comparison to Cassius as a soldier. Cassius, in an attempt to diffuse the situation, claims he had said “elder” soldier not “better” (IV.iii.58), though this clarification is not strictly

⁵⁷ Loeb Translation. For details, see Bibliography.

⁵⁸ Festus (*Brev.* 17) describes Cassius as a *vir strenuus* (perhaps derived from Livy), whose deeds were gained *summa cum admiratione*.

⁵⁹ See Appian's similar account below: p.37.

⁶⁰ John W. Velz, "Undular Structure in *Julius Caesar*, *The Modern Language Review* 66 (1971): 21-30, on claims to age and experience falling flat in *Julius Caesar*. See also note 62.

⁶¹ Barbara L. Parker, *Plato's Republic and Shakespeare's Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works*. (University of Delaware Press 2004) 84-86.

true.⁶² Of course, Shakespeare also exploits the irony of the fact that the sagacious Cassius, with his reputation as the better soldier and general, will make a devastating, elementary blunder that will seal the fate of the Republicans (V.iii.21-3).⁶³ Another Shakespearean appropriation is to emphasise that Cassius' troops (which the ancient tradition agrees were better trained than Brutus') begin to show mutinous behaviour, which emphasises the extent of Cassius' reversal of fortune (V.iii.1-4 cf. Plut. *Brut* 28 [North]):

O, look, Titinius, look, the villains fly!
Myself have to mine own turned enemy.
This ensign here of mine was turning back;
I slew the coward and did take it from him.

Shakespeare's Cassius, then, has suffered the worst fate that could befall a Roman general: his troops have mutinied on the battlefield and have left his camp exposed, as the ruthless Mark Antony descends upon it (V.iii.9-11). Titinius informs him that Brutus "gave the word too early" (V.iii.5); yet again, therefore, Cassius' deference to Brutus, this time on military strategy (something that he was more knowledgeable about), has ended in another crippling mistake. Shakespeare heightens the drama of this episode to reinforce the fact that even perceptive figures are susceptible to errors of judgment and reversals of fortune.

Arguably the most important ancient source Shakespeare referred to after Plutarch was Appian.⁶⁴ That Shakespeare knew and drew upon Appian is probable if

⁶² Arguments about age and abilities also fall flat in *Julius Caesar*: Raymond Chapman, "I Have Seen More Years Than You': Youth and Age in *Julius Caesar*," *Aligarh Journal of English Studies* 17 (1995): 1-11.

⁶³ Barbara L. Parker, "The Monstrous Apparition': The Role of Perception in *Julius Caesar*," *Ball State University Forum* 16, no. 3 (1975): 70-77. Parker notes that the "Great Observer" Cassius becomes dependent on the eyes of others—that is, Titinius and Pindarus, and mistakenly fears the battle is lost as a result.

⁶⁴ On Shakespeare's use of Appian, see M.G. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and their Sources* (Macmillan, 1925) 647-8, Appendices C and D; cf. E. Schanzer, *Shakespeare's Appian*, (Liverpool, 1956); Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources* (London, 2001) 15-

far from conclusive. Appian's perspective on Cassius is notably different from that of Plutarch. Indeed, in Plutarch Cassius serves predominantly as a foil for Brutus; but in Appian, he is a fully independent historical figure of notable military prowess. It is likely, therefore, that Shakespeare found in Appian details about Cassius that he could use to refocus the vague figure in Plutarch's *Brutus*.

In 1578, Henrie Bynniman published an English translation probably penned by William Barker.⁶⁵ Entitled *An Ancient Historie and Exquisite Chronicle of the Roman Warres, both Civile and Foren*, it more than treated the period covered in *Julius Caesar*. It was well received by the learned public. Indeed, Appian was well known and respected (far more than at present) by educated Elizabethans. Take, for instance, Lawrence Humphrey. In 1563, he wrote that the "greatest" Greek historians were "Plutarke, Appian, and Thucydides" in that order.⁶⁶ Today, that order would be reversed –and Appian and Plutarch would be entirely absent. So for Appian to be regarded as the second most important historian is extremely important for anyone interested in Elizabethan Roman drama.

Appian's writing would certainly have appealed to Shakespeare: he did not, necessarily, let the finer points of truth get in the way of a dramatic flourish.⁶⁷ His version of Antony's funeral oration, for instance, is laced with theatrical elements (the crowd is like a "chorus"; Antony deploys props to incense them; and, at the climax of his speech, a mechanical crane is used to lift up a wax bust of the dead Caesar before

20; Warren Cherniak, *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge, 2011) 9. Some, however, maintain that it is doubtful whether Shakespeare knew Appian: M. Lyons and H. C. Montgomery, "Friends, Romans, Countrymen," *Classical Bulletin* 44, no. 3 (1968): 37-39.

⁶⁵ Cummings and Gillespie, "Translations from Greek and Latin Classics 1550-1700: A Revised Bibliography." *Translation and Literature* 18, no. 1 (2009) 7; Bullough (1957) V.156-59. I accept the attribution of William Barker given his acknowledged translation of Xenophon.

⁶⁶ Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources* (London, 2001) 16.

⁶⁷ For the best modern treatment of Appian, see Alain Gowing, *The Triumviral Narratives of Appian and Dio* (Michigan, 1992).

the mourners).⁶⁸ It seems likely that Shakespeare recognised the dramatic potential of Appian's account, though he modifies certain details.⁶⁹

The first time Appian mentions Cassius in his *Historiae Romanae* he writes in error. He places Cassius in the Hellespont after Caesar's decisive victory over Pompey at Pharsalus in 48 BC. Historically, Cassius could not have been in this place at that time; he was off the coast of Sicily. Nevertheless, Appian thinks he is writing about Cassius, and so there is little difference. In WB's words (shown here in Black Letter):

**that he should so afray *Cassius* a valiant man, comming vppon
him with seauentie Gallies vtterly vnprouided, that he durste
not medle with him. For as cowardly as he did now yeeld vnto
him vpo the Sea, so after did he as cruelly kyl him whē he was
Lord of all at Rome.**

Appian's assessment immediately accentuates what he believes are the contradictions in Cassius's character. He is described as a valiant man (in Appian's Greek he is described as "most warlike [a fierce soldier]": *πολεμικώτατον*), but also cowardly and cruel. In short, Cassius is brave but cruel.

Appian may ultimately censure Cassius for his leading role in Caesar's assassination, but he also preserves material complimentary to the tyrannicide.⁷⁰ The historian's account is useful then, inasmuch as it can serve as a counterweight to Plutarch's overly effusive assessment of Brutus, which Shakespeare seems to have grasped. While Velleius and Plutarch ultimately diminish Cassius, Appian's portrait is

⁶⁸ On the theatrical nature of Appian's version of Antony's funeral oration, see George Kennedy, "Antony's Speech at Caesar's Funeral," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 54, no. 2 (1968): 99-106.; MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (Macmillan, 1925) 647; Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources* (London: 2001) 18.

⁶⁹ George Kennedy, "Antony's Speech at Caesar's Funeral," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 54, no. 2 (1968): 99-106, notes the differences between the accounts of Appian and Shakespeare.

⁷⁰ For the *locus classicus*, see App. *B Civ.* 1.4, 2.111. I use the term "tyrannicide" to distinguish the historical personage from the literary figure and symbol.

far more favourable.⁷¹ Cassius, Appian concludes, was wholly focused on the war against the triumvirs, like a gladiator facing his antagonist:

αἴτιον δὲ τούτων ἦν αὐτὸ τὸ Βροῦτον ἐπιεικῆ καὶ φιλόφρονα ἐς ἅπαντας εἶναι καὶ ἀνόμοιον Κασσίῳ, αὐστηρῶ καὶ ἀρχικῶ περὶ πάντα γεγεννημένῳ· ὅθεν ἐκείνῳ μὲν ἐξ ἐπιτάγματος ὑπήκουον, οὐ παραστρατηγοῦντες οὐδὲ τὰς αἰτίας μανθάνοντες οὐδὲ εὐθύνοντες, ὅτε καὶ μάθοιεν... ἐν δὲ ταῖς φροντίσι καὶ πόνοις ὁ μὲν Κάσσιος ἀμεταστρεπί, καθάπερ ἐς τὸν ἀγωνιστὴν οἱ μονομαχοῦντες, ἐς μόνον τὸν πόλεμον ἀφείρα· ὁ δὲ Βροῦτος, ὅπῃ γίγνοιτο, καὶ φιλοθεάμων ἦν καὶ φιλήκοος, ἅτε καὶ φιλοσοφῆσας οὐκ ἀγεννῶς.

Brutus himself was the cause of these murmurs, being of a gentle and kindly disposition toward all – not like Cassius, who had been austere and imperious in every way, for which reason the army obeyed his orders promptly, not interfering with his authority, and not criticising them when they had learned them...In that which related to their cares and labours Cassius gave his attention strictly to war, like a gladiator to his antagonist. Brutus, wherever he might be, wanted to see and hear everything, having been a philosopher of no mean note.⁷²

Shakespeare's Cassius is also thoroughly committed to his cause. More than any other character, he is set on bringing the conspiracy to fruition, even if he has to do so himself: "Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius" (I.iii.90). This is important as Plutarch does not stress the energy with which Cassius orchestrated the conspiracy. Appian's Cassius, on the other hand, is frenetic, busy relentlessly preparing for war; and most noticeably, in contrast to the apathetic Brutus, he is restless. This is the man that Caesar fears in Act I, Scene ii – the man who does not "sleep a-nights" (I.ii.194). Cassius is a zealot, a person who resents a "greater" man than himself, as Caesar says (I.ii.210). Cassius, therefore, is a man completely focused on his mission, rather than Brutus, who is easily distracted by philosophical quandaries (consider I.ii.45-48). Ultimately, Appian nuances Cassius and provides a counterweight to Plutarch's predominantly dismissive characterisation. Shakespeare, I believe, incorporates Appian's details

⁷¹ App. *B Civ.* 4.123.

⁷² App. *B Civ.* 4.123, 4.133. Appian is evidently an important source for the author of *Caesar's Revenge*, a work scholars are confident Shakespeare knew or consulted (cf. Chapter Two).

(whether derived at first-hand or through intermediate sources) about Cassius' restless energy and commitment to the cause of the Republicans.

Lucan is another source who may have influenced Shakespeare's Cassius. As Chapter Two demonstrates, Lucan's *Pharsalia* had a tremendous influence on the work of Shakespeare's contemporary Thomas Kyd. Yet it is difficult to ascertain whether Shakespeare consulted the poem for the composition of *Julius Caesar*. In English, Christopher Marlowe's line for line translation of Lucan's first book was not published until 1600, the year after *Julius Caesar* opened.⁷³ Nevertheless, it is possible that Shakespeare had read the *Pharsalia* in the original, in part or in full. Indeed, at least one scholar identifies echoes of Lucan in *Julius Caesar*, and concludes that Shakespeare consulted the epic.⁷⁴

One of the most compelling Lucanian echoes involves a uniquely Shakespearean point in the tragedy: the storm scene (I.iii). When Cassius mentions to Casca that he has bared his chest to the "thunder-stone" (I.iii.49), Shakespeare seems to be drawing upon (and refashioning) Lucanian imagery and ideas. Cassius' irreverent questioning of the heavens is similar to a passage in Lucan's *Pharsalia* connected to Cassius (7.447-60),⁷⁵ in which Lucan sardonically asks why Jove did not strike Caesar down at Pharsalus, instead leaving the deed up to Cassius (7.447-51):

*Mentimur regnare Iovem. Spectabit ab alto
Aethere Thessalicas, teneat cum fulmina, caedes?
Scilicet ipse petet Pholoen, petet ignibus Oeten,
Immeritaeque nemus Rhodopes, pinusque Mimantis:
Cassius hoc potius feriet caput?*

Jove is no king. Blind chance sweeps the world along.
Shall Jupiter, though he grasps the thunder-bolt, look
On idly from high heaven at the slaughter of Pharsalia.

⁷³ Robert Cummings and Stuart Gillespie. "Translations from Greek and Latin Classics 1550-1700: A Revised Bibliography." *Translation and Literature* 18, no. 1 (2009): 23.

⁷⁴ Clifford J. Ronan, "Lucanic Omens in *Julius Caesar*," *Comparative Drama* 22, no. 2, (1988): 138-144; Clifford J. Ronan, "Lucan and the Self-Incised Voids of *Julius Caesar*," *Comparative Drama* 22, no. 3 (1988): 215-226.

⁷⁵ Clifford J. Ronan, "Lucanic Omens in *Julius Caesar*," 140.

Shall he forsooth aim his fires at Pholoe and Oeta, at
The pines of Mimas and the innocent forest of Rhodope,
And shall Cassius, rather than he, strike Caesar down.

Ben Jonson recognised the significance of this passage in his *Catiline*.⁷⁶ And Clifford Ronan argues that Shakespeare also appreciated its importance. Shakespeare, he argues, cleverly mingles classical allusions to expose “the moral dysfunctioning of Jove’s heavenly lightning.”⁷⁷ Cassius should be struck down for blasphemy; yet he, like Caesar at Pharsalus, remained unharmed. Providential justice, therefore, as Cassius demonstrates so brazenly, is an uneven business in Shakespeare’s Rome.

III. Plutarch

By 1599, Shakespeare was already well acquainted with a source that would not only be instrumental in the composition of *Julius Caesar*, but also every Roman play (arguably every ancient play) he wrote thereafter.⁷⁸ This source, of course, was Sir Thomas North’s *Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*. The first edition of North’s translation, which was itself a translation of Jacques Amyot’s French edition (based on the original Greek),⁷⁹ was published in 1579. A second, expanded edition followed in 1595, around the time Shakespeare appears to have

⁷⁶ Ben Jonson, *Catiline* III.i.237: “Hath Jove no thunder?”.

⁷⁷ Clifford J Ronan, “Lucanic Omens in *Julius Caesar*,” 141. In Greek mythology, Capaneus was struck down by lightning for questioning Zeus’ power. Yet Lucan notes that Jupiter seems absent at Pharsalus, when he should have struck down Caesar. Shakespeare refashions it so that Cassius too is spared by the wielder of the thunder-stone.

⁷⁸ On the importance of Plutarch to Shakespeare, see Gordon Braeden, “Shakespeare, Plutarch, and the Alpha Males,” In *Shakespeare and the Classics* (Cambridge, 2004) 188-205. Cf. Zander *op. cit.* note 29.

⁷⁹ C. M. Eccles, “Shakespeare and Jacques Amyot: Sonnet LV and *Coriolanus*.” *Notes & Queries* 12.3 (1965): 100-2, argues that verbal echoes in both Sonnet 55 and *Coriolanus* indicate that Shakespeare had read at least the forward to the Frenchman’s Plutarchan translation.

obtained a copy.⁸⁰ For *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare appears to have consulted the following lives: *Brutus*, *Antony*, *Caesar*, and *Cicero*, perhaps *Crassus*.⁸¹

North's *Plutarch* furnished Shakespeare with a cornucopia of historical information and character portraits. Many of the major figures in *Julius Caesar*—Antony, Brutus, Caesar, even the minor Cicero—were the subjects of hefty Plutarchan biographies. Shakespeare, then, could plunder and appropriate to his heart's content.⁸² And yet, in the case of Cassius (never the subject of any known ancient biography), who in terms of words spoken is the second most prominent character in the play, Shakespeare had very little information or anecdotes to hand, as has been observed repeatedly by scholars.⁸³ Plenty has been written about the importance of Plutarch as Shakespeare's chief source for *Julius Caesar*.⁸⁴ However, less has been said about Cassius' characterization in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, and the implications for Shakespeare.⁸⁵ Therefore, it will be useful to examine some passages Shakespeare will have read and discuss how he either adapted and/or appropriated the material.

⁸⁰ Evidence from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would seem to indicate that Shakespeare was in possession of a copy of North's Plutarch by the mid-1590s: see note 81 below for bibliography.

⁸¹ E.A.J. Honigmann, "Shakespeare's Plutarch," *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter, 1959), 25-33: 30. Honigmann points out that this edition of North's Plutarch even cross-references the *Lives of Brutus* and *Crassus*. Cf. T.S. Dorsch, *Julius Caesar* (Methuen, 1961) xiii.

⁸² Ching-min Sun, "A Study of Shakespeare's Departures from Plutarch in the Characterizations of Caesar and Brutus in *Julius Caesar*," *Bulletin of the College of Arts* (1968): 441-504. Sun provides a detailed scene-by-scene source analysis of the play.

⁸³ Vikram Chopra, "The Last of all the Romans—a Case for Cassius" 222-3: "It is interesting to note that from no more than an outline in Plutarch, Cassius becomes in Shakespeare a full-blown Elizabethan figure: friend, patriot, rebel, egotist or a self-sacrificing ascetic evoking a mixed admiration from different characters and critics." Frederick Samuel Boas, *The Works of Thomas Kyd* (Clarendon Press, 1901), lxxxiii: "The character of Cassius as revealed here, and in the interview with Casca, I. iii. 41-130—a character of which only the barest hints are suggested by Plutarch—has its exact prototype in the Cassius of Garnier-Kyd, fiery yet shrewd, envious of Caesar, yet full of a genuinely patriotic passion for liberty."

⁸⁴ T.S. Dorsch, *Julius Caesar* (Methuen, 1961) xiii; David Daniell, *The Arden Shakespeare: Julius Caesar* (Arden, 1998) 79, speaks of Plutarch as Shakespeare's "prime source".

⁸⁵ S.S. Agarwalla, *Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (Atlantic Publishers, 1995) 37, remarks that Cassius is depicted as "nobler" in Shakespeare than in Plutarch.

From the outset of Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, Cassius serves as a foil for the eponymous hero. Whilst Brutus is noble and enlightened, Cassius, at least in North's translation, is considered "cruel", "violent", and, most importantly, not so "well given" (Plut. *Brut.* 1.4). Shakespeare, who knew Plutarch intimately, probably recalled this summary of Cassius' character when he ironically has Antony dismiss Caesar's concerns about the "lean and hungry" Cassius (I.ii.206-7):

Fear him not, Caesar; he's not dangerous.

He is a noble Roman, and well given.

Shakespeare may have expected his learned audience to pick up the irony of Antony's statement. But just in case the point was missed, Caesar's final words in the scene indicate that he suspects that Antony, who many modern critics accuse of naiveté for the above words,⁸⁶ holds a different view to the one expressed: "tell me truly what thou think'st of him" (I.ii.213).⁸⁷ Caesar, who had previously chided Antony for his quixotic assessment of Cassius, fancies that his lieutenant holds a different opinion to the one expressed. This is, I believe, why he asks Antony to "Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf" (I.ii.212).⁸⁸ He suspects his deputy is concealing his true feelings in the public space, potentially in earshot of Cassius or one of his supporters. Accordingly, they will discuss the matter privately. Shakespeare, then, certainly incorporated Plutarch's first statement about Cassius, although he has clearly inverted the original sense of "well given" to force the audience to consider what sort of character Cassius is, especially after the forensic character assessment of Caesar (I.i.200-09, see

⁸⁶ Myron Taylor, "Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Irony of History," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24. 3 (1973) 301-308: "Antony is willing to trust Cassius simply because he is an aristocrat." (p. 304).

⁸⁷ Douglas L. Peterson, "'Wisdom Consumed in Confidence': An Examination of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16. 1 (1965) 19-28: 20; Peggy Muñoz Simonds, "'No More ... Offend Our Hearing': Aural Imagery in *Cymbeline*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 24.2 (1982): 137-154, 138.

⁸⁸ Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge, 1983) 85, argues Caesar's deafness is symbolic of his "fatal inability to listen". Cf. John Velz, "Caesar's Deafness," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 22 (1971): 400-1, who argues Caesar's deafness is figurative and that he is inviting Antony to indict Cassius.

discussion below), and the so-called ‘seduction scene’ (I.ii.35-175). Shakespeare, of course, did not create cardboard characters; as the rest of the play proceeds he undermines the audience’s initial, mixed impression of Cassius.

Perhaps the most important characterization of Cassius in the drama is Caesar’s assessment of him. Irritated at Antony’s credulous indifference to him, Caesar rapidly rattles off ten lines forensically parsing Cassius’ character (I.ii.200-209):

I do not know the man I should avoid
So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much,
He is a great observer, and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
As thou dost, Antony; he hears no music;
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort
As if he mocked himself and scorned his spirit
That could be moved to smile at anything.
Such men as he be never at heart’s ease
Whiles they behold a greater than themselves,
And therefore are they very dangerous.

And yet, from whence did Shakespeare draw this information? Plainly, the reference to the “spare” (thin) Cassius is from Plutarch (*Brut.* 6). But Cassius’ wide reading and perspicacity are (to my knowledge) traits that are nowhere attested in the ancient sources.⁸⁹ In fact, every other quality Caesar associates with Cassius finds no ancient antecedent. Indeed, in the case of Cassius’ alleged aversion to smiling, Plutarch offers a very different view: “and on the other side, he was too familiar with his friends, and would jest too broadly with them” (Plut. *Brut.* 22 [North]).⁹⁰ Even in North’s Plutarch, Cassius is far more jovial and emotional than Brutus. Thus, Caesar’s assessment of

⁸⁹ As Chapter Three notes, however, these are traits associated with prominent Elizabethan dissident Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex.

⁹⁰ Cf. Plut. *Brut.* 27 [North]: “Cassius fell a-laughing to hear what he was said...”

Cassius is largely Shakespeare's own invention, coloured as it is by contemporary considerations (for instance, the metadramatic irony of Cassius not liking plays, his peculiar dislike of music).⁹¹

There are very good reasons for Shakespeare to insert the detail about Cassius' observational powers, which are perhaps hinted at in Plutarch's *Life of Crassus*, as we saw above. Indeed, Shakespeare appropriates an anecdote in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus* that notes Cassius was shortsighted (Plut. *Brut.* 29), without any obvious ironic implication: "howbeit Cassius himself saw nothing, for his sight was very bad, saving that he saw (and yet with much ado) how the enemies spoiled his camp before his eyes." Shakespeare, however, seizes the opportunity to explore the possibilities of Cassius' physical and potentially metaphorical myopia ("My sight was ever thick": V.iii.21). Cassius' shortsightedness, then, is likely one of the reasons Shakespeare has Caesar refer to Cassius as a "great observer" (I.ii.201).⁹² Indeed, Shakespeare uses the remark to accentuate Cassius' *peripeteia* (reversal of fortune) at Philippi, as a result of physical and perhaps metaphorical myopia, which is doubly ironic as Cassius lambastes Caesar for similar physical infirmities (I.ii.111-128).

Shakespeare's omission of certain details is every bit as important as his inclusion (or inversion) of material. An interesting Shakespearean omission is that no reference is made to the contest for the praetorship, an election for a prestigious public office, and an episode that Plutarch had emphasised in his *Life of Brutus*. In this election, Brutus eventually triumphed at the expense of Cassius. Caesar alone decided the outcome, noting that, whilst Cassius' "cause was juster" Brutus must be "preferred"

⁹¹ David Daniell, *Julius Caesar* (Arden, 1998) 176-7, on the implication of Cassius' uneven nature as a result of the lack of music and plays in his life.

⁹² Cassius' perspicacity is well documented in the scholarship, as is the significance of his literal myopia. See, for example, John W. Velz, "Cassius as a 'Great Observer'," *The Modern Language Review* 68, no. 2 (1973): 256-59.

(Plut. *Brut.* 5 [North]). So Brutus received preferment at Cassius' expense. If, then, proof were needed that Caesar did (on occasion) put his personal wishes above the general good here it is. Here, moreover, is evidence that he did, if necessary, abuse his powers in a kingly fashion.⁹³ Shakespeare's choice, then, not to mention or even allude to this episode is very important. Here is a legitimate grievance Cassius has against Caesar –one that exposes Caesar's abuse of power and patronage– and Shakespeare omits it. Shakespeare deprives Cassius of this argument because he has him focus on the fate of the nobility, as well as his personal animosity towards the “feeble-tempered” Caesar (I.ii.129). Nonetheless, Plutarch emphasises this episode as one of the chief causes that Cassius begins to orchestrate the conspiracy.⁹⁵

Indeed, in his dialogue with Brutus, Cassius offers many different reasons (some more believable than others) that Caesar should be removed from power. Yet he never accuses Caesar of an abuse of power, even if the sentiment is frequently implied.⁹⁶ Brutus, furthermore, in the orchard scene (II.i) also notes no reason to remove Caesar other than for the “general” good (II.i.12). Reasons are not hard to find, however, if he had but meditated on the point. Had not Flavius and Murellus⁹⁷ been “put to silence” (an ambiguous but certainly ominous phrase) for removing Caesar's scarfs off his statues? (I.ii.282-3).⁹⁸ Such an act surely constitutes abuse of power.

⁹³ After Caesar's assassination Cassius attempts to restore the Republican mechanisms of government by inviting Antony to play a role in the even distribution of offices (III.i.177-78). Cf. Chapter Three.

⁹⁵ Plut. *Brut.* 5 [North]: “[Cassius] thanked not Caesar so much for the Praetorship he had [a lesser office], as he was angry with him for that he had lost.” Shakespeare's decision to omit this episode may have been structural, as it jars with the portrait of Brutus he is trying to create. Admittedly, it may have been difficult for Shakespeare to introduce the information in this scene, as it pertains to the (mainly) morally upright Brutus. As an argumentative prong, however, mentioning Caesar's conduct in deciding the praetorship could have provided Cassius with tremendous ammunition –though, of course, it would have been impolitic in the extreme to mention this deed to the man that benefited from Caesar's favouritism.

⁹⁶ Caesar is already in a position of absolute power, as Cassius understands. See below.

⁹⁷ Like David Daniell, onomastically I prefer the spelling Murellus: David Daniell, *The Arden Julius Caesar* (Arden, 1998) 73-4, and 153, with n.19 (List of Roles).

⁹⁸ Vivian Thomas, *Shakespeare's Roman Worlds* (Routledge: 1989), 45. David Daniell, *The Arden Julius Caesar* (Arden, 1998) 153, believes they were “probably put to death” soon after the first scene.

In addition to Cassius' focus on the demise of the nobility, perhaps part of the answer for Shakespeare's omission of the contest for the praetorship is that he wanted to focus on the "choleric" Cassius who "hated Caesar privately" (Plut. *Brut.* 6, 22). Indeed, the great attraction of a character like Cassius is that his motives are not so pure as Brutus' –in North's words, he is not so "well given" (*Brut.*1.4). Certainly, in the second scene of Act One, rather than point out the increasingly monarchical nature of Caesar's rule (which is frequently alluded to in the rest of the first half of the play: "chidden train" I.ii.183; cf. I.ii.284), Cassius lists personal criticism of Caesar more to do with his disbelief at Caesar's ability to "bear the palm alone" (I.ii.131). Cassius, then, is a patriotic defender of Republicanism, but his antagonistic relationship with Caesar calls into question (compromises) the credibility with which he leads the conspiracy.

Unlike in Plutarch, Shakespeare's Cassius demonstrates a range of emotions throughout the course of the play. Admittedly, on several occasions in *Julius Caesar* Cassius' hot temper gets the better of him. In the quarrel scene, for instance, Brutus bates Cassius to "Go show your slaves how choleric you are" (IV.iii.47).⁹⁹ At this, Cassius draws his dagger and begs his brother-in-law to run him through, since such words are already "killing him".¹⁰⁰ Given such emotion, it is not hard to see why Thomas McAlindon argues that Shakespeare's four major characters all represent (to some extent) the four humours of ancient and medieval medicine: Cassius is choleric.¹⁰¹ And yet, Shakespeare's Cassius is more emotionally complex than such neat categorization. In contrast to the stoic Brutus (a model of *constantia* –constancy),¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Cf. IV.iii.43: "Must I give way and room to your rash choler?"

¹⁰⁰ IV.iii.110-120.

¹⁰¹ Thomas McAlindon, "The Numbering of Men and Days: Symbolic Design in *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*," *Studies in Philology* 81, no. 3 (1984) 372-393: 380.

¹⁰² Jan H. Blits, "Manliness and Friendship in *Julius Caesar*," (Infobase Publishing) 2009, 31-46.

Cassius displays a range of emotions throughout the play: anger, jealousy (I.ii.128-30), fear (III.i.19-22), indignation (“must I endure all this?”: IV.iii.41), and sorrow (for Portia, IV.iii.147-9, 164), but also happiness. He shows more feeling than the stoical Brutus himself.¹⁰³ Emotionally, therefore, Shakespeare’s Cassius is a more realistic figure than his Plutarchan model, which is not true (perhaps) of his Brutus.¹⁰⁴

At the beginning of his biography of Brutus, Plutarch concedes that his sources attribute all that was wrong with the conspiracy to Cassius (Plut. *Brut.* 1.2-4). It is a useful editorial comment for the historian, especially when reading the Greek’s account of how Brutus was brought into the assassins’ fold. Indeed, in Plutarch the impression created is very black and white: Cassius “incensed Brutus against him [sc. Caesar]” (Plut. *Brut.* 6). Cassius, then, fired the magnanimous and unsuspecting Brutus up against Caesar. Plutarch implicitly assigns blame here to Cassius. The undertone is that Cassius used emotional pleading to turn Brutus against Caesar. In Shakespeare, however, the situation is very different. Admittedly, Cassius does claim credit for “thus much show of fire” (I.ii.185) from Brutus, and, at the end of the scene, believes his “honourable mettle” has been remolded to Cassius’ liking (I.ii.308-9). Brutus, too, later credits Cassius for first turning him against Caesar (II.i.61-2),

However, Shakespeare makes clear two things that demonstrate conclusively that Brutus has not been seduced. One, when Cassius first approaches Brutus in the scene it is clear that he is distracted. When questioned, Brutus responds (I.ii.45-7):

Vexèd I am
Of late with passions of some difference,
Conceptions only proper to myself

Then:

¹⁰³ Blits, “Manliness and Friendship in *Julius Caesar*,” 31-46. See also, David Daniell, *The Arden Shakespeare: Julius Caesar* (Arden, 1998) 64, notes that Cassius shows “tolerance” and “warmth”, which transcend the choleric caricature of Plutarch’s Cassius.

¹⁰⁴ S.S. Agarwalla, *Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar* (Atlantic Publishers, 1995) 36: “Brutus is essentially Plutarch’s Brutus in Shakespeare.”

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.171-74).

Brutus, too, it appears has been worrying about the state. He seems acutely aware of the threat posed by Caesar and that Rome has fallen on hard times. That he is not seduced by Cassius is also clear from the fact that he does not commit too readily to Cassius' cause. What Cassius has said, he will "consider" (I.ii.167), an answer hardly of a man under the spell of his interlocutor. Shakespeare, it seems to me, has greatly nuanced the information he has found in Plutarch. Cassius does not so much unilaterally incense a naive and unsuspecting Brutus, but rather prod him in a direction he was already heading. Cassius has simply accelerated the process: Brutus proceeds to grapple with questions of Caesar's power (II.i10-34).

Shakespeare also modifies Plutarch's story about Brutus' inclusion into the conspiracy. For the hagiographical biographer, Brutus' participation reflected his unquestionable moral standing. In North's present-minded words, the nameless conspirators will only participate if Cassius can win Brutus to their cause, because his presence would assure men that the deed was "holy" and "just" (Plut. *Brut.* 7).¹⁰⁶ In Shakespeare's version, by contrast, Cassius and the conspirators desire Brutus' presence because his reputation is, unlike theirs, almost unassailable. Unlike Plutarch, Shakespeare emphasises that the conspirators need Brutus for political cover. Cinna pleads with Cassius to win Brutus to their party. For his part, Cassius believes he has almost secured his brother-in-law's participation (I.iii.139-41):

Three parts of him
Is ours already, and the man entire
Upon the next encounter yields him ours.

¹⁰⁶ Plut. *Brut.* 7 [North]: "[T]hey all agreed, and promised to take part with him, so [=provided that] Brutus were the chief of their conspiracy." North's translation of the original Greek to "holy" and "just" emphasises that "Shakespeare inherited Plutarch at third hand and, and in a very English-Renaissance garb": Garry Wills, *Rome and Rhetoric* (Yale, 2013), 156.

Here Shakespeare expands (or amplifies) the details he found in Plutarch to give his audience a view into how Cassius went about organising the conspiracy. Details only alluded to in Plutarch are thus fleshed out by Shakespeare to great effect. Indeed, Cassius dominates the action of the second and third scenes of Act One. He is at the centre of the conspirators' web, and the audience is likewise positioned, in following the activities of the key members of the conspiracy in the first three scenes of Act One, at the centre of the conspiracy. The additional focus on Cassius, then, gives Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience unparalleled access into an event not uncommon in their lives –an assassination plot against a powerful ruler.

Another way in which Shakespeare adapts his Plutarchan material is in the episode with Popilius Lena at the moment immediately before the assassination. Cassius (and not all the conspirators, as in Plutarch) fears prevention: "If this be known, Cassius or Caesar never shall turn back, / For I will slay myself." (III.i.24) His sudden panic and histrionics are stayed by the calm Brutus, who steers Cassius by saying: "Cassius, be constant" (III.i.25).¹⁰⁸ And yet, in Plutarch, "they [sc. the conspirators] were afraid every man of them" (Plut. *Brut.* 12). However, Plutarch also has Cassius break into a "furious passion", a leitmotif he repeatedly employs to characterise the conspirator as a man ruled by his passion (cf. Plut. *Brut.* 29.1-2). Shakespeare decides to modify this detail; his Cassius panics that Caesar is being warned of the plot.¹⁰⁹ It is a subtle difference, but it has significance, in that it foreshadows Cassius' all too hasty suicide at Philippi, wherein his emotions overcome his usually perceptive assessment of a

¹⁰⁸ Jan H. Blits, "Manliness and Friendship in *Julius Caesar*," in *William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 31-46. Blits argues that Brutus is defined by his Roman *constantia* (his constancy), whereas Cassius is emotionally unpredictable.

¹⁰⁹ Vivian Thomas, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Routledge: 1989) 46.

situation (V.iii.34-35). Expanding on Plutarch, Shakespeare uses one episode to prepare the audience for the other.

Shakespeare does not hesitate to follow Plutarch where the historical record is replete with drama. One ready-made episode is the debate about what should be done after Caesar has been assassinated. Antony, sensing an opportunity, argues that Caesar's will should be made public and the man himself given a proper Roman public funeral. Cassius, Plutarch notes, "stoutly spake against it" (Plut. *Brut.* 15 [North]). But Brutus, who in this instance erred according to his hagiographical biographer, granted Antony's wishes. Shakespeare is alert to the dramatic power of the episode: Cassius, the political realist; Brutus, the man obsessed with honour.¹¹⁰ In an attempt to dissuade his brother-in-law, Cassius pleads with Brutus not to let Antony speak at Caesar's funeral; "Know you how much the people may be moved / By that which he will utter?" (III.i.258-9). Brutus does not credit Cassius' fears because he believes he can manage the people. Cassius, however, is all too aware of how fickle the people can be (as Shakespeare aptly emphasizes at the start of the play: "Knew you not Pompey!": I.i.39), but he nevertheless bows to Brutus' decision, noting despairingly "I like it not." (III.i.257).

There are limits to how far Shakespeare will follow Plutarch. He does not censure Cassius in the same vein as the biographer. In one section of Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, the Greek moralist is unusually vituperative (*Brut.* 22 [North]):

And as for Cassius, a hot, choleric, and cruel man, that would oftentimes be carried away from justice for gain, it was certainly thought that he made war and put himself into sundry dangers, more to have absolute power and authority than to defend the liberty of his country.

¹¹⁰ James S. Mullican, "Brutus and Cassius: A Timely Contrast," *The Clearing House* (1963): 178.

Shakespeare, of course, never suggests that Cassius himself is desirous of Caesar's power (Brutus acts more like Caesar in the latter half of the play).¹¹¹ If anything, Cassius wants to restore his own honour and liberate his country from Caesar's grip. His intentions are clear, even if his motivations are mixed. Moreover, Cassius is prepared to cede control of the conspiracy to Brutus, even though he fears Brutus is mishandling important decision-making (e.g., Cicero's inclusion in the conspiracy; Antony's fate on the Ides; allowing a funeral speech; and the battle of Philippi). In the end, Cassius' friendship with Brutus is more important to him than the fate of the Republic. Shakespeare accentuates this detail (especially in the second half of the play), which certainly is not stressed in Plutarch.¹¹²

Shakespeare deftly notes that Cassius' faults are noted far more than those of Brutus (highlighting Plutarch's acknowledgment of this historical fact):

For Cassius is aweary of the world—
Hated by one he loves, braved by his brother,
Checked like a bondman, all his faults observed,
Set in a notebook, learned and conned by rote
To cast into my teeth. O, I could weep
My spirit from mine eyes (IV.iii.98-103)

Brutus is angry at Cassius over money. Cassius had been engaging in extortionate tax collecting but had forgotten to give Brutus a cut. Self-righteous and contradictory, Brutus initially asked Cassius for money, money he himself could not raise because such extortion was unpalatable to him. So when he suspects Cassius is not handing over

¹¹¹ Barbara L. Parker, *Plato's Republic and Shakespeare's Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works*. (University of Delaware Press, 2004) 84-86.

¹¹² Scholars have not always considered Cassius' friendship with Brutus (his brother-in-law) sincere, merely expedient, although increasingly this is the case: Blits, "Manliness and Friendship in *Julius Caesar*," 221-8; Vikram Chopra, "'The Last of All the Romans'--a Case for Cassius," *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* 54, no. 5 (2003): 221-8; Coppélia Kahn, "'Passion of Some Difference': Friendship and Emulation in *Julius Caesar*," in Horst Zander ed., *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays* (2005): 271-83; V. Thomas, *Shakespeare's Roman Worlds* (Routledge, 1989) 79, notes that friendship is double-edged in the tragedy.

the money he is raising he censures him for having an “itching palm” (IV.iii.8-9). Brutus comes across as hypocritical here. Cassius can feel aggrieved at Brutus’ criticisms, especially given the expediencies of war.¹¹³

Plutarch draws a notable dichotomy between Cassius’ passion (θυμὸς) and Brutus’ reason (λόγος). Shakespeare, however, whilst initially characterising Cassius as sometimes uncontrollably passionate in the so-called ‘seduction scene’, subverts this one-dimensional characterisation. Indeed, throughout the drama Cassius is equally logical and perspicacious, a trait that Caesar himself apprehensively acknowledges: “he looks/ Quite through the deeds of men.” (I.ii.203-4) Unlike Casca, he looks to the “true cause” (I.iii.63) of things to explain the ominous portents (or what he believes to be the true cause); he offers unpalatable but no doubt correct advice to the conspirators regarding Antony’s fate on the Ides (II.i.163-9). Cassius, then, is a perspicacious realist. However, though Shakespeare stresses his sagacity, he nevertheless demonstrates the limits of Cassius’ insight, especially before the assassination (III.i.24), and before he commits suicide (V.iii.34-5). Cassius is not defined by his passion alone in Shakespeare.

As in Plutarch, Shakespeare also has Cassius question his Epicureanism, the philosophical school to which he paid allegiance. Plutarch, who criticises the doctrine of Epicureanism elsewhere in his extensive writing,¹¹⁶ likely invented Cassius’ recantation. Shakespeare, too, has Cassius question his beliefs and himself in the last Act, although the focus is not to discredit Epicureanism so much as to make Cassius

¹¹³ Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1930) II.356, notes that Brutus’ decision-making and histrionics have contributed to Cassius’ “weariness” in the second half of the play.

¹¹⁶ Catherine Castner, *Prosopography of Roman Epicureans* (Peter Lang, 1988) 29-31.

question his long-held belief in materialism.¹¹⁷ He concedes, in part, in his revelation in “things that do presage.” (V.i.79). This is a slightly humbled Cassius, a far cry from the man who confidently proclaimed men can be the “masters of their fates” (I.ii.140), and explained away the ominous portents in Act One, Scene Three (I.iii.60-65). Shakespeare, then, appropriates a small anecdote to provide depth and colour to his Cassius. Even a materialist like Cassius is susceptible to superstitious doubts, as he frets about the fate of the battle of Philippi. Even so perceptive and thoughtful a figure as Cassius can misconstrue events. No one, it seems, has a monopoly on foresight and logic in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

The most important Shakespearean elaboration upon Plutarch is the focus on the means by which Cassius brings Brutus into the conspirators’ fold. In Plutarch, the episode is touched upon only briefly (a few lines in his biography: *Brut.* 7[North]). After Brutus was awarded the Urban Praetorship, his relationship with Cassius soured, Plutarch informs his readers. Yet, through the intervention of friends who had softened Brutus to his brother-in-law, Cassius (who had already begun to gather a group of likeminded dissidents around him) met with Brutus and sounded him out over Caesar. What was discussed at the reconciliation –or what arguments Cassius proffered to secure Brutus’ participation– are, surprisingly, omitted by Plutarch, who gives a clipped, unrealistic account of the interview (*Brut.* 7). Indeed, after only a few leading

¹¹⁷ Stephen M. Buhler, "No Spectre, No Sceptre: the Agon of Materialist Thought in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *English Literary Renaissance* 26, no. 2 (1996): 313-332. On the complex debate about Shakespeare’s view of Materialisms, see, for example, Rick Bowers, "The Luck of Caesar: Winning and Losing in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *English Studies* 79 (1998); David Hawkes, "Proteus Agonistes: Shakespeare, Bacon, and the 'Torture' of Nature," in *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body Mind*, ed. L. Johnson, J. Sutton, and E. Tribble (Routledge, 2014), 13-26; Graham Holderness and Marcus Nevitt, "Major among the Minors: A Cultural Materialist Reading of *Julius Caesar*," in *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*, ed. Horst Zander (Routledge, 2005), 257-69; James A. Knapp, "Beyond Materiality in Shakespeare Studies," *Literature Compass* 11, no. 10 (2014): 677-90.

questions, Brutus, in a patriotic frenzy, is ready to turn on his former benefactor. This hardly seems likely; it seems romanticised and elliptical.

Shakespeare, of course, sensing the dramatic potential of this historical incident, amplifies the episode, and devotes the best part of a scene to Cassius' attempted 'seduction' (I.ii.30-187). In Plutarch, Cassius' tact is quite direct; he notes the rumour that Caesar's friends intend to have him made king on the Ides (Plut. *Brut.* 7 [North]).¹¹⁸ Shakespeare's take is very different. Cassius is very careful and calculating. He begins innocuously asking whether Brutus will attend the Lupercalian race.¹¹⁹ Slowly, he leads Brutus into a discussion about the state.

Shakespeare also appropriates and adapts Plutarch's dubious story that Cassius began to question his belief in Epicureanism. Whereas Plutarch opportunistically but briefly critiques what he considers an evil philosophy, Shakespeare appropriates the episode to ruminate on the limits of materialism as a philosophy, for which he lays the groundwork in the storm scene (I.iii). This scene is a notable Shakespearean departure from Plutarch. Here Cassius encounters Casca on a stormy night, an episode for which there is certainly no ancient antecedent. Casca is frightened by all the ominous "portents" (I.iii.28); Cassius, by contrast, is sceptical of omens, and chastises Casca for being superstitious.¹²⁰ As an Epicurean materialist, he counsels Casca to look for the "true cause" (I.iii.63) of events. Yet Caesar's disregard of inauspicious omens leads to

¹¹⁸ Brutus, equally direct, responds (*Brut.* 7): "I mean not to hold my peace, but to withstand it, and rather die than lose my liberty."

¹¹⁹ "Will you go see the order of the course?" (I.ii.25). Ironic and a leading question. Cassius has no desire for Brutus to attend the Lupercalian festival, as that would prevent him from sounding out his friend for the conspiracy. He also hopes that by asking such a question he will provoke in Brutus a contemptuous response ("Not I"; cf. "gamesome"), which will give him an opening to ask more dangerous questions. The question is innocuous and chatty in nature; Cassius exercises great control and projects calmness as he embarks on his mission to seduce Brutus. However, the subtle enquiry will give Cassius some indication of Brutus' disposition towards Caesar.

¹²⁰ Fernando J. Cardim de Carvalho, "Decision-making under Uncertainty as Drama," *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 25.2: (2002-3): 189-218 (p. 213).

disaster,¹²¹ and even before Cassius' own cruel *peripeteia* at Philippi he begins to "partly credit things that do presage" (V.i.80), after seeing eagles (symbols of Roman power) desert his troops on the day of the battle. Never one to miss an opportunity, Shakespeare uses a minor reference in Plutarch to explore the limits of Cassius' Epicurean Materialism.¹²²

Conclusions

It is well established that Plutarch was Shakespeare's chief source for *Julius Caesar*. However, scholars have often underappreciated two points. The first point is that Shakespeare incorporates material from additional ancient sources such as Appian, whether at first hand or through an intermediary author/dramatist (on which, see Chapter Two). This is evident in the characterisation of Cassius (his energy, bravery, and military abilities). The second point is that even though Plutarch was truly Shakespeare's most important source, he is not simply dramatizing or repeating the biographer. As this chapter has demonstrated, Shakespeare's deep engagement with Plutarch did not prevent him from adapting the material to suit his own purposes. Cassius, a foil for Brutus in Plutarch, does not serve that purpose in *Julius Caesar*, although the assertion has often been made.¹²³

Shakespeare's Cassius, then, goes well beyond his Plutarchan model. Instead of being a one-dimensional character (e.g., a choleric personality), Cassius displays a range of emotions. Plutarch has nothing to say about Cassius' intelligence or abilities

¹²¹ Douglas L. Peterson, "'Wisdom Consumed in Confidence': An Examination of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16 (1965): 19-28.

¹²² Marshall C. Bradley, "Caska [Sic]: Stoic, Cynic, 'Christian'," *Literature and Theology* 8 (1994): 140-56; Julian C. Rice, "*Julius Caesar* and the Judgment of the Senses," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 13 (1973): 238-55; Patrick Gray, *'Hide Thy Selfe': Montaigne, Hamlet, and Epicurean Ethics.*, ed. John D. Cox and Patrick Gray, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics* (Cambridge, 2014), 213-36.

¹²³ See, for example, M. Marrapodi, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories: Anglo-Italian Transactions* (Ashgate, 2011), 132.

as a politician; Shakespeare furnishes his audience with a highly observant political realist (as well as a skilful orator), who sees Caesar for what he is –an authoritarian ruler who has placed himself above the rest of the nobility. Admittedly, Shakespeare does follow Plutarch in assigning Cassius ample personal motives for his antagonism towards Caesar. But Cassius' reasons are mingled in Shakespeare: he is a patriot who, at least in part, wants to restore equality to Roman government (cf. Chapter Three). By modifying and amplifying Plutarch's character, Shakespeare has created a compromised (that is, politically questionable) but committed conspirator.

CHAPTER TWO

CASSIUS' CHARACTERISATION IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY DRAMATIC TRADITION

From where else, then, did Shakespeare draw inspiration for his Cassius? As we saw in Chapter One, some of his colouring comes from the ancient sources, especially Plutarch. His imagination, too, must also receive some of the credit. But, as this chapter will show, the literary and dramatic tradition which preceded him certainly seems to have provided plenty of ideas as well. Plays on ancient subjects and themes were not in short supply, and this was particularly true of the Roman Republic. On Caesar alone, there were no less than five prominent European plays (excluding *Julius Caesar*) in the sixteenth century, and presumably many more no longer extant.¹ In this chapter, then, I wish to offer a comparative analysis of a selection of these plays in which Cassius enjoys a significant or notable rôle.² The plays are examined in chronological order so as to trace Cassius' development (and transformation).

By the end of this chapter it should be possible to delineate some strands of the dramatic tradition Shakespeare drew upon. He may not have consulted many of these plays at first hand, but could have been aware of at least some of them, in outline if not in detail. And in some ways, it is more important to see what pieces of the tradition

¹ Henslowe's Diary indicates that a play now lost about Caesar and Pompey was performed repeatedly in 1594. This was not *Caesar's Revenge*, as has been argued; see T. M. Parrott, "The 'Academic Tragedy' of 'Caesar and Pompey'," *The Modern Language Review* 5, no. 4 (1910): 435-44, for a refutation.

² Michael Wirdung's *Brutus* (1596) will not be examined as Cassius does not appear in the play – he has already committed suicide before Act I: see the brief remarks of Julia Griffin, "Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Dramatic Tradition," in *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, ed. Miriam Griffin (Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 381. For additional information on Wirdung's play, see Andreas Hagmaier, *M.A. Muret, Iulius Caesar. M. Wirdung, Brutus: Zwei Neulateinische Tragödien. Text, Übersetzung Und Interpretation* (Walter de Gruyter, 2006), who has little to say about Cassius.

Shakespeare changed (or deliberately ignored) than those he incorporated into his play. The differences in *Julius Caesar* are every bit as important as the similarities.³

I. Muret's Cassius

One of the earliest sixteenth century tragedies to treat the character of Cassius was Marc-Antoine Muret's *Julius Caesar*. A French humanist and renowned Latinist,⁴ Muret composed the play in around 1547, whilst he was a young professor at the Collège de Guyenne.⁵ He designed the drama as a Latin text for his pupils. Primarily the work of an academic rather than a poet, Muret's play rigidly follows the Senecan form of tragedy, particularly in its emphasis on rhetoric.⁶ This genre played to his strengths; Montaigne, one of his students, regarded his old professor as "le meilleur orateur du tempts."⁷ Although the drama was published as part of his *Juvenilia*, its influence on subsequent Caesar plays, especially Grévin's and Pescetti's, was profound.⁸ This was no trifling schoolroom production.⁹

³ Griffin, "Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Dramatic Tradition," 380-5, highlights this fact eloquently.

⁴ Biographical information on Muret is summarised by Bloemendal, "Tyrant or Stoic Hero? Marc-Antoine Muret's *Julius Caesar*," in *Recreating Ancient History: Episodes from the Greek and Roman Past in the Arts and Literature of the Early Modern Period* (Brill, 2001) 304n.2; See additionally, Kirk Summers, *The Juvenilia of Marc-Antoine Muret* (Ohio State University Press, 2006) xiii-xxvi; and Verginie Leroux, ed., *Juvenilia: édition critique, traduction, annotation et commentaire* (Droz: 2009) 13-24.

⁵ For the debate over the composition date, see Kirk Summers, *Juvenilia* (Ohio State University Press, 2006) xv-xvi with n.8, for summary. See additionally, Verginie Leroux, *Juvenilia: édition critique, traduction, annotation et commentaire* (Droz: 2009) 14-18; Andreas Hagmaier, *M. A. Muret, Iulius Caesar, M. Virdung, Brutus: Zwei Neulateinische Tragödien, Text, Übersetzung und Interpretation* (Walter de Gruyter, 2006) 5-9.

⁶ On the Senecan nature of Muret's tragedy, see briefly Werner Schubert, "Seneca the Dramatist," in *Brill's Companion to Seneca* (Leiden, 2013) 79; Andreas Hagmaier, *M. A. Muret, Iulius Caesar, M. Virdung, Brutus: Zwei Neulateinische Tragödien, Text, Übersetzung und Interpretation* (K. G. Saur, 2006) 149. Thematically, however, its emphasis is on the everlasting reversals of power and the unending clash between political principles: Jürgen Blänsdorf, "Die Verwandlung der senecanischen Tragödie in Marc-Antoine Murets '*Julius Caesar*' und Jacques Grévin's '*César*,'" *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* (1994) 1.2: 58.

⁷ Montaigne, *Essais* 1.26, cited in Kirk Summers, *Juvenilia* (Ohio State University Press, 2006) xv.

⁸ W.M. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (Macmillan, 1925) 21.

⁹ When Muret published his *Juvenilia* in 1552, it was "carefully designed to demonstrate the young scholar's virtuoso facility in a range of poetic genres in Latin," Paul White, "Review: '*Juvenilia: édition critique, traduction, annotation et commentaire*,'" in *Neo-Latin News* 59, nos. 1-2 (2011): 101.

By the time Cassius takes the stage in Act II, Brutus has already committed himself to the assassination. Indeed, as in many other pre-Shakespearean Caesar plays, Brutus is cast as the architect and ringleader of the conspiracy.¹⁰ There is no need, therefore, for Cassius to bring Brutus into the conspirators' fold (as in Shakespeare), and so all he is left to do is offer his encouragement and praise (e.g., II.151: "*Magnanime Brute*").¹¹ Only Brutus, Cassius believes, a man of incomparable and irreproachable *virtus* (II.149), can shepherd oppressed Rome to freedom.¹² Shakespeare's Cassius also lavishes praise on Brutus, especially his virtue (*JC.* I.ii.90), although this is carefully calculated to flatter him and exploit his desire to be well-regarded.¹³ Muret's Cassius is not so conniving; rather, he truly considers Brutus Rome's last hope. In this regard, Cassius serves to promote the hagiographical view of his brother-in-law promoted by Plutarch (cf. Chapter One).

Despite Cassius' espousal of Republican principles, his dialogue with Brutus reveals that, ultimately, hatred of Caesar drives his actions. Indeed, in contrast to the morality-driven Brutus, Cassius' rhetoric is saturated with emotionalism. Muret's Cassius, like his Shakespearean counterpart, makes passing references to Republican principles, yet these pronouncements ultimately ring somewhat hollow. This is not to imply, however, that Muret casts Cassius as a pseudo-Republican, far from it. Initially, Cassius comes across as a man full of steely commitment and passion for the Republican cause: Rome, for instance, is oppressed (*depressa*: II.150); and Caesar is *publici inuasor*

¹⁰ Julia Griffin, "Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Dramatic Tradition," (2009) 383. Plutarch, of course, states explicitly that Cassius was the originator of the plot and the man who brought Brutus into the conspiracy: *Plut. Brut.* 7.7; cf. *Caes.* 8.3. See also, *App. B Civ.* 2.121; Cf. e.g., 2.116, 2.122, 2.123, 2.142; *Gell. NA.* 3.9; *Liv. Per.* 123, *Cassianarum partium* ("Cassius' Party").

¹¹ Later Cassius describes Brutus as *Romulae gloria gentis* ("glory of Romulus' Race"): II.180. The effect of Cassius' opening greeting is, as has been observed elsewhere, almost hymnal: Andreas Hagmaier, *M. A. Muret, Iulius Caesar, M. Viridung, Brutus: Zwei Neulateinische Tragödien, Text, Übersetzung und Interpretation* (Walter de Gruyter, 2006) 131.

¹² II.149-51; cf. II.150 *Romam...depressam*.

¹³ Cf. *JC.* I.ii.63 and reference to Brutus' "hidden worthiness"; see also esp. I.ii.315 and Brutus' name: "Why should that name be sounded more than yours?" (I.ii.145-6).

boni (II.165).¹⁴ Cassius, it is clear, would like nothing more than to announce to the Roman people that *Roma tandem libera est* (II.163). And if he shall die in the process of freeing his country that is of no consequence because (in an echo of Horace): “*Bene moritur, qui patriam moriens iuuat* (II.168)”.¹⁵ Uttering Republican sentiments throughout the play, Cassius nevertheless leaves the audience uneasy –his vindictive desire to see the back of Caesar seems far more personal than political. Muret is simply following Plutarch’s editorial estimate of Cassius (cf. Chapter One).

In many ways, then, Muret’s Cassius is very similar to the figure found in Plutarch’s *Life of Brutus*. However, Muret amplifies the most important trait Plutarch ascribes to Cassius (*Brut.* 8.5): “But Cassius being a cholericke man, and hating Caesar privatlie, more then he did the tyrannie openlie...” Thus, Cassius –in stark contrast to Brutus– is described as an angry Caesar-hater. Though Plutarch only touched upon the subject, Muret exploits the dramatic potential to the full. Indeed, as in the case of Caesar, Muret draws inspiration from Senecan drama to fill in the dramatic gaps.¹⁶ Accordingly, his Cassius is far more emotional, malicious,¹⁷ and violent than those of the other dramatists surveyed here. Graphically, he fantasises about how he will tear Caesar’s head from his neck with his teeth, and then with his bloodied mouth proclaim Rome’s freedom to the people (II.160-64). This image of Cassius savagely cutting Caesar’s head off with his teeth is bestial, and goes well beyond Republican fervour. He comes across as wild

¹⁴ Irving Ribner, "Political Issues in *Julius Caesar*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 56, no. 1 (1957): 12, on Caesar as a would-be tyrant in Renaissance thought.

¹⁵ Hor. *Carm.* 3.2.13: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*.

¹⁶ On Muret’s use of Seneca’s *Hercules Furens* as inspiration for his ‘braggart Caesar’, see Harry M. Ayres, “Shakespeare’s *Julius Cæsar* in the Light of Some Other Versions,” *PMLA* 25.2 (1910): 183-227. For relation to Cassius: p. 210: “The hint for this situation and for Cassius’ malignancy was derived, I think, from the entrance of Hercules rejoicing in the gore of the tyrant Lycus (*Her. Fur.*, 895 f.)”

¹⁷ Harry M. Ayres, “Shakespeare’s *Julius Cæsar* in the Light of Some Other Versions,” *PMLA* 25.2 (1910) 208, argues Cassius “gloats malignantly over the prospect of killing Caesar with his own hand and announcing freedom to the Roman people.”

and reckless, savage and vindictive. Muret's Cassius, then, is saturated with Senecan gore.

Three Acts later, Cassius' bloodthirstiness is on display again when he addresses the citizens triumphantly after Caesar's murder (V.445-51):

*En, Roma, gladium adhuc tepentem sanguine:
En dignitatis vindicem dextram tuae.
Impurus ille, qui furore nefario,
Rabieque caeca, te, et tuos vexaverat,
Hac, hac manu, atque hoc, hocce gladio, quem vides,
Consauciatus, et omnibus membris lacer,
Undam cruoris, et animam evomuit simul.*

Behold, Rome, this sword yet warm with blood, behold the hand that hath championed thine honour. That loathsome one who in impious frenzy and blind rage had troubled thee and thine, sore wounded by this same hand, by this same sword which thou beholdest, and gashed in every limb, hath spewed forth his life in a flood of gore.¹⁸

In Shakespeare, by contrast, Brutus takes the lead in "bloodthirstiness".¹⁹ It is a great irony that for all Brutus' talk of not being butchers, this is exactly how the conspirators act, especially Brutus himself.

Muret's Cassius also takes the initiative and broaches the subject of whether or not Antony should be killed along with Caesar (II.184-6). Antony, he argues, is his one small remaining anxiety (*scrupulus*). Brutus replies that he desires only to eradicate (*perimere*) tyranny. Quickly and skilfully, however, Cassius uses Brutus' very words against him in an attempt to dissuade him of his position:

Perimatur ergo ab infimis radicibus,
Ne quando posthac caesa rursus pullulet.
Then let it [**sc. tyranny**] **be cut off** from its deepest roots,
lest if only cut down, it sprout again at some time hereafter.²⁰

Cassius implies that Antony could take Caesar's place. Caesar is only the stalk and not the root of Rome's tyranny. Cassius is Machiavellian in his "ends justify the means"

¹⁸ Trans. M.W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (Macmillan, 1925) 25.

¹⁹ Julia Griffin, "Julius Caesar and the Dramatic Tradition," 384.

²⁰ Trans. M.W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and their Background* (Macmillan, 1925) 23. Cf. also the translation of Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* (Cambridge, 1964) 5.27, whose "destroyed" does not quite convey the whole metaphor.

argument. This line of argument is repeated in Pescetti and Shakespeare (II.i.162-8) also, as well as several other plays. What Plutarch only touches on, Muret and later dramatists exploit to its full dramatic potential. Cassius' desire for, and case in favour of, Antony's assassination becomes a staple episode of contemporary dramas, which is unsurprising given the ethical questions such a proposal raises. However, Shakespeare perhaps sensed this was well-trodden ground and does not allot as much time to the debate as someone like Pescetti.

Muret's Cassius, then, for all his talk of freedom, is a rather unsavoury and sanguinary character. Zealous, but too zealous, his pathological hatred of Caesar is in stark contrast to Brutus' reason. Muret's Cassius is Plutarchan in outline, but Senecan in his violent temperament and behaviour.

II. Eedes's Cassius (1582)

The next play, *Caesar Interfectus*, is an anomaly in that only the epilogue has survived. *Caesar Interfectus* (c.1582) is often attributed (sometimes tentatively) to Richard Eedes.²¹ Eedes, a graduate of Christ College, Oxford, took Holy Orders before becoming Proctor and Prebendary at his *alma mater*. He was a noted poet, among "our best for Tragedie"²²

²¹ The Epilogue is assigned to Richard Eedes in: BL Add. 41499 A, f.13; Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. e. 5, f. 359, from which it was printed by F. S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Clarendon Press, 1914), 164, 165; cf. E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1923) III.84. I accept this attribution as the most probable based on current evidence. Simply because *Caesar Interfectus* is not attributed to him by Meres is not sufficient proof to doubt Eedes's authorship. Meres' anthology, as is now well appreciated, was not designed to be comprehensive, but selective, as his entry on Shakespeare amply demonstrates. Onomastically, I prefer Eedes over Edes, following R.F. Fleissner, e.g., "Shakespeare at Oxford?" *PMLA* 121 (2006) 1743-44. Some only attribute the epilogue to Eedes and suggest that another, unknown author (or authors) may be responsible for the drama: Martin Wiggins, *British Drama: 1533-1642* (Oxford, 2013) III.297.

²² Francis Meres. *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury*. London: Printed by P. Short, for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598: fol. 283. Cited in T.S. Dorsch, ed., *Julius Caesar* (Methuen, 1961), xix; R.S. and H.E. Rollins, *The Phoenix Nest, 1593* (Harvard University Press, 1969), 137.

according to Francis Meres (author of the Elizabethan anthology *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury*). Eedes wrote in both English and Latin.

Caesar Interfectus was an academic drama, performed at Oxford, probably in February 1582. That the play influenced Shakespeare would not, perhaps, be expected. However, some scholars connect this drama to Polonius' allusion in *Hamlet*.²³ Polonius, indeed, recalls that he once performed the role of Caesar at university, which has been interpreted as an allusion to Eedes's tragedy, which was performed at Christ Church.²⁴ Perceptive theatregoers, then, especially those at Oxford (where *Hamlet* was certainly performed), would perhaps have recalled Eedes's *Caesar Interfectus*. Moreover, Howard Staunton, in *The Plays of Shakespeare*, first proposed Shakespeare drew his "Et tu, Brute" from Eedes's tragedy.²⁵

The play is now lost but its epilogue has survived in a Bodleian manuscript. Whatever the merits of these scholarly conjectures, *Caesar Interfectus* still provides (in its epilogue at least) a contemporary assessment of Cassius' character. And it is certain that Eedes wrote and delivered the epilogue, which itself may have been considered an exemplary piece of prose, worthy of imitation. Indeed, it is a classic example of the prized Renaissance educational technique of argument *in utramque partem*.²⁶ Though proof is

²³ John S. Smart, *Shakespeare: Truth and Tradition* (Oxford, 1966) 179-182; Benvenuto Cellini, *Drammi pre-Shakespeariani* (Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1958) IV.73; cf. J.W. Binns, *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age* (Francis Cairns, 1990) 122.

²⁴ John H. Astington, "Introduction," *Shakespeare Studies* 37 (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009): 19; Boas, of course, preferred to see the allusion as a reference to *Caesar's Revenge*, a work Shakespeare was clearly indebted to: F. S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Clarendon, 1914) 267-78.

²⁵ Howard Staunton, *The Plays of Shakespeare* (Routledge, 1860) III.412; Robert F. Fleissner, "Et Tu, Brute?" And 'Recte Brutus . . . Improbe, Qui Interfecto Caesare . . .': Or, Did Not Shakespeare Ever Utilize the Bodleian?," *Manuscripta* 39 (1995): 51-55. For other explanations of Caesar's famous lines, see Daniel E. Gershenson, "'Kai Su, Teknon': Caesar's Last Words," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43 (1992); Peter Melman, "'Et Tu, Brute?': An Instance of Code-Switching in *Julius Caesar*," *English Language Notes* 39, no. 1 (2001); Richard M. Waugaman, "Unconscious Communication in Shakespeare: 'Et Tu, Brute?' Echoes 'Eloi, Eloi Lama Sabachthani'?", *Psychiatry* 70, no. 1 (2007).

²⁶ Julia Griffin, "Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Dramatic Tradition," 380-1. On the popularity of this technique in Renaissance education and in relation to Shakespeare, see Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1977) 16; and Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Politics: A Contextual Introduction* (Bloomsbury, 2009) vii.

elusive in this case, it is very possible that Shakespeare had come across the epilogue, even if he was not very familiar with the play.²⁷

The epilogue is hardly an embarrassment of riches, but the few references to Cassius do help to provide some insight into Eedes's characterisation. One departure from many of the preceding plays examined here is that Cassius gets due credit for incensing Brutus against Caesar: *Antonius Caesari subiecit igniculos, Bruto Cassius*. The force of the dative makes clear that it was Cassius' incendiary words and deeds (*igniculus* is a small flame or spark) that pushed Brutus to move against his former benefactor. By implication, Cassius is culpable in the same way that Antonius is responsible for Caesar's fate.²⁸ In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Cassius readily admits (albeit using litotes to describe his rhetorical skill) that he has fired up Brutus against Caesar (I.ii.185-7):

I am glad that my weak words
Have struck but thus much show of fire from
Brutus.

Cassius is confident that Brutus' "honourable mettle" may be "wrought" (I.ii.305). Admittedly, his clever speech has not necessarily sowed the seeds of discontent (Brutus has been pondering Rome's present condition: e.g., I.ii.41-5), but put this discontent in the forefront of Brutus' mind. He has thus fired up Brutus against a benefactor he felt deeply divided about.

Cassius' motivations, too, also come under scrutiny (as do those of all the major figures). Indeed, Eedes's Cassius is far from the Republican die-hard of Kyd's *Cornelia*. His Cassius is not motivated out of a desire to restore *libertas* or to avenge Caesar's war crimes (*Corn.* IV.3-4), but by a desire to seize what Caesar has within his grasp –royal

²⁷ R.F. Fleissner, "Shakespeare at Oxford?" *PMLA* (2006) 1743, proposes, *a priori*, that Shakespeare may have attained a copy of Eedes' play from an actor in the performance or by being 'in attendance' at university, despite no indication of attendance in the record books.

²⁸ Antonius offered Caesar the diadem that some think brought odium on the ageing dictator. *Nic. Dam.* 21.

power: *Quicquid voluit* [sc. Caesar], *valde voluit Brutus; nimiu Cassius* (“That which he wanted, Brutus wanted intensely, Cassius excessively”) The adverb *nimum* (“excessively”) undercuts any claim to credibility: Republicanism, it seems, is a sham. Eedes’s Cassius, then, espouses Republican sentiment, but covets royal power every bit as much as Caesar does. Shakespeare’s Cassius, too, laments Caesar’s position of power, jealously questioning how Caesar came to rule. Indeed, Cassius shows consternation at Caesar’s success (I.ii.135-38):

You gods, it doth amaze me
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world
And bear the palm alone.

And why should Caesar be a tyrant, then? (I.iii.107).

In no uncertain terms, Eedes’s Cassius is the result of the source he clearly had close to hand when composing his epilogue: Velleius Paterculus. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Velleius was one of Cassius’ harshest critics, who writes to glorify the emperor Augustus, the very man who (with Marcus Antonius) triumphed over Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in 42 BCE. This is important as the next segment of the epilogue borrows heavily (in fact, often copies) from the Roman historian, something perhaps hitherto commented upon in detail. Velleius offers an antithetical *synkrisis* of Brutus and Cassius, in which he damns by faint praise the latter. Velleius, like Eedes, sets up a teleological judgement to the effect that Brutus was the better man than Cassius. Eedes’s Cassius, therefore, is strongly based on Velleius’ Cassius. If Shakespeare were aware of this play-epilogue, it would explain some of the more negative characterisation in his work that is not developed in detail in Plutarch.

III. Pescetti’s Cassius (1594)

The next significant play to treat the character of Cassius is Orlando Pescetti's *Il Cesare Tragedia*. Pescetti, about whom hardly anything is known, is often regarded as a minor poet in the Italian pantheon.²⁹ Nonetheless, his prolix play has attracted (perhaps) unexpected attention ever since one critic argued that Shakespeare was to some extent indebted to this drama; scholars have repeatedly debated the merits for and against this hypothesis.³⁰ Unfortunately, there is no space here to go into the debate, but it will (hopefully) suffice to say that, even if Shakespeare did not consult the play at first hand, he may have been aware of some of its interesting dramatic innovations. And there are indeed some suggestive parallels between the plays, particularly the Brutus-Portia scenes, which have no Plutarchan or ancient precedent. In the end, the evidence adduced is suggestive, but far from conclusive, and irrespective of the merits of the case for intertextuality, Pescetti's Cassius still provides another analogue against which to compare with Shakespeare's creation.

Pescetti's play was published in Verona in 1594. It was dedicated to Alfonso II d'Este, the Duke of Ferrara (r.1559-97), who is often considered to be the inspiration of Browning's *My Last Duchess*.³¹ That Pescetti would dedicate a play about the assassination of a political ruler to the duke is interesting, even if he claims in his work that, though Brutus and Cassius could not stomach Caesar's rule, they would happily tolerate Alfonso's.³²

²⁹ C. Vallaro, *Pescetti's Il Cesare and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: A Case of Political Intertextuality* (EDUCatt Università Cattolica, 2014), 3. There is little scholarship on Pescetti in English.

³⁰ A. Boecker, *A Probable Italian Source for Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar'* (New York, 1913); Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (Columbia University Press, 1964) 5.30-33; and recently: Cristina Vallaro, *Pescetti's 'Il Cesare' and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: A Case of Political Intertextuality* (EDUCatt Università Cattolica, 2012). However, Raymonde Monnier, "Use and Role of the Concepts of Tyranny and Tyrannicide during the French Revolution," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 2.1 (2006) 22, argues Pescetti was "probably" an inspiration for Shakespeare. It is just possible that Shakespeare knew some Italian: Frances A. Yates, "Italian Teachers in Elizabethan England," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, no. 2 (1937): 103-16.

³¹ Loius S. Friedland, "Ferrara and *My Last Duchess*," *Studies in Philology* 33 (1936): 656-684.

³² Alexander Boecker, *A Probable Italian Source of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (New York University Press, 1913), 8.

Following in the tradition of Muret, Pescetti makes Brutus the mastermind of the conspiracy and even has him incense Cassius against Caesar, neatly inverting the ancient tradition (*Ces.* I.236-39):

Believ'st thou, Cassius,
That I know not as great a courage hides
In thy breast as in Caesar's? That thine arm
Is no less muscular and strong than his?³³

Though Caesar is a tyrant, Brutus claims that Caesar is no more passionate or strong than Cassius. In Shakespeare, Cassius makes similar arguments: there is no reason for noble Romans to be in awe of Caesar, he is as human as everyone else (I.ii.112-14):

I was born free as *Caesar*, so were you
We have both fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter's cold as well as he.

Later in the dialogue, Cassius will return to this theme. Caesar, he argues, is no different from any other noble Roman, except that he is of "feeble temper" (I.ii.158-60):

Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that *Caesar*?
Why should his name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together: Yours is as fair a name?

Caesar is not exceptional. There is no reason Brutus should not be the first man of Rome, or so Cassius argues. In Shakespeare, Cassius' argumentation is clearly designed to play on Brutus' weakness – his overestimation of his own name and reputation (especially for honour: "I love / The name of honour" [I.ii.88-9]).³⁵

Pescetti, like Muret, also dramatizes the debate about the fate of Antony. Cassius confides that he suspects Antony is desirous of power (*Ces.*I. 246). Brutus responds that,

³³ Trans. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* V. 180.

³⁵ William R. Bowden, "The Mind of Brutus," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17 (1966): 57-67. Norman Council, *When Honour's at the Stake* (Routledge, 2014), 60-74, treats Brutus' honour.

were they to kill Antony too, the people would view the assassination as one motivated by private vengeance rather than precipitated by the standard-bearers of Republicanism (*Ces.* I.254-7; cf. *JC* II.i.169-89).

Pescetti's Cassius is perspicacious, and a committed political realist, as Caesar concedes in Shakespeare's tragedy (I.ii.193-8). Whereas Brutus dismisses Antony as a "broken man" (I.267), dissolute and weakened by drunkenness, Cassius identifies and catalogues the future triumvir's tremendous attributes: his esteem amongst the soldiers; his oratorical chops; and his perseverance (*Ces.* I.252-3, 277).³⁶ Moreover, when debating whether or not Antony should be removed also, Cassius notes in rebuttal to Brutus (I.275-79):

Antony
Is certainly to ease and pleasure vowed,
But on the other hand no man exists
Stronger and more courageous, more enduring
In toils and troubles that concern himself.³⁷

Cassius concedes that Antony is given to idleness and pleasure, but notes that he has great attributes: strength (*forte*), courage (*coraggioso*), and patience in the face of hardships. Cassius also understands that Antony is desirous of power. Accordingly, he argues to Brutus (I.286-9):

More like am I
To him who kills his enemy before
He offends, than him who waits to avenge the harm
Until he's been offended.³⁸

³⁶ Following Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* V. 180-1, for lineation and translation.

³⁷ Trans. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* V. 181.

³⁸ Trans. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* V.181.

For Cassius, the end justifies the means. He is not prepared to wait for Antony to seize power. He will remove him beforehand. Like Muret, therefore, Pescetti's Cassius exemplifies the Roman Republican belief in pre-emption. Antony, like Caesar, must be removed before he fills the vacuum Caesar's death will create. Brutus, however, articulates the position that you cannot punish a person for something they have yet to do. Cassius pleads with Brutus that he is too upstanding, but his petition is rejected. Like Pescetti, Shakespeare also stages a set-piece discussion of Antony's fate, a notable parallel which finds nothing but the barest hints in the ancient source material.

Pescetti's Cassius attacks Caesar as a tyrant focusing on his physical characteristics rather than his political actions or alleged war crimes (cf. Kyd, below) (IV.26-28):

Non può la terra sostener gran tempo

Il peso del Tiranno, e non può Giove

Il puzzo tollerar d'huom si malvagio.

The earth cannot sustain for long

The heft, nor Jove the stench,

Of such an evil man. (My translation).

As Cristina Vallaro has noted, Pescetti's Cassius gives a physical dimension to Caesar's tyranny: his weight and smell are emphasised in such a way that "the audience is immediately touched by the sensation of corruption and rottenness."³⁹ Rather than focus on a philosophical definition of tyranny, Pescetti appeals to the senses. Shakespeare's Cassius, too, focuses on Caesar's body, but in a different way. He emphasises the ailing and frail Caesar, who struggles to swim and is prone to the "falling sickness" (I.ii.249-54). For Shakespeare's Cassius, Caesar the tyrant is like a "sick girl" (I.ii.128); how could such a man become (or remain) a tyrant? According to Pescetti's Cassius, then, the

³⁹ Vallaro, *Pescetti's Il Cesare and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: A Case of Political Intertextuality*, 32.

tyrant's body is symbolic of tyranny and the corrupting nature of power, whereas for Shakespeare's Cassius it serves to expose the human vulnerabilities of the tyrant.

Pescetti's Cassius also offers reasons for his disapproval of Caesar's rule. Indeed, for Cassius Caesar has deprived all men of their birthright – freedom. Above all, man must have “dominio di se stesso” (IV.37); yet Caesar's autarchic rule has stolen Cassius' autonomy. In this regard, Pescetti's Cassius makes the case against tyranny (rather than just against Caesar) in a way that is very different from the Cassius in *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare's Cassius focuses on the nobles' loss of honour (they will have to dig themselves ‘dishonourable graves’: I.ii.138). Caesar's victory has robbed true Roman nobles of their *dignitas*.

The egalitarian (all noble Romans are created equal) argument first emerges in Pescetti. However, in Pescetti it is Brutus who raises the curtain on Caesar's unremarkableness. And yet, Pescetti's emphasis is slightly different from Shakespeare's. In Pescetti, Brutus reassures Cassius that he is every bit as strong and fierce as Caesar. The focus here is more to do with manliness as a marker of leadership; and Caesar's claim is no greater than Cassius'. *Julius Caesar* offers a subtle variation on this argument. In Shakespeare, Cassius states that he cannot live in “awe” (fear) of someone like himself (i.e., Caesar). His point is that Caesar is no better (either physically or mentally) than Brutus or himself. In fact, as he goes on to insist, Caesar is actually physically weaker, so much so that his ascension to a position of power can only be explained by the “womanish” state of the Roman nobility.

Pescetti's *Il Cesare* is one of the earliest play to have a character seriously call into question (dispute, in fact) the justification on which Caesar's power is built. Caesar, Pescetti's Brutus implores, is no more special than any other noble: he is ordinary. This is precisely the line of attack that Shakespeare's Cassius takes when recruiting both

Brutus and Casca. In Shakespeare, after de-feathering Caesar, Cassius will force the dictator to fly an “ordinary pitch” (I.i.72). Shakespeare’s Cassius fulfils the prophecy of Murellus and Flavius in scene II of Act One. Pescetti’s play advances important Republican and personal reasons to justify the assassination of Caesar. Pescetti’s Cassius suffers under the stifling oppression of a corrupt leader. He has been deprived of his birthright, and, like Shakespeare’s Cassius, vows to free himself (cf. *JC*. I.iii.90).

IV. Kyd’s Cassius’ (1594)

Thomas Kyd’s Cassius is arguably the most important precursor of Shakespeare’s. *Cornelia*, a translation (and more) of Robert Garnier’s play of the same title, marked a departure for Kyd (it was a closet play), whose *Spanish Tragedy* had enjoyed notable success in London. It was printed in 1594 by James Roberts. By this time, Kyd had fallen out of favour with his former patron, perhaps after running afoul of the Privy Council. Although some consider it his most mature play, it has often been overlooked by critics, particularly because, at first glance, *Cornelia* may appear a simple translation of Garnier’s earlier work (1574). However, on closer inspection the play reveals that Kyd is no mere copyist. His additions to, and revisions of, the original play are such that many critics consider it an independent/original text.⁴⁰

Cassius enjoys an almost cameo-like appearance in Act Four, in which he engages in a debate about Caesar with Decimus Brutus. As Frederick Boas has pointed out, there are distinct similarities between the Cassius of Garnier-Kyd and of Shakespeare. Both characters, he argues, come across as “fiery yet shrewd, envious of Caesar, yet full of

⁴⁰ Josephine A. Roberts and James F. Gaines, "Kyd and Garnier: The Art of Amendment," *Comparative Literature* 31, no. 2 (1979): 133. Curtis Perry, "The Uneasy Republicanism of Thomas Kyd's *Cornelia*," *Criticism* 48, no. 4 (2008): 535-55. cf. Lukas Erne, *Beyond the Spanish Tragedy: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester University Press, 2001), 209-10.

genuinely patriotic passion for liberty.”⁴¹ However, there are notable differences in the way each Cassius presents his case against Caesar, and this is very important.⁴² Shakespeare does not incorporate many of the Lucanian/anti-Caesar arguments found in Kyd’s *Cornelia* (see below). His Cassius’ arguments are based largely on the loss of honour that the Roman nobility has suffered (a prominent but not the only argument in Kyd). In Kyd, as in Garnier, Cassius sounds distinctly Lucanian (IV.3-4):⁴³

For one mans pleasure (O iniurous Rome)
Thy children gainst thy children thou hast arm’d.

From the beginning of the scene, Cassius indicts Caesar for putting his own *dignitas* above the commonwealth, for an illegitimate war no less. As a result of Garnier’s use of Lucan, Kyd’s Cassius is evidently far more principled and Republican in spirit than in Muret, if also rhetorically sophistic (another trait of Shakespeare’s Cassius). Indeed, Cassius is incensed against Caesar because he has been made servile “which torments me most” (IV.11). Admittedly, even this Republican protestation reveals that Cassius is also upset at losing his own authority and respectability.

Cassius is also Lucanian and notably Stoic (and not Epicurean) in his despairing of the gods (IV.17): “No, no, there are no Gods...” But Cassius is not prepared to take

⁴¹ Frederick Samuel Boas, *The Works of Thomas Kyd* (Clarendon Press, 1901), lxxxiii: “Shakespeare, with his keen interest in the decline and fall of the Republic, is likely to have read *Cornelia*, and the dialogue in Act IV, scene i of that piece, between Cassius and Decimus Brutus, anticipates curiously in general spirit, and at times even in expression, that between Cassius and Marcus Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, I. ii. 25-177. The character of Cassius as revealed here, and in the interview with Casca, I. iii. 41-130 – a character of which only the barest hints are suggested by Plutarch – has its exact prototype in the Cassius of Garnier-Kyd, fiery yet shrewd, envious of Caesar, yet full of a genuinely patriotic passion for liberty”; cf. Erne, *Beyond the Spanish Tragedy: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd*.

⁴² W. Nicholas Knight, “Julius Caesar and Shakespearean Revenge Tragedy,” *Erasmus Review* 1 (1971): 19-34. Scholars have shown Shakespeare’s potential indebtedness to Kyd’s: Frank Ardolino, “The Influence of Sly: The Influence of the *Spanish Tragedy* on the Two Shrews,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 31 (2005); Glyn Austen, “Seneca, Kyd, and Shakespeare: The Place of *Hamlet* in the Evolution of Revenge Tragedy,” *English Review* 10, no. 1 (1999); Janet Clare, “Shakespeare: Revising and Re-Visioning,” *Revista alicantina de estudios ingleses* 25 (2012).

⁴³ Of most significance is that Garnier was influenced by Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, which had also been translated by Marlowe, Kyd’s companion, likely whilst he was at Cambridge, but unpublished till 1600.

Caesar's victory lightly. It would bring disgrace on all those who fought against Caesar. Cassius criticises the Republicans' "base cowardise" (IV.41).⁴⁴ Indeed, for Cassius every moment that Caesar is not dead makes the Republicans "wretches." (IV.72) Only the tyrant's death would "revive" their reputations and freedom. In an echo of Muret, Cassius remarks: "I burne till I be there / To see this massacre" (IV.73-4).

Decimus Brutus and Cassius engage in an appropriately classical *agon* (or *stichomythia*). Brutus takes up Caesar's defence. He argues that Caesar, like Sulla before, will restore liberty to the commonwealth now that he is victorious in war (IV.77-79). Cassius, however, is having none of it: "*Caesar and Sylla, Brutus, be not like.*" (IV.80). Here Cassius demonstrates his perspicacity, which will be borne out. He realises that Caesar will not set aside his status as dictator. It is Cassius' perceptiveness that Shakespeare emphasises repeatedly throughout *Julius Caesar*, and nowhere more obviously than in Caesar's famous aside to Antonius: "He is a great observer, and he looks / Quite through the deeds of men." (I.ii.221-2). In Kyd, Cassius knows full well that Caesar will not lay down his power now that he has defeated Pompey. Shakespeare's Cassius, unlike almost everyone else in the play, can see Caesar for what he truly is: an authoritarian ruler, who has gained his power at the expense of the nobility. This is the reason Caesar holds Cassius to be "very dangerous".

Decimus Brutus serves as a foil to Cassius in this scene. In their debate, Cassius consistently overturns his rebuttals, often using methods employed by sophistic orators. Once again, we see a Cassius attuned to the realities of power, as in Pescetti (*Ces.* I.246, I. 304-5) and Shakespeare (for example, I.iii.103, II.i.157).

Brut. But *Cassius*, *Caesar* is not yet a King

Cass. No, but dictator, in effect as much...

⁴⁴ Cf. Pescetti's *Il Cesare* IV.571-2 (trans. Bullough, *Narrative Sources*, V.190): "Base cowards we, who until now / Could bear to live in servitude so vile."

Brut. Hee is not bloody.

Cass. But by bloody iarres/He hath unpeopled most part of the earth.

Cassius' Republican sentiments come through strongly in Kyd:

I cannot serve nor see Rome yok'd.

No, let me rather dye a thousand deaths.

As in Muret (II.168), Cassius is prepared to die in the fight against Caesar. The use of hyperbole powerfully conveys his desire to die for his country, although such a sentiment may have been a cliché in Elizabethan England, but not less effective for that. Here again there are parallels; Shakespeare's Cassius also pledges to kill himself for the cause. When he fears that the conspirators' enterprise has been revealed to Caesar, he declares (III.i.20-22):

If this be known,
Cassius or Caesar never shall turn back,
For I will slay myself.

In both Kyd's and Shakespeare's plays, then, it is clear that (despite his flaws) Cassius is truly prepared to die to see Caesar removed from power. He is evidently a committed rebel. Still, there are subtle differences. In Shakespeare, Cassius wears his emotions about Caesar on his sleeve. He is very eager to see Caesar die; in Kyd, by contrast, Cassius is more controlled and persuasive, no doubt a vestige of the neo-Senecan style.

Cassius' disillusionment and frustration with the Gods is also notable. Not simply is Caesar to blame – and “accursed” Rome herself – but the Gods who have let everything transpire. Cassius, however, dismisses the gods (“No, no, there are no Gods”) and blames chance for the current state of affairs (IV.21-22):

'Tis Fortunes rules, for equitie and right

Have neither helpe nor grace in heavens sight

One significant difference between Kyd's and Shakespeare's Cassius is the nature in which they set out to unmask Caesar as a man desirous of kingly power. Based on his Lucanian-centred⁴⁵ model, Kyd's Cassius presents a sustained, articulate (if rhetorically sophistic and tendentious) case against the victor of Pharsalus. Shakespeare's Cassius, no less tendentious and skilful, does not present a litany of offences so much as a vituperative assessment of Caesar's fitness to rule (*inter alia*).⁴⁶

Kyd's Cassius presents his case in a structured manner, parrying the arguments of Decimus Brutus and building upon his own points. In his exordium, he begins by lamenting the civil war itself, which has pitted "Thy chylidren gainst thy chylidren." Fellow Romans have been forced to kill their neighbours, friends, even their own brothers. The massacre of Roman soldiers leads Cassius poignantly on to his next point: this whole deed has been committed "For one man's pleasure". There can be no doubt that this bloody civil strife occurred because the power-hungry Caesar wanted to establish himself as king. Thus Cassius accuses Caesar of starting the civil war for his own self-aggrandisement, which has led to the death of many innocent Romans. Cassius' next argumentative prong is that, by starting a civil war, Caesar has destroyed the commonwealth, the system of government that had existed at Rome for almost half a millennium: "The Conquering Tyrant, high in Fortunes grace, / Doth ryde tryumphing o're our Common-wealth". Now, Cassius opines, one man is in control of Rome rather than the old nobility: "And o're Rome *Caesar* raignes in Rome it selfe." The irony of Caesar's civil war, Cassius concludes, is that he promised the soldiers liberty, but made them die for monarchy.

⁴⁵ Lucan was an anti-Caesarian Roman poet Shakespeare was aware of: Frank Ardolino, "Costard as 'Thrice Great Pompey' in *Love's Labour's Lost*," *Discoveries: On-line Newsletter of S-CRC* 27, no. 1 (2010); Knight, "*Julius Caesar* and Shakespearean Revenge Tragedy,"; Clifford J. Ronan, "Lucanic Omens in *Julius Caesar*," *Comparative Drama* 22 (1988); Ronan, "Lucan and the Self-Incised Voids of *Julius Caesar*," *Comparative Drama* 22 (1988); Frederick Samuel Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Clarendon Press, 1914); George M. Logan, "Lucan--Daniel--Shakespeare: New Light on the Relation between the Civil Wars and *Richard II*," *Shakespeare Studies* 9 (1976): 121-40.

⁴⁶ He also presents arguments based on the ruinous demise of the Roman nobility: see Chapter Three.

Caesar's war was a sham. These provocative arguments, based on anti-Caesarian source material, which foreground an alleged illegitimate war in a bid for absolute power, are different in tenor to those made by Shakespeare's Cassius.

Shakespeare's Cassius is far less controlled in his case against Caesar. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Cassius' emotions seem to get the better of him as he embarks on his explanation, and he diverges from his expressed purpose to ruminate over Caesar's physical frailties (frailties that reveal the dishonourable state of the Roman nobility).

One distinct characteristic of Kyd's Cassius is that he is conscious of reputation. He seems eager to move against Caesar because not to do so would leave his reputation in tatters. To some extent, Kyd's Cassius is moved against Caesar out of shame that he will be accused of cowardice if he does not oppose the "tyrant" (IV.43-46):

Shall lamed Souldiours, and grave gray-haird men
Poynt at us in theyr bitter teares, and say:
See where they goe that have theyr race forgot,
And rather chuse (unarm'd) to serve with shame,
Then (arm'd) to save their freedom and their fame?

Kyd's Cassius is frustrated and guilt-ridden. Repeatedly and graphically, he emphasises the wanton destruction and death that Caesar has wrought: "Now o're our bodies tumbled vp on heapes, /...Thou buildst thy kingdom." (IV.8, 10). Caesar builds his new Roman monarchy on the bodies of soldiers he promised were fighting for liberty.

Kyd's Cassius also appears to be suffering from what modern psychologists have term "survivor's syndrome". He is anxious that "gray-haird men" and "lamed Souldiers" would consider him cowardly and accuse him of turning his back on Rome and Republicanism. He vividly imagines their contemptuous jibes: "See where they [Cassius and D. Brutus] goe that have theyr race forgot" (IV.i.44). Not only has Caesar robbed

Cassius of his dignity, now even his manliness is under threat too. Shakespeare, I believe, clearly incorporated such fears into the personality of his Cassius; they are entirely absent in the ancient sources. Indeed, Cassius confesses to Casca that he feels Caesar's has emasculated the Roman nobility (I.iii.81-5):

But—woe the while!—our fathers' minds are dead,
And we are governed with our mothers' spirits.
Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish.

And yet, Cassius feels that Caesar (who has reduced the nobility to its “womanish” position) is as frail as a “sick girl” (I.ii.128). No wonder it rankles him so.⁴⁷

For Kyd's Cassius, as long as Caesar “raignes in Rome” he is nothing more than a servile creature. Only by Caesar's death, he tells D. Brutus, “we wretches may revive” (IV.i.72). Shakespeare's Cassius, too, is angry that Caesar, ailing and frail, has power over him. Physically Caesar is weak, but his power has made Cassius a “wretched creature,” who “must bend his body / If Caesar but nod on him.” (I.ii.117-18). Cassius' obsequiousness is intolerable. He is mystified as to how Caesar, a man of “feeble temper” (I.ii.129), could maintain his control over Rome. He could not, Cassius later concludes, were not the Romans “but sheep” (I.iii.105).

In sum, Thomas Kyd's *Cornelia* has clearly had an impact on Shakespeare. There are details in his story that have no ancient precedent and yet find their way into *Julius Caesar*. Kyd's Cassius, for instance, does not miss an opportunity to censure the Roman nobility for their cowardice, something that Shakespeare's Cassius does repeatedly (e.g., I.ii.152, I.iii.80-4). Yet, at the same time, Cassius himself is not immune from this criticism. On the contrary, in both Kyd and Shakespeare he is acutely aware that his manliness and reputation have been called into question, as a result of Caesar's usurpation

⁴⁷ In another vein, Jan Blits has argued that Shakespeare attributes several feminine traits to Cassius: Jan H. Blits, “Manliness and Friendship in *Julius Caesar*,” in *William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar*, ed. Harold Bloom (Infobase Publishing, 2009), 155-67.

of power. It should also be stressed that there are important differences between the works. Of most importance is the nature in which the case against Caesar is presented. In Kyd, Cassius is controlled, rhetorically skilful (if not almost sophistic); in Shakespeare, Cassius is emotive, rhetorically redundant, but no less persuasive in highlighting the plight of the nobility. However, there is certainly an absence of remarks about Republicanism and Caesar's war crimes (alluded to in the first scene: I.i.52), which form the foundation of Kyd's Cassius' successful indictment of Caesar.

V. Anonymous Author of *Caesar's Revenge* (c. 1590s)

There can be little doubt nowadays that *Caesar's Revenge* was an important source for Shakespeare, despite considerable debate over its composition date. Much of the confusion stems from the fact that the drama was not entered into the Stationer's Register until June 1606, which is clearly long after Shakespeare had composed *Julius Caesar*. However, as most scholars now agree, the academic play was probably written and performed much earlier – in the 1590s; its language and predilection for erudite classical allusions are certainly a marker of that decade.⁴⁸ Reassigning the drama to the last decade of the sixteenth century, then, explains the strong intertextuality between the two plays (and other works of Shakespeare from that period).⁴⁹

Caesar's Revenge is the first surviving university drama on a classical theme, and, interestingly, demonstrates a deliberate imitation of (and familiarity with) dramas staged in London, something that may well have drawn Shakespeare's initial interest.⁵⁰ Notably,

⁴⁸ Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age*, 268. Cf. Jacqueline Pearson, "Shakespeare and *Caesar's Revenge*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 32 (1981): 101-2, who also considers the play "Elizabethan rather than Jacobean."

⁴⁹ Ernest Schanzer, "A Neglected Source of *Julius Caesar*," *Notes & Queries* 199 (1954): 196-7; William Poole, "*Julius Caesar* and *Caesars Revenge* Again," *Notes & Queries* 49 (2002): 226-8. Poole argues that *Caesar's Revenge* was to hand (or at least recalled) when Shakespeare composed *JC* – the verbal echo in the first scene of the first act is too close to be coincidental. He suggests the play was composed in 1593.

⁵⁰ Harry Morgan Ayres, "*Caesar's Revenge*," *PMLA* 30, no. 4 (1915): 779.

the anonymous author is every bit as comfortable drawing on Kyd, Marlowe, Sidney, and Spenser (i.e. London stage playwrights) as he is on the classics.⁵¹ This notwithstanding, the classics are also never far from the author's fingertips, particularly Appian and Lucan, who were both far more sympathetic than other ancient sources to Cassius and his cause (cf. Chapter One).

In *Caesar's Revenge*, Cassius enters at the very beginning of Act III. Personified Discord encourages Cassius to wake from his dreams,⁵² although she notes, with appropriately distasteful glee, that he "naught dost dreame but blood and death" (III.1159). Cassius is tormented (haunted, in fact) in his sleep by "howling Ghosts", who with "ghastly horror" – in an echo of Lucan – goad and cry out to him: "By Cassius' hand must wicked Caesar die" (III.1160-1; Luc. 7.451). The effect of these disturbing "visions" is immediate; when Cassius awakes, he resolves to make a solemn promise (III.1189-91):

And if none be, whose countryes ardent loue,
And losse of Roman liberty can moue,
Ile be the man that shall this taske performe.

In *Julius Caesar*, too, Cassius comes to the realisation that he will have to initiate and organise the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar. As the Roman nobility have abdicated their duties, Cassius resolves to take personal responsibility for the task, before the senators can make Caesar a king (I.iii.90-1): "I know where I will wear this dagger then. / Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius."

Thus Cassius takes it upon himself to remove Caesar. But what are his reasons? In contrast to Shakespeare's character, but along similar lines to Kyd's, Cassius here rehearses the arguments of Lucan, although (interestingly) he sententiously censures

⁵¹ Ibid. 779; cf. Pearson, "Shakespeare and *Caesar's Revenge*," 101: "The author...was steeped in contemporary literature [and]..has an extensive knowledge of the popular theatre."

⁵² III.1157: "Why sleepest thou Cassius?" The phrase is a clever allusion to historical Roman graffiti that were placed around the Capitol for Brutus to encourage him to come to his senses about Caesar (Plut. *Brut.*9.7). It is thus also displacement in that the phrase is connected to Cassius rather than Brutus.

Caesar as a man “long in pleasures idle lap”, whose dalliance with his “Proud Curtezan” (Cleopatra) has sated his bloody appetite. Like Pescetti’s Caesar, here the dictator has grown lazy and idle, a stereotypical characteristic of the Renaissance tyrant. Nevertheless, Cassius still alludes to the civil war: Caesar comes in triumph with “Tropheyes sad, / Which from the Romaines he with blood did get” (III.1177-8). Shakespeare alludes to Caesar’s victory in the civil war very briefly in the opening scene (I.i.51, cf. Cassius’ “opens graves”: I.iii.75); but Cassius never uses the deed as an argumentative prong to sway Brutus.

Cassius also feels that Caesar has reached the apex of his power. In short, like an aged actor past his best, Caesar’s time has come and gone, as had Pompey’s;⁵³ it will not be long before he too is surpassed (III.1185-7):

Thy sonne is mounted in the highest poynt:
Thou placed art in top of fortunes wheele,
Her wheele must turne, thy glory must eclipse...

Here, too, however there is still an element of jealousy, which is so evident in Shakespeare’s characterisation. Caesar rides triumphantly through Rome, like Apollo, in “gloryes cheefest pride” lording it over his enemies. There is a strong undertone in Cassius’ speech that he struggles to stomach Caesar’s victory. He resents the “Tyrant” mounted in his “goulden Chayre.” (III.1179-80).

In Shakespeare, too, Cassius evidently feels that Caesar’s best years (like those of his Elizabethan counterpart) were behind him.⁵⁴ Their historical swimming contest

⁵³ Pompey’s role in the tragedy of *Julius Caesar* has been notably understudied: George Walton Williams, “Pompey the Great in *Julius Caesar*,” *Renaissance Papers* (1976): 31-36.

⁵⁴ The reference to Caesar’s deafness has often been cited as an example of Caesar’s frailty, although there is debate about whether or not this deafness is figurative: John W. Velz, “Caesar’s Deafness,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 22 (1971): 400-1.

demonstrates to Cassius, at least, that Caesar is no longer the proud conqueror of Gaul (I.ii.114-17):

I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
Did I the tired Caesar.

As with the other contemporary plays, however, there are also notable differences to Shakespeare's tragedy. In Scene iii of Act III, for example, Cassius stumbles across Brutus and resolves to "sound him" out on Caesar to discover how he is "inclined". Admittedly, this section bears some striking similarities to Shakespeare's dialogue between Brutus and Cassius. However, the differences are just as important. Notably, Cassius is far less subtle and circuitous in his argumentation than his Shakespearian counterpart. He boldly enquires "How fares young Brutus in this tottering state?" This is far more direct and brazen than in Shakespeare, where Cassius starts off innocuously and ironically with "Will you go see the Order of the course?" (I.ii.27) Brutus responds passively and has a defeatist air about him.

Cassius' restlessness and disturbed sleep – which in Renaissance thought were regarded as ominous indeed – are alluded to in several of the plays.⁵⁵ In Muret, Cassius refers to his sleeplessness in Act II; all night he had been fantasizing about Caesar's murder: *Vtque haec nihil me cogitantem praeter haec / Nox tota vidit* (II.157-8). So excited is he about the prospect of Caesar's death, he cannot even sleep. In *Caesar's Revenge*, by contrast, Cassius' disturbed sleep is the result of something very different. Indeed, in Act III he is afflicted by bad dreams (III.1157-61):

⁵⁵ Joel E. Dimsdale, "Sleep in *Othello*," *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* 5, no. 3 (2009); Yury Furman, Sheldon M. Wolf, and David S. Rosenfeld, "Shakespeare and Sleep Disorders," *Neurology* 49 (1997); Ken Heaton, "Nature's Nurse or Ape of Death? Shakespeare and Sleep," *A Groat's Worth of Wit: Journal of the Open University Shakespeare Society* 21, no. 4 (2011); S. Viswanathan, "Sleep and Death: The Twins in Shakespeare," *Comparative Drama* 13 (1979).

Why sleepest thou *Cassius*? wake thee from thy dreame:
And yet thou naught dost dreame but blood and death.
For dreadfull visions do afright thy sleepe.
And howling Ghosts with gastly horrors cry,
By *Cassius* hand must wicked *Cæsar* die...

Cassius is tormented in his sleep. He is haunted by dreams in which he presumably relives the horrors of civil war, whose victims, the “howling ghosts”, cry out to him to kill Caesar. Neither disturbed sleep nor ghostly apparitions were considered healthy in Renaissance thought. Cassius, at any rate, resolves to restore Roman liberty and remove Caesar as a result. In Shakespeare, too, Cassius’ restlessness is evident. Even Caesar remarks that he would rather have men about him that would “sleep a-nights” (I.ii.192) He is referring to Cassius, who “thinks too much” (I.ii.194). Cassius is forever at unease as a result of Caesar’s victory. The play, too, shows a restless Cassius. Whilst this characteristic of Cassius is famously alluded to by Plutarch, it has clearly been developed and appropriated by the dramatists of the sixteenth century.

Caesar’s Revenge may have furnished Shakespeare with useful details. Certainly, it places unusual emphasis on Cassius’ role in the conspiracy (based on a close reading of Lucan). The play also foregrounds his torment at Caesar’s victory: he is haunted by ghosts that implore him to remove Caesar. As a result, he resolves to take the initiative, since everyone else appears to have divested themselves of responsibility.

Conclusions

Known earlier Caesar plays were written by academics rather than playwrights (Kyd being a notable exception), and the dramas often conform to the strict neoclassical rules. It has been seen how Shakespeare’s Cassius bears some similarities to Muret’s Cassius, especially in his vindictive criticism of Caesar and zealous Republicanism, only briefly touched upon in Plutarch. Indeed, if Plutarch provided the skeletal details, Muret has fleshed out lots of the motivations. However, Muret’s Cassius is far more unsavoury than

Shakespeare's – in fantasising about Caesar's murder, he luxuriates in his graphic descriptions of Caesar's murder to the people. Muret's Cassius is obsessed with the "criminal Caesar" rather than with the high principles of Republicanism, which so concern Brutus. His emotions overrun him, again in stark contrast to Brutus.

It has also been seen that Shakespeare's Cassius bears some strong resemblances to Kyd's Cassius, especially in his grievances against Caesar. The seduction scene and Act Four of *Cornelia* clearly have strong parallels. However, there is a notable difference in the argumentation. Kyd's Cassius lists Caesar's crimes – his lust for power, and his alleged war crimes; Shakespeare's Cassius only offers brief overtures to Caesar's tyranny, and then critiques him for different reasons: he is old and ailing; the Romans are weak for ceding him control of the state; and he is unremarkable.

Thus, certain "Cassian" attributes emerge not found in Shakespeare's ancient materials. He is a perceptive political observer, "a realist" (not made explicit by any ancient source). He is also Machiavellian in his "ends justifies the means" mentality, as seen in his feelings about the fate of Antony. He is prepared to put political expediency above political principles; Brutus is not. Nonetheless, this political outlook of Cassius does not make him the "Machiavel" of the plays. His motives for wanting to remove Caesar are often personal *and* political, enflamed by emotion. Only in Kyd does Cassius make controlled, reasoned, predominantly Republican arguments against Caesar in his *agon*-like debate with Decimus Brutus, even if there is a strong rhetorical element to this pleading. Note, too, that this is a play Shakespeare will have read and the contents of these arguments are not repeated to any serious degree. One reason for this difference, I believe, is that Shakespeare wants to focus on what Cassius and the nobility have lost to Caesar (not what his alleged crimes against the state are). Shakespeare is more concerned

with honour, a personal rather than a political theme. It is Cassius' loss of honour, and Brutus' desire to restore honour, that set the tragedy in train.

Cassius' mental anguish also reveals a darker side to his character. At the beginning of Act III in *Caesar's Revenge*, for instance, Cassius is tormented. His sleep is disturbed, ghosts haunt his dreams, and goad him to assassinate Caesar. Discord wills Cassius to wake, whilst reveling in the "dreadfull visions" that afright his sleep (III.1160). In Kyd's *Cornelia*, Cassius is wracked with guilt. He worries that people will label him a coward because he survived whilst other patriots perished fighting against Caesar. It is for this reason in Kyd, indeed, that Cassius feels most strongly that Caesar must die: he cannot regain his *dignitas* (his honour) until Caesar has been removed. In Shakespeare, too, Cassius is tormented by Caesar's position of power. He struggles to understand how an ailing man of "feeble temper" managed to install himself as master of the "majestic world" (I.ii.136-7). His deep-seated resentment of Caesar's position is evident. He feels wretched –as does Kyd's Cassius–at being under Caesar's thumb. Pescetti's Cassius, as will be recalled, is also spurred by the frustration of losing his autonomy. In all these ways, psychological torment at Caesar's position spurs Cassius to action. Kyd's Cassius sums this feeling up: being made servile, he says, "torments me most" (IV.11). Shakespeare captures Cassius' psychological torment at being under Caesar's power brilliantly, but then he was drawing on a rich dramatic tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

SHAKESPEARE'S SOCIO-POLITICAL MILIEU AND HIS CHARACTERISATION OF CASSIUS

Introduction

This chapter aims to chart the influence of Shakespeare's socio-political environment on his characterisation of Cassius. Whether or not scholars accept that *Julius Caesar* is a political play (and there is certainly not universal agreement about it), the character of Cassius is central to the tragedy. In conspiring against Caesar, he acts in a way that is arguably Elizabethan, as has been observed elsewhere.¹ I shall further make the case that Cassius' words and deeds would have had a profound contemporary resonance for Shakespeare's audience.

The organisation of this chapter is as follows. First, I will examine the historical context in which *Julius Caesar* was composed. As many scholars have recognised, 1599 was a watershed year for Shakespeare, as he transitioned from history plays to his so-called mature tragedies. I will also briefly explore whether Caesar can be considered an analogue for Elizabeth, and how the domestic and foreign concerns of the 1590s exacerbated anxieties over the white elephant in the room: an undecided succession. Second, I will examine the extent to which Cassius may be considered an analogue of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, as has been mooted by Barbara Parker. There are intriguing parallels between Cassius and Essex, which certainly merit exploration. Shakespeare's connections to Essex are also relevant here, although discussed briefly, for which I make no apology, given the tenuous links between the pair. Third, I will examine the ways in which Cassius acts like a contemporary

¹ Vikram Chopra, "The Last of All the Romans: A Case for Cassius," *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* 54, no. 5 (2003): 221-8. It is to be lamented, however, that Chopra did not develop his case in further detail. Cf. Wayne A. Rebhorn, "The Crisis of the Aristocracy in *Julius Caesar*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1990): 81.

Elizabethan dissident. Among other cultural artefacts, I draw on Catholic Resistance literature to compare the similarities in argumentation (especially the emphasis on the decline of the nobility). Fourth, I examine how Machiavellian political thought may have influenced Shakespeare's characterisation, especially in illuminating Cassius' falsification of testimony (and his proposal to kill Antony). And finally, I look at Essex's loss of favour and fall from grace (beginning in 1599), and demonstrate this is paralleled in Cassius' story also, as a close reading of Act I, Scene ii demonstrates. As paradoxical as it may sound, Cassius, like Essex, can be viewed as a flawed but committed Elizabethan dissident, fuelled by a patriotic desire to restore his caste.² Shakespeare, I will argue, was greatly influenced by his environment, and no more so than in his characterisation of Cassius as an Elizabethan dissident. Before turning to the historical context in which *Julius Caesar* was composed, I would like to clarify the focus of my chapter in regards to Shakespeare's politics.

Beyond Shakespeare's Politics

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to rehearse the various arguments for and against Shakespeare as a *political* dramatist. After four hundred years, scholars are still no closer to pinning down Shakespeare's politics; nor should one assume, even if solid conclusions could be reached, that his beliefs were immutable. Like James Shapiro, then, I think it best to concede, as pedestrian as it may sound, that Shakespeare "kept a lock on what he revealed about himself."³ Moreover, scholars would do well to remember that it is possible to discuss politics without being political. Such a view, however, is not meant to imply that Shakespeare never makes political observations in

² Chopra, "The Last of the Romans: a Case for Cassius" 221-8, argues that Cassius can be considered akin to an Elizabethan patriot. Cf. S.S. Argawalla, *Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (Atlantic, 1995) 36, who describes Cassius as an "out and out patriot".

³ James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (Faber & Faber, 2011), 333.

his plays, or *Julius Caesar* specifically, but that there is no discernible pattern of political persuasion, which given the strict censorship of Elizabethan plays is understandable.⁴ As mentioned, the focus of this chapter is not so much on identifying Shakespeare's political persuasion to explain how his beliefs colour his portrayal of Cassius, but on how his socio-political environment appears to have influenced his characterisation. The distinction, which is not merely semantic, is crucial to understanding Shakespeare's Cassius.

However, this is not an attempt to eschew difficult questions. Irrespective of whether or not *Julius Caesar* is intended as a political play, the tragedy raises many provocative issues. Did Shakespeare pen the play because he was interested in concerns about the succession crisis or constitutional matters? In Republicanism?⁵ Did he tacitly support the faction of the charismatic Earl of Essex over the *regnum Cecilianum* (the mantle which Robert Cecil had assumed)? Did he believe, in some circumstances, that resistance to a leader was permissible? Did a play about *Julius Caesar* allow him to explore these concerns, whilst providing him protection from censorship?⁶ Or were there simply more pragmatic reasons than politics? Did he only turn to *Julius Caesar* because there had been numerous Caesar plays before,⁷ which evidently indicates their popularity and lucrativeness? Opening the Globe theatre was a tremendously precarious venture, and a financial risk that Shakespeare was a

⁴ For a detailed discussion of issues pertaining to Renaissance censorship, see A. Hadfield, ed. *Literature and Censorship in Renaissance England* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

⁵ On these matters, see the seminal article of Robert S Miola, "*Julius Caesar* and the Tyrannicide Debate," *Renaissance Quarterly* (1985). One noted scholar has argued that Shakespeare expresses Republican sympathies in his earlier classical plays, although not in his later works: Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 111. Cf. Arthur F. Kinney, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 2011) s.v. "Republicanism".

⁶ The issue of censorship in Late Elizabethan England is well known. In the summer of 1599, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London (*inter alia*) had published an edict forbidding the printing of "Satyres or Epigrams": Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1997), 67.

⁷ Cf. Chapter Two, which explored the popularity of Caesar plays.

significant shareholder in. Did he ultimately need a crowd-pleaser? Or perhaps the appearance of the second edition of North's *Plutarch* (1595), or even Thomas Spegth's *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1598),⁸ made such an exercise too inviting to pass up.⁹ Whatever his motivations, and there were likely more than one, Shakespeare does not shy away from raising important political issues in *Julius Caesar*. As has been observed, however, he is careful to adopt an ambivalent and complex attitude to both political issues and the major characters.¹⁰

1. Historical Context

Julius Caesar was composed and performed in 1599, and was likely the first play to christen the newly built Globe Theatre.¹¹ In no uncertain terms, then, 1599 was a career-defining moment for the dramatist:¹² in this year he made the transition from a long string of English history plays (his Henriad) to what has been called his mature tragedies, beginning with *Hamlet* (c. 1601).¹³ It is *Julius Caesar*, a historical-tragedy, which bridges the divide.

The England of the 1590s (and 1599 in particular) was a very different place from the country of Shakespeare's youth. So different, in fact, that one scholar divides

⁸ Seth Lerer and Deanne Williams, "What Chaucer Did to Shakespeare: Books and Bodkins in *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare* 8, no. 4 (2012): 398-410. Despite its title, the focus of this article is every bit concerned with Chaucer's influence on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

⁹ Horst Zander, "Introduction" *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays* (Routledge, 2005) 4, on the fundamental importance of Plutarch for Shakespeare in the composition of his mature tragedies.

¹⁰ Mildred E. Hartsock, "The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*," *PMLA* 81 (1966): 56-62; Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹¹ Steve Sohmer, "12 June 1599: Opening Day at Shakespeare's Globe," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 3, no. 1 (1997): 1-46; Wilson, Richard. "A Brute Part: *Julius Caesar* and the Rites of Violence." *Cahiers élisabéthains* 50 (1996): 19-32.

¹² James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*. (Faber & Faber, 2011).

¹³ The date of *Hamlet* first performance is not settled in stone; see Michael J. Hirrel, "When Did Gabriel Harvey Write His Famous Note?" *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2012): 291.

Elizabeth's reign into two, and suggests that from 1585 her "second reign" began.¹⁴ As with sequels generally, Elizabeth's second reign was not nearly as impressive or popular as her first. The triumphs against the Spanish Armada (1588), which had taken a greater toll on the English than sometimes realised, were a distant memory by 1599. Worse still, whispers of another foreign invasion attempt reared their head in this year, fuelling the fear that her isolated Protestant outpost might be subject to another Spanish Armada.¹⁵

Riots,¹⁶ suspension of laws, military entanglements and threats,¹⁷ and a religious crackdown that one historian has compared to an "English Inquisition",¹⁸ created a general sense of anxiety and foreboding amongst the English. By 1599, as practically the sole survivor of her political generation (William Cecil had died in 1598), Elizabeth appeared increasingly isolated and authoritarian in her actions, just like Shakespeare's Caesar (e.g., II.IV.34). In response to the influx of intellectual tracts on Republicanism and the "mixed monarchy" debate, which Shakespeare may have weighed into later in *King Lear*,¹⁹ Elizabeth ratcheted up her "divine right of kings"²⁰ rhetoric and the cult of *Gloriana* (see below).

¹⁴ John Guy, "Introduction: The 1590s: The second reign of Elizabeth I?" in Guy, John Alexander, ed. *The reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-19, p.1ff.

¹⁵ The Anglo-Spanish war would not truly end until 1604. On the lingering threat, see generally Charles Beem, *The Foreign Relations of Elizabeth I* (Palgrave: 2011); John Warren, *Elizabeth I: Religion and Foreign Affairs* (London: 1993). Crucially, another Armada was threatened in 1599: Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood: 1590-1612* (Cambridge: 1996) 133.

¹⁶ Mihoko Suzuki, "The London Apprentice Riots of the 1590s and the Fiction of Thomas Deloney," *Criticism* 38, no. 2 (1996); MJ Power, "London and the Control of the 'Crisis' of the 1590s," *History* 70, no. 230 (1985).

¹⁷ John McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The 1590s Crisis* (Manchester University Press, 1997). Cf. Nina Taunton, *1590s Drama and Militarism: Portrayals of War in Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare's Henry V* (Ashgate, 2001), who shows how obsessed playwrights were with the threat of (and continuation of) war in the 1590s.

¹⁸ Ethan H. Shagan, "The English Inquisition: Constitutional Conflict and Ecclesiastical Law in the 1590s," *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (2004).

¹⁹ Giuseppina Restivo, "Law, Constitution and Ethics in Shakespeare's *King Lear*." *Textus* 21 (2008), N. 3, 2008 21, no. 3 (2008): 1000-1030. Cf. Andrew Hadfield, "Shakespeare and Republicanism: History and Cultural Materialism," *Textual Practice* 17 (2003): 461-83.

Shakespeare would have been acutely aware that Elizabeth was a very divisive monarch, who enjoyed friends and foes aplenty.²¹ Indeed, England was gripped by several sophisticated assassination plots (or alleged plots, e.g., the Lopez Plot) against the queen. The most famous of these was the Babington Plot of 1586.²² At a time of high political and religious tension, the resulting execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the Catholic cousin of Elizabeth, who had been implicated in an usurpation attempt, must have had a profound impact. Some scholars, as is well known, suggest that Shakespeare may have had Catholic sympathies, and engaged in a range of Catholic oppositional debates.²³ (This takes on significance later in the discussion of Cassius' use of arguments from Catholic resistance literature.) Regardless of Shakespeare's religious beliefs, the point is that assassination was not an abstract concept to him; it was not the stuff of history and Renaissance drama. It was part of his Elizabethan world. That Cassius should instigate an assassination attempt against a leader, then, may initially have been unpalatable to some of Shakespeare's audience, but it would certainly not have shocked their sensibilities.

In addition to the somewhat historical Babington Plot, the events that were to culminate in the Essex rebellion were already well in train by 1599. Scandalously, in 1598 Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, had turned his back on the queen (a

²⁰ There is tremendous debate about how Shakespeare viewed the concept of the "divine right of kings". See, for example, Hem Raj Bansal, "The Subversion of the Divine Right of Kings in *Richard II*," *Labyrinth: An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014) 190-8, for the view that Shakespeare critiqued the notion; cf. Mark Bayer, "Is a Crown Just a Fancy Hat?: Sovereignty in *Richard II*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 28, no. 1 (2002): 129-152.

²¹ Paul Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Hammer cogently argues how polarised Elizabethan England was by the late 1590s.

²² "Faith and Doubt in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Parts 1 and 2* and *King John*."

²³ Randall Martin, "Rehabilitating John Somerville in 3 *Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no.3 (2000): 332-340; Cf. Michael Alexander, "Shakespeare's Catholicism?: or 'You would pluck out the heart of my mystery'," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 3, no. 3 (2000): 35-49. Beauregard, David N. "Shakespeare's Catholic Mind at Work: The Bard's Choices, Additions, and Projections," *The Heythrop Journal* 54, no. 6 (2013): 942-954.

visual sign of displeasure and an unequivocal slight), prompting Elizabeth to box his ears for impudence.²⁴ Reacting, the Earl swore and somewhat understandably motioned as if to draw his sword, before being restrained. Thereafter, Essex and rumours of conspiracy and sedition are never far from one another. Court gossip even insinuated that, before departing for Ireland, Essex and the queen had “threatened the other’s head”.²⁵ Evidently, their once warm relationship had soured beyond repair. What is important to remember is that Essex’s fall from favour was already rumoured in public by 1599. The final years of Elizabeth’s reign, then, were marked by turbulence and great uncertainty.²⁶

Shakespeare, I believe, was profoundly influenced by his Elizabethan socio-political milieu. Indeed, as critics have repeatedly observed, *Julius Caesar* contains numerous anachronistic references that encourage the audience to consider the tragedy’s timely themes.²⁷ As we have seen, the play was composed at a period of tremendous political uncertainty; by 1599, it was increasingly likely that Elizabeth would die without naming an heir, leaving unsettled the most important question of any monarch’s reign: succession. Is it a coincidence that at the apex of this dynastic anxiety Shakespeare penned a play about the death of a childless political leader

²⁴ Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford, 1993) 136; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588-1603* (Princeton University Press, 1992) 414.

²⁵ Janet Clare, *Art Made Tongue-tied by Authority: Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester University Press, 1999²) 84.

²⁶ Gajda, Alexandra. 2009. “Debating War and Peace in Late Elizabethan England,” *The Historical Journal* no. 52 (4):851-878; John Guy, “The 1590s: The Second Reign of Elizabeth I?” in John Guy ed. *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge, 1995). The 1590s was a decade of “unusual hardship” characterised by “weariness” with the old Queen’s rule.

²⁷ Irving Ribner, “Political Issues in *Julius Caesar*,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 56, no. 1 (1957): 10; James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (Harper Collins: 2005) 139: Shakespeare found in Plutarch’s old story the “fault lines of his own milieu”. The bard was also, as Shapiro goes on to note, able to collapse the difference between the Roman and Elizabethan worlds, and cared little for historical accuracy (p.158). There are numerous examples of Elizabethan ‘cultural furniture’ in the play, for example “chimney tops” (I.i.41). See also, Rebhorn, “The Crisis of the Aristocracy in *Julius Caesar*,” 80-1.

(I.ii.6-9), which he emphasises in a way not seen in the ancient sources), and the chaos that ensues?²⁸

Classicist Maria Wyke, amongst others, has eloquently demonstrated the pointed similarities between Shakespeare's presentation of Caesar and the elderly queen.²⁹ And the resemblances go well beyond both rulers being old and childless. Like Shakespeare's Caesar, Elizabeth clung to an increasingly quixotic public image of herself as *semper aedem* ("always the same"; cf. Caesar's "always I am Caesar" [I.ii.213], and "I am constant as the Northern star" [III.i.65]). As Roy Strong has demonstrated, Elizabeth strove to project an eternally youthful image of herself: *Gloriana*.³⁰ As the years passed, however, this mask must have increasingly faltered. By the late 1590s, the cult of *Gloriana* was fading in spite of the weary monarch's best attempts to keep up appearances.³¹ It is in this context that Shakespeare pens his tragedy. The parallels between the play and Elizabethan socio-political life are indeed suggestive.

2. Cassius and Essex

It has not gone unnoticed that there are striking similarities between Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, and Shakespeare's Cassius.³² Indeed, Barbara Parker very briefly

²⁸ On the significance of the succession crisis in *Julius Caesar*, Christopher Pelling, "Judging Julius Caesar," in Maria Wyke ed., *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* (Blackwell, 2006) 5; John Roe, "Julius Caesar: Conscience and Conspiracy," in Harold Bloom ed., *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Julius Caesar –New Edition* (Chelsea House, 2009) 68; Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford, 2012) 13-16.

²⁹ Maria Wyke, *Caesar: A Life in Western Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 212-14. See also Barbara L. Parker, *Plato's Republic and Shakespeare's Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works*. (University of Delaware Press, 2004), 88-90.

³⁰ Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (Pimlico, 1999), 125-26.

³¹ Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (Pimlico, 1999), 125-26; Julia M. Walker ed., *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana* (Duke University Press, 1998).

³² See Barbara L. Parker, *Plato's Republic and Shakespeare's Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works* (University of Delaware Press, 2004), 88-90. Cf. Robin Headlam Wells, "Julius Caesar, Machiavelli, and the Uses of History," in *Shakespeare Survey*, 55, Peter Holland ed., (Cambridge, 2002), 211. See also, Rebhorn, "The Crisis of the Aristocracy," 83n.20, for a survey of scholars who have connected the play, but not Cassius specifically, to Essex and factionalism.

highlights several connections between the pair, which may be summarised as follows: one, both men consider violence a legitimate means of defending honour and political ideals; two, both men resent their inferior position and the humiliation this causes; and three, both men felt that their ruler was, in fact, inferior to them.³³ These are interesting parallels, and I hope to accentuate the connections between Essex and Cassius further in this chapter (especially their loss of access to power networks).

However, an immediate caveat is required. Essex, who has been the subject of a revisionist Renaissance in recent times,³⁴ has long fascinated Shakespeareans. Numerous critics have connected him to Shakespeare's plays and sonnets.³⁵ And whilst it is certainly possible that Shakespeare himself was interested in Essex's career, it may be best to posit that there has perhaps been a tendency to retrospectively magnify the Earl's significance.³⁶ The Essex parallels should not be pushed too far, then; Shakespeare was not writing a second-rate *roman à clef*. This caution is all the more appropriate as the relationship between Shakespeare and Essex is complex.

Shakespeare and Essex

The relationship of the Earl of Essex to Shakespeare is understandably complex and tenuous.³⁷ Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that the bard sympathised with

³³ Parker, *Plato's Republic and Shakespeare's Rome*, 88-89.

³⁴ See Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597*, 3n.12, for a list of biographies. A new picture of Essex as an "intelligent and highly cultivated aristocrat" (p.7) committed to martial affairs has emerged.

³⁵ Stuart M. Kurland, "No Innocence is Safe, When Power Contests": The Factional Worlds of *Caesar* and *Sejanus*. *Comparative Drama* (1988): 56-67; Rebhorn, "The Crisis of the Aristocracy in *Julius Caesar*," *Renaissance Quarterly* (1990): 75-111; David Womersley, "Sir Henry Savile's Translation of Tacitus and the Political Interpretation of Elizabethan Texts," *Review of English Studies* (1991): 313-342.

³⁶ Sung-won Cho, "Bertram, Essex, and the King (Queen): *All's Well That Ends Well* and the Essex Rebellion," *Journal of English Language and Literature* (1999): 815-37.

³⁷ The scholarship on this issue is extensive. See, in particular, Willet Titus Conklin, "Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, and Essex," *Studies in English*, no. 11 (1931). (*Coriolanus* as analogue of Essex); Ray Heffner, "Shakespeare, Hayward, and Essex," *PMLA* 45, no. 3 (1930); "Shakespeare, Hayward, and Essex Again," *PMLA* 47, no. 3 (1932); Jonathan Bate, "Was Shakespeare an Essex Man?" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162, no. 1 (2009); Paul E. J. Hammer, "Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the Play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2008); Arthur F. Kinney,

the swashbuckling Elizabethan hero.³⁸ In the first half of 1599, for instance, Shakespeare restaged *Henry V*. It was a timely choice: a play about a campaign in a foreign nation successfully concluded by a soldier-king. At this time, Essex had been dispatched on his ill-fated campaign into Ireland to vanquish the troublesome Earl of Tyrone. Surely unaware of Essex's setbacks at this time, Shakespeare adds a remarkable insertion of lines into his Act 5 Chorus.³⁹ The implication of these new lines, of course, is that when Essex returns from Ireland he will be greeted in the streets in the same triumphal manner (and with the same enthusiasm) as Caesar and King Henry V. It is hard to read these lines as anything other than an endorsement of Essex.⁴⁰ In fact, one scholar goes so far as to suggest that Shakespeare's *Henry VI* and *Richard II* serve as "political propaganda" for Essex's party in the lead up to the rising.⁴¹ Despite such assertions, it is difficult to recover how much (if at all) Shakespeare truly sympathised with Essex.

The Hayward Affair

In February 1599, in the dedicatory preface of John Hayward's *The First Parte of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIIII* Essex is lauded as *magnus siquidem es, et presenti iudicio, et futuri temporis expectatione* ("Since you are great, both in judgment of the present time, and in the expectation of the future").⁴² Though the phrase may sound

"Essex and Shakespeare Versus Hayward," *ibid.* 44, no. 4 (1993); cf. Rebhorn, "The Crisis of the Aristocracy in *Julius Caesar*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1990): 106, who argues that Shakespeare enjoyed a "loose" connection to Essex's faction through his intermittent patron the Earl of Southampton.

³⁸ Thomas Merriam, "Shakespeare's Supposed Disillusionment with Chivalry in 1599," *Notes & Queries* 54 (2007): 285-7.

³⁹ Womersley, "Sir Henry Savile's Translation of Tacitus and the Political Interpretation of Elizabethan Texts," *Review of English Studies* 42 (1991): 313-342.

⁴⁰ Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre*, 65-66.

⁴¹ Joe Falocco, "Shakespeare, Essex, and Machiavelli," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 2 (2002): 64-74.

⁴² Richard Dutton, "Patronage, Licensing, and Censorship," in Donna Hamilton ed., *A Concise Companion to English Renaissance Literature* (Blackwell, 2006) 75-93, p.90.

innocuous to modern ears, these words caused a great stir when published. Essex, it was argued in some circles, is positioned as Bolingbroke to Elizabeth's Richard II.⁴³ Such an analogy was not merely incendiary, but treasonous. Whilst Essex was not the author of the problematical *Preface*, there was a suggestion of his complicity with Hayward.⁴⁴ To make matters worse, by Elizabethan standards, the book was a bestseller; over 500 copies were sold in three weeks.⁴⁵ Elizabeth, by this time disillusioned with Essex, stoked the fire, implying that Hayward was not the true author of the *Preface*, but that some more mischievous person was behind the incendiary dedication.⁴⁶ The implication was all too obvious. Cassius, too, pens notes that are designed to inspire Brutus to radical action, even though in Plutarch Cassius is certainly not identified as the author of these notes (although it could be construed this way in North's edition):

Thinkest thou that they be cobblers, tapsters, or suchlike base mechanical people, that write these bills and scrolls which are found daily in thy praetor's chair, and not the noblest men and best citizens that do it? (Plut. *Brut.* 7.)

Shakespeare inverts this information. In Plutarch, Cassius claims that the nobility and not the plebeians are really behind the notes calling Brutus to action; Shakespeare, however, has Cassius (a noble) fabricate notes, as if they came from "citizens", in order to give the impression that the people fear Caesar's ambition (I.ii.314-19):

I will this night,

⁴³ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 33n.13, with bibliography therein; Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 189, on Essex's self-association with Henry Bolingbroke, which goes beyond the connection Hayward made.

⁴⁴ Richard Dutton, "Patronage, Licensing, and Censorship," in Donna Hamilton ed., *A Concise Companion to English Renaissance Literature* (Blackwell, 2006) 75-93.

⁴⁵ Chamberlain (1939: I,70) cited in Richard Dutton, "Patronage, Licensing and Censorship," in Donna Hamilton ed., *A Concise Companion to English Renaissance Literature* (Blackwell, 2006) 86.

⁴⁶ Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet*, 34.

In several hands, in at his windows throw,
As if they came from several citizens,
Writings all tending to the great opinion
That Rome holds of his name; wherein obscurely
Caesar's ambition shall be glanced at.

As with John Hayward's *Preface*, Shakespeare has Cassius spur a symbolic public figure on to "future" glory.

The fabrication of documentation to damn a political enemy was a controversial issue in Elizabethan England. It had become part of the culture of factional politics. In the most shocking case, Sir John Perrot, Lord Deputy of Ireland, was convicted of treason based on forged documents in 1591, probably at the instigation of William Cecil, Lord Burghley.⁴⁷ Another famous example of such questionable letters relate to the so-called "Casket Letters" of Mary Queen of Scots, which are widely regarded as forgeries. These letters are supposed to implicate Mary in the death of her husband, Lord Darnley. Critics such as Frances Teague cite Cassius' falsification of public notes as a sign that Shakespeare wished to convey to his audience Cassius' unsavoury character;⁴⁸ and perhaps this is true. Yet it is just as likely to be an indictment of the dirty politics that pervaded the deeply polarized Elizabethan court of the 1590s. As we shall see, moreover, Cassius' note-falsifying activities, though dishonest, are in line with Machiavelli's tenets that the means are inconsequential if one's political goals are attained (see below, section of Shakespeare and Machiavelli).

⁴⁷ Roger Turvey, *The Treason and Trial of Sir John Perrot* (University of Wales Press, 2005); cf. Hiram Morgan, "The Fall of Sir John Perrot," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge, 1995), 109-25; Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597*, 398.

⁴⁸ Frances Teague, "Letters and Portents in *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Yearbook* 3 (1992): 87-104.

The dissemination of books and pamphlets in the 1580s became a topical issue for the Elizabethan government. Printers were a threat to, and instrument of, Elizabethan government. The danger posed by French propaganda, for instance, and its influence on (occasionally unwitting) readers is particularly well documented.⁴⁹ Essex's desire to promote his own agenda led him to circulate "partisan manuscripts" in the mid-1590s that sought to "win over Elizabeth to his cause".⁵⁰ So there is a consistent record of powerful Elizabethans circulating tendentious works to advance their political causes. In this context, then, Cassius' note falsifying and pamphleteering are well in line with Elizabethan political practices.

Cassius as Elizabethan Dissident

Cassius is portrayed in a fashion similar to the quintessential Elizabethan dissident. In this section, I will examine how his contumacious words and deeds would have had contemporary resonance.

The rhetorical arguments Cassius employs to recruit both Brutus and Casca are not dissimilar to the points being advanced in Catholic Resistance literature.⁵¹ A classic Elizabethan example of such works is Robert Person's *A Conference about the Next Succession* (1595), a controversial tract that divided Catholics let alone the wider English community.⁵² These Catholic polemics often rehearse two familiar themes: the weakness and demise of the Elizabethan nobility, which is alleged to have fallen into ruin; and the excesses of a weak and misguided (read: heretical and illegitimate)

⁴⁹ Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, "Printers, Patrons, Readers, and Spies: Importation of French Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25, no. 4 (1994): 853-72.

⁵⁰ Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597*, 394.

⁵¹ On Catholic Resistance literature, see Victor Houlston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons's Jesuit Polemic, 1580-1610*, vol. 63 (Ashgate, 2007).

⁵² Predictably, Person's influence on Shakespeare is hotly contested: Jean-Christophe Mayer, "This Papist and his Poet': Shakespeare's Lancastrian Kings and Robert Parsons's *Conference about the Next Succession*," in Richard Dutton, ed., *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare* (Manchester University Press, 2003) 116-29.

monarch under the sway of “evil counsellors”.⁵³ Of course, not all Catholic tracts were quite as inflammatory. But by the 1590s, Catholic resistance writers had incorporated the provocative arguments of the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* (1579),⁵⁴ an anonymous French treatise, in which citizens are urged to “resistance”, if they are oppressed by “inferior” magistrates.⁵⁵ Admittedly, the tract stops short of advocating the overthrow of bad monarchs, but there was evidently a belief in European thought that in certain circumstances citizens could resist their leaders.

Catholic Resistance literature flourished during the decade in which Shakespeare penned *Julius Caesar*. More importantly, whereas in the 1570s and 1580s resistance tracts had firmly laid the blame for Catholic woes on Elizabeth’s “evil counsellors”, by the 1590s some radical Catholics were accusing Elizabeth herself of being the “root cause” of those same evils; William Allen’s vituperative *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England* (1588) is a classic example.⁵⁶ Accordingly, Catholic polemics encouraged subversive behaviour against Elizabeth and her counsellors.⁵⁷

The demise and ruin of the ancient nobility is a theme never far from Cassius’ thoughts. This decline in the nobility’s fortunes, he believes, is the reason that Caesar has ascended to an almost insurmountable position of power: “Age, thou art shamed! /

⁵³ Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge, 1982). Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford, 2012) 19, on the “evil counsellors” leitmotif.

⁵⁴ Rebecca Lemon, *Treason by Words: Literature, Law, and Rebellion in Shakespeare's England* (Cornell University Press, 2007), 30-1.

⁵⁵ However, see Anne McLaren, "Rethinking Republicanism: *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* in Context," *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2006): 23-52.

⁵⁶ Ethan H. Shagan, *Catholics and The 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester University Press, 2005), 84-5. There is debate as to whether Allen actually penned this mud-slinging tract or whether he just affixed his name to it. His previous work is notably more scholarly in tone.

⁵⁷ Houliston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons's Jesuit Polemic, 1580-1610*, 63; David Womersley, "Sir Henry Savile's Translation of Tacitus and the Political Interpretation of Elizabethan Texts," *The Review of English Studies* 42, no. 167 (1991): 313-42.

Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!” (I.ii.151-2).⁵⁸ For Cassius, the nobility have deserted Rome and absolved themselves of all responsibility in deference of Caesar. Caesar’s rise to power, Cassius assures Brutus, would never have been allowed to occur in their fathers’ generation or any one previous (I.ii.150, 157-60). When speaking with Casca, Cassius contemptuously reveals that he feels the nobility have become spineless. It is not, Cassius argues, Caesar that has the falling-sickness:

No, Caesar hath it not. But you and I
And honest Casca, we have the falling sickness. (I.ii.254-5)

As leaders of the nobility, these men must be afflicted with some illness to let a man as frail as Caesar supplant their caste. Cassius returns to this theme again in the next scene: “Our [sc. The nobility’s] yoke and sufferance show us womanish” (I.iii.84). Like Catholic dissidents, then, Cassius decries the state of the nobility, who have passively stood by as Caesar established his autocratic rule.

Cassius the dissident also examines and critiques the distribution of patronage. In Elizabethan England, the crown used patronage as leverage over the nobility to ensure their loyalty to the monarch. Indeed, Elizabeth’s court has been described as a “clearing-house”⁵⁹ of royal patronage. Patronage is a finite resource, however, and one man’s success is always another man’s failure. Powerful factions appear to have emerged in the 1590s, all vying for influence over an increasingly fatigued monarch. Essex had been lavished with considerable offices in the early 1590s, although he does not appear to have been so successful in securing offices for his supporters.⁶⁰ Yet

⁵⁸ Jan H. Blits, “Caesarism and the End of Republican Rome: *Julius Caesar*, Act I, scene I,” *The Journal of Politics* 43, no. 1 (1981): 40-55, points out that, like the nobility, the people have voluntarily surrendered their liberty.

⁵⁹ Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (Routledge, 2014), 109.

⁶⁰ Janet Dickinson, *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589–1601* (Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2012), 3.

towards the end of the decade the queen had cut back her largesse, which must have stung the pride of the egoistic Essex.

To certain of Shakespeare's audience, then, Caesar's excessive concentration of patronage and power may have been analogous to that by Elizabeth and her Privy Council. For example, before the senate on the Ides Caesar refuses to recall Publius Cimber from his banishment, despite the pleading and begging –prostration even, from a fawning Cassius (III.i.61-3)– of the leading members of the nobility. Caesar, who prides himself on his *constantia* (cf. Elizabeth's vaunted *semper aedem*), refuses to change his decision (III.i.72-3):

I was constant Cimber should be banished,
And constant do remain to keep him so.

It is all too apparent that the career and fate of Cimber depend on Caesar's judgment alone. Despite the impassioned arguments of the chorus of aristocrats pleading for his restoration, their petition falls on deaf ears.⁶¹ In spite of their majority, the nobility are powerless to advance and restore the career of one of their own.

After Caesar's assassination, Cassius' attention immediately turns to the proper distribution of patronage.⁶² He offers Antony (a Caesarian loyalist) "a voice as strong as any man's / In the disposition of new dignities" (III.i.177-78). Some may view Cassius' offer as a hollow ploy, a desperate attempt to pacify the dangerous Antony. But it may also be an attempt on Cassius' part to restore the Republican-style of political equality that had existed before Caesar's domination (which Cassius alludes to in Act One, Scene Two: "When went there by an age, since the great flood, / But it was famed with more than with one man?": I.ii.151-52). Cassius' attempt to widen

⁶¹ Parker, "This Monstrous Apparition: The Role of Perception in *Julius Caesar*," 70-7, suggests Caesar's deafness is symbolic of defective reasoning. Cf. Velz "Caesar's Deafness," 400-1.

⁶² Kurland, "No Innocence is Safe, When Power Contests": The Factional Worlds of "*Caesar*" and "*Sejanus*." 58.

the networks of patronage is significant, therefore, inasmuch as it indicates his intentions to ensure power is distributed on a more even basis. Sharing power, moreover, requires the tacit acknowledgement of a basic equality.⁶³ In *Julius Caesar*, Cassius believes that Caesar has “grown so great” (I.ii.149) and does not honour and respect the nobility (reduced to “petty men”: I.ii.135). There is evidence, then, to suggest that Cassius wants to restore the power equilibrium disrupted by Caesar. Dismantling his tyranny begins with the proper distribution of power.

Many among the Elizabethan nobility of the 1590s felt increasingly marginalised if not almost obsolete. *Julius Caesar* explores the contemporary aristocratic social glue of the “chivalric compromise”,⁶⁴ that is the nobility’s deference to (and mutual dependence on) the monarch, an increasingly fragile arrangement by the 1590s. The chivalric compromise sought a balance of power between the self-asserting nobles and a queen who, to some aristocrats like Essex at least, seemed all too concerned with her own image and immortality.⁶⁵ Shakespeare’s Cassius taps into the same frustration that Essex and some elements of the younger generation of the nobility had about Elizabeth’s fame and power (I.ii.143-8):

Brutus and Caesar—what should be in that “Caesar”?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name.
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well.
Weigh them, it is as heavy.

Frail and female, Elizabeth’s self-fashioning campaign (*Gloriana*) cast a shadow over her aristocracy in the same way that Caesar the colossus casts a shadow over the Roman nobility, who, as mentioned, are reduced to “petty men” (I.ii.135).

⁶³ Timothy W. Burns, *Shakespeare’s Political Wisdom* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 20.

⁶⁴ Glen Mynott, “Chivalry, Monarchy, and Rebellion in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, Parts One and Two,” (IATE Press 2000) 147-60.

⁶⁵ Janet Dickinson, *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589–1601* (Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2012) 3, argues that Essex’s “chivalric identity” was important to his personality.

For this reason, a significant prong of Cassius' argument against Caesar involves appealing to Brutus' patrician pride –not ambition as some scholars have maintained.⁶⁶ This is the *coup de grace*: “There was a Brutus once...”(I.ii.158). Brutus' name and innate worthiness are every bit as impressive as Caesar's: “Why should that [sc. Caesar's] name be sounded more than yours?” (I.ii.143). Caesar is not exceptional, as Cassius sarcastically demonstrates: “Upon what meat does this our Caesar feed / That he has grown so great”: I.ii.150-1). He is just like every other member of the Roman nobility, except weaker and elderly. Cassius' arguments are not about ambition and assuming Caesar's mantle, but really focused on depriving the dictator of the pedestal he has used to raise himself above the Roman nobility.⁶⁷ Cassius wants Caesar to fly an “ordinary pitch” (I.i.74). In other words, Cassius is not so much motivated by jealousy and what he can gain from Caesar's downfall, but by the humiliation he feels at what the nobility have lost at Caesar's expense. Cassius labours on the point that the Roman nobility has fallen into arrears.

Cassius the dissident also criticises Caesar's unbridled power. He memorably describes Caesar as a Colossus, as a man who forces Cassius to “bend his body”, and who “thunders, lightens, opens graves, and roars” (I.iii.75). Like Essex under Elizabeth, Cassius suffers under Caesar's oppressive power. He speaks of “this age's yoke” to Brutus (I.ii.64) and “our yoke and sufferance show us womanish” to Casca (I.iii.85; cf. IV.iii.118-19). Essex, unlike Cassius, was under the power of a frail woman (“crooked as her carcass”); Cassius, too, feels emasculated by a frail Caesar.⁶⁸ In short, Essex's and Cassius both marshal ageist arguments against the rulers whom they feel oppress them.

⁶⁶ Robert Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge) 277, Citing I.ii.142-3.

⁶⁷ Rebhorn, “The Crisis of the Aristocracy in *Julius Caesar*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990): 75-111, concedes such argumentation is possible, but instead turns to emulation.

⁶⁸ Jan H. Blits, “Manliness and Friendship in *Julius Caesar*,” 31-46.

Elizabeth tightened the screws of public control in the 1590s.⁶⁹ She had occasion to suspend common law by diktat, and so empowered Provost-Martials to act with impunity. Dissenters and paupers who caused any trouble were severely punished. In response, Essex noted with complete candour that, in peacetime, Elizabeth should not let her subjects die “*sans replique*”.⁷⁰ Although tactfully phrased, Essex censures Elizabeth for her authoritarian handling of her citizens. Essex may well have thought that Elizabeth was “bestriding the world like a Colossus” without any regard for the “petty men”. Indeed, for the grievous crime of removing scarfs from his statues, Caesar also “put to silence” the Republican tribunes Murellus and Flavius (I.ii.281), clearly without regard for due process. The 1590s also saw a strict religious crack-down, which one historian describes (perhaps with a modicum of exaggeration) as an “English Inquisition”.⁷¹ Like Cassius, Essex cannot tolerate his ruler’s unbridled power: as he once ironically observed, “What, cannot princes err?”⁷²

Shakespeare and Machiavelli

Despite being the subject of almost unending debate, there is still no consensus about the influence of Machiavelli on Shakespeare. There is not, in fact, even general agreement that Shakespeare read Machiavelli at first hand,⁷³ which admittedly is not surprising given that there was no English translation of his works available in Shakespeare’s lifetime. But, as is increasingly understood, the reception of the Italian political theorist’s ideas (in *Il Principe* and *I Discorsi*) seemed to have circulated and permeated Elizabethan culture in other ways, in spite of the lack of a suitable English

⁶⁹ John Guy, “The 1590s: The second reign of Elizabeth I?” p.1.

⁷⁰ Chris Fitter, *Radical Shakespeare: Politics and Stagecraft in the Early Career* (Routledge: 2013) 4.

⁷¹ Shagan, “The English Inquisition: Constitutional Conflict and Ecclesiastical Law in the 1590s,” 541-65.

⁷² Wallace T. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588-1603* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 519.

⁷³ N. W. Bawcutt, “Shakespeare and Machiavelli: A Caveat,” *Shakespeare Survey* 63 (2010): 237-48.

edition.⁷⁴ Still, it should be understood that not everyone maintains Shakespeare derived his political realism from Machiavelli, but rather from, for example, what he observed happening at Elizabeth's court.⁷⁵

Regardless of how well acquainted Shakespeare was with *Il Principe*, *Julius Caesar* can still be considered a Machiavellian drama *par excellence*.⁷⁶ Indeed, one scholar has noted that Machiavellian theories of power are the “yardstick” by which leadership is judged in *Julius Caesar*—Cassius and Antony, like Essex and Cecil, are adept in such politics.⁷⁷ In addition, in contrast to the stoical Brutus, Cassius is the quintessential Machiavellian politician.⁷⁸ This is demonstrated best during his soliloquy, where he reveals he will fabricate testimony, which will appear to be from the people, urging Brutus to make a stand against Caesar (I.ii.314-19). Such a technique might offend the sensibilities of modern readers as being entirely unethical and dishonest. But from a Machiavellian standpoint (as outlined in the controversial seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of *Il Principe*), such tactics were not only permissible but even to be encouraged.

Cassius' desire for Mark Antony to also be eliminated with Caesar on the Ides is also out of the handbook of Machiavelli.⁷⁹ Unlike Brutus, Cassius understands the threat posed by Antony (the “shrewd contriver”: II.i.165), and wishes to have him

⁷⁴ Hugh Grady, “The End of Shakespeare's Machiavellian Moment: *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's Historiography, and Dramatic Form.” In Marrapodi ed., *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories: Anglo-Italian Transactions* (Ashgate, 2011) 120-1, with notes 6-7. Cf. p.126: “[D]iscourses circulate in and through societies following innumerable and usually untraceable vectors...”

⁷⁵ John D. Cox, “Shakespeare and Political Philosophy,” *Philosophy and Literature* 26 (2002): 107-24.

⁷⁶ Hugh Grady, “The End of Shakespeare's Machiavellian Moment: *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's Historiography, and Dramatic Form.” In Marrapodi ed., *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories: Anglo-Italian Transactions* (Ashgate, 2011) 119.

⁷⁷ Indrani Deb, “The Machiavel in *Julius Caesar*,” in *Renaissance and Modern Shakespeares*, ed. Subir Dhar (Avantgard Press, 2008), 384-96.

⁷⁸ Joseph S. M. J. Chang, “Of Mighty Opposites: Stoicism and Machiavellianism,” *Renaissance Drama* 9 (1966): 37-57.

⁷⁹ John Alan Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (DS Brewer, 2002), 155: “There is no doubt whose opinion [sc. on the matter of Antony's elimination] the author of *Il Principe* would prefer [i.e. Cassius’]”.

killed before he can take revenge on Caesar's behalf, or seize power for himself.

Cassius puts his case as follows (II.i.162-8):

I think it is not meet
Mark Antony, so well beloved of Caesar,
Should outlive Caesar. We shall find of him
A shrewd contriver. And, you know, his means,
If he improve them, may well stretch so far
As to annoy us all; which to prevent,
Let Antony and Caesar fall together.

A true realist, Cassius pleads for pre-emption. If, Cassius argues, Antony is given the opportunity to improve his position, he would likely do so, as he is not of inadequate "means". To prevent this potential scenario, Caesar and Antony should die together. Machiavelli would have agreed with Cassius' sentiment; he would have had no qualms with Antony's death. Brutus, however, frets that the conspirators' deed will appear "too bloody" (II.i.169), and so he dismisses Cassius' proposal.

Machiavelli, who believed that Rome had achieved its *grandezza* as a free state before Caesar,⁸⁰ approved of conspiracy in the defence of Republicanism. In the third book of his *Dicorsi*, in fact, he even references Brutus and Cassius on the subject (*Dis.* III.6.): "il desiderio di liberare la patria stata da quello [sc. Caesar] occupata. Questa cagione mosse Bruto e Cassio contro a Cesare." Thus, Cassius and Brutus moved against Caesar to liberate their fatherland (*patria*) from the prince, of this fact Machiavelli has no doubt. Their aims, he concludes, were noble, but they acted too late to save their Republic, as is often the case with conspiracies (*Disc.* I.33).⁸¹

In Shakespeare, of course, it is not the lateness of the venture so much as the honourable standards by which Brutus wants to conduct the assassination that cause the conspirators problems. Brutus' honourable political notions prevent Cassius from

⁸⁰ Eric Nelson, "Shakespeare and the Best State of a Commonwealth," in eds., David Armitage *et. al.* *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) 253.

⁸¹ John Alan Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (DS Brewer, 2002) 135-6.

doing the ruthless but necessary deeds that would give their cause the greatest chance of success.⁸² After the death of Caesar, for example, Antony asks Brutus if he may speak at Caesar's public funeral. Unsurprisingly, Cassius is vehemently opposed to the suggestion. Brutus, however, grants Antony his request, in the belief that he can control the people's reaction to Antony. Sensing the political opening Brutus has offered Antony, Cassius tries to dissuade him from agreeing to his request (III.i.247-8): "Know you how much the people may be moved / By that which he will utter?" Naïvely, Brutus thinks he can manage the people. Cassius, however, understands that a skilled orator like Antony (a likeminded politician) may manipulate the opinion of the capricious crowd: "I know not what may fall. I like it not." (III.i.257).

3. Loss of Favour

In this section, I wish to suggest that Cassius and Caesar –like Essex and Elizabeth– were formerly friends (at least in terms of Roman political friendship, *amicitia*).⁸³ However, their association disintegrates, leading to the isolation and discontent of Cassius. In Act One, Scene Two, it is evident that Cassius has been isolated from Caesar for some time – Caesar has made it obvious to Antony that there is no man he would rather "avoid" than Cassius (I.ii.201-2), someone he appears to know well as his forensic assessment of him indicates (I.ii.). As in Elizabethan politics, Cassius' loss of access and favour has led to feelings of bitterness and jealousy.

Nevertheless, brief allusions in the text suggest that their relationship was not always so distant. Indeed, Cassius' Tiber anecdote (I.ii.103-17) obliquely hints at a closer relationship once, no doubt soured by Caesar's political elevation, which, as

⁸² James S. Mullican, "Brutus and Cassius: A Timely Contrast," *Clearing House* 38 (1963): 178.

⁸³ On the variegated nature of *amicitia*, see Michael Cameron Andrews, "Erasmus and *Macbeth*: 'Making the Green One Red'," *Erasmus in English* 15 (1987); Wolfgang Braungart, "Freundschaft, Ironie Und Opfer in Shakespeares Tragodie *Julius Caesar*," (Rodopi, 1998) 99-114.

will be remembered, put Cassius in the humiliating position of “bend[ing] his body” in subservience (I.ii.119). This rankles Cassius all the more so because he had saved Caesar’s life in the Tiber, something that he might expect to cement their relationship. The Aeneas-Anchises analogy is crucial here. Cassius, appropriating a common analogue for Caesar and his Julian dynasty, positions himself as the Roman hero and Caesar as the frail father, Anchises.⁸⁴ Evidently, Caesar has not shown Cassius the loyalty that his deed merits, which may help to explain some of his reasons for conspiring against Caesar.⁸⁵ The next anecdote he relates is even more enlightening, inasmuch as it may reveal the extent of their former friendship, and the underlying motive for Cassius’ resentment of Caesar (I.ii.121-4):

He had a fever when he was in Spain,
And when the fit was on him, I did mark
How he did shake. 'Tis true, this god did shake!
His coward lips did from their colour fly.

Scholars have failed to appreciate the true significance of these lines. Not a few critics have dismissed the entire section as the tendentious and unreliable reportage of a jealous malcontent.⁸⁶ However, I suggest a different interpretation is possible. Shakespeare’s vivid description (“I did mark”) physically places Cassius in Caesar’s presence in Spain. This is a first-hand account of Caesar’s seizure (cf. Casca’s confirmation of Caesar’s “falling sickness”: I.ii.251-2). Ultimately, the startling implication of this anecdote is that Cassius had been serving with Caesar on his campaign against the remnants of the Republican forces, which would eventually lead to Caesar’s triumph over “Pompey’s blood” (I.i.51). This interpretation is

⁸⁴ Robert Miola, *Shakespeare’s Rome* (Cambridge, 1983) 85, 88, points out the irony of Cassius as Aeneas.

⁸⁵ John Doeblér, “When Troy Fell: Shakespeare’s Iconography of Sorrow and Survival,” *Comparative Drama* (1985): 321-331, on Aeneas as a symbol of loyalty in Shakespeare’s plays.

⁸⁶ Even Rebhorn, “Crisis of the Aristocracy,” p.83-84, refers to this anecdote ironically as Cassius’ “history”.

strengthened by the presence of Cassius' closest friend, Titinius (I.ii.129; cf. V.iii.38: "best friend"):

"Alas," it [Caesar's tongue] cried, "give me some drink, Titinius"

The setting is vague, but Titinius' presence may suggest a private, intimate environment rather than a public space. Shakespeare's Cassius and Titinius, then, may have played a role in the defeat of the Republican forces in Spain. By inference, it follows that they seem to have helped Caesar ascend to the position he enjoys at the beginning of the play. Yet Cassius certainly had not been sufficiently rewarded for his loyalty to Caesar. Indeed, by the time the play begins, "Caesar doth bear me hard" (I.ii.309). Shakespeare implies to the audience that Cassius has lost Caesar's favour in a way akin to the fall from grace that Essex had recently suffered. Essex had served Elizabeth loyally for years, before being unceremoniously cast aside, admittedly after a disastrous military campaign. Cassius suffers the same fate: he returns from foreign soil to find himself out of favour. This interpretation may explain why Cassius refrains from making Republican arguments against Caesar.

Essex and Elizabeth had once been boon companions; and yet, by 1599, their special relationship had remarkably deteriorated to a point where (allegedly) each had made threats on the life of the other. No matter how accurate court gossip was, their friendship had irrevocably disintegrated. After years of unflinching service and mainly meritorious conduct, Essex was unceremoniously cast aside. Essex and Cassius both suffer tragic and perhaps unjustified falls from grace at the hands of their former benefactors. Such an unfortunate reversal of fortune no doubt festers, and inspires thoughts of conspiracy. Shakespeare, then, has encoded a profound explanation for Cassius' motives for conspiring against Caesar.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how Shakespeare's socio-political environment may have affected his characterisation of Cassius. Indeed, many of Cassius' words and deeds find no ancient (or contemporary dramatic) antecedent. A perfect example of such uniqueness is Cassius' fabrication of letters to Brutus, which are ostensibly from Roman citizens. As we saw, the forgery of letters to incriminate aristocrats was not an unknown practice in Shakespeare's time, and something that no less a figure than William Cecil was almost certainly engaged in (probably on more than one occasion). Unsavory as such actions are, they are emblematic of the factional politics that defined the 1580s/90s.

Catholic resistance literature also seems to have influenced Shakespeare's characterisation of Cassius. In his dialogue with Brutus, Cassius decries the state of the Roman nobility, which he feels has abdicated its responsibilities, and created the opportunity for Caesar to establish his tyranny (I.iii.98). Again, in the ancient sources no such arguments are marshalled by Cassius to this effect.

And the political ideas of Machiavelli clearly influence Shakespeare in the style of politics that Cassius engages in. Cassius is not afraid to suggest the ruthless but advantageous proposal of killing Antony. Throughout this chapter, moreover, it has been seen how there are intriguing parallels between the careers of the Earl of Essex and of Cassius. Essex's fall from favour, for example, in the late 1590s may also have inspired Shakespeare's Cassius' isolation and resentment in *Julius Caesar*. Cassius, like Essex, feels that the ruler he serves under is inferior to himself. Ultimately, Shakespeare's characterisation of Cassius is clearly influenced by many important socio-political episodes in Late Elizabethan England.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored Shakespeare's characterisation of Cassius in *Julius Caesar*. It investigated two important and interconnected questions: one, from where did Shakespeare draw his material on Cassius; and two, what light, if any, does the identification of this material shed on his depiction of Cassius? As I explained in my Introduction, Cassius emerges from the margins of the ancient sources, chiefly Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, to play a principal role in Shakespeare's tragedy. His prominence in the play seems unusual in comparison to other known contemporary Caesar dramas, although there are a few dramatic antecedents (cf. Chapter Two).

Nonetheless, Cassius' dominance of the second and third scenes of Act One appears, as far as can be established, to be a dramatic innovation. In this thesis, then, I have attempted to explain what may have led to his newfound significance. Ultimately, I conclude that Shakespeare fused together material and events from his sources and contemporary environment to fashion a new Cassius –neither a vile Machiavel nor an untarnished Tyrannicide– but rather in the mould of a flawed Elizabethan rebel. Shakespeare thus moves beyond the common binary Renaissance presentation of Cassius and Brutus, preserved in many of the ancient sources (cf. Chapter One). Thus, like most of the characters in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius should engender mixed feelings in the audience.

As we saw in Chapter One, Cassius was a complex historical figure. The mostly hostile ancient sources often problematized this complexity further by creating false dichotomies between Brutus and Cassius (for example, Velleius and Plutarch). Shakespeare, however, seems to have reacted against such one-sidedness; his Cassius, for example, is not solely defined by his choleric humour unlike Plutarch's figure.

Shakespeare also appears to be aware of non-Plutarchan views of Cassius, which are likely derived from Appian and Lucan in particular.

The details he found in the other sources (for example, Cassius' restless energy, his military ability, and bravery) provided Shakespeare with a more rounded character than the one-dimensional character of Plutarch. Shakespeare appears to have read beyond the Plutarchan portrait of Cassius found in the *Life of Brutus*. Indeed, he incorporates disparate strands of a complex ancient tradition to provide a more nuanced Cassius. Most importantly, Shakespeare took the skeletal outline of Cassius he found in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus* and fleshed it out. To do so, he adapted, amplified, appropriated, omitted, and inverted the material in North's Plutarch to fashion a more realistic and compelling figure than that of his chief source.

Chapter Two examined a selection of European Caesar plays. It highlighted the variety of the Caesar-plays, and their similarities and differences to Shakespeare's own drama. It also explored how the sources these plays favoured coloured their depiction of Cassius. Richard Eedes's *Caesar Interfectus*, for instance, evidently drew heavily on Velleius Paterculus, who was a harsh critic of Cassius. Eedes, therefore, reflects this ancient author's hostility to Cassius. Cassius is accused of using sophistic and incendiary rhetoric to fire up the naïve Brutus against Caesar. Shakespeare sifts but modifies these details. Cassius, as will be remembered, delights that he has inspired "this much show of fire" in Brutus. But his recruitment of Brutus is not a *fait accompli*. Brutus, himself, comes to the realisation that Caesar must die.

Chapter Three argued that Cassius' characterisation should also be understood in the context of Shakespeare's socio-political environment. Cassius' loss of Caesar's favour, his resistance rhetoric decrying the fate of the Roman nobility, and his Machiavellian political realism (as well as unethical political tactics), are all

quintessentially Elizabethan traits. Shakespeare's Cassius, therefore, was very much a product and reflection of the political climate of the 1590s.

Finally, let us turn to the matter of characterisation. Shakespeare's Cassius has frequently been arraigned because he supposedly only makes personal rather than political arguments against Caesar to justify the assassination, which is indicative, it is suggested, of a jealous malcontent (see Introduction). Unlike Kyd's Cassius, who offers a litany of Republican criticisms against Caesar, Shakespeare's Cassius seems disconsolate that someone as frail and feeble as Caesar has seized power. Yet, as Chapter Three showed, Cassius' focus is primarily on the demise of the nobility (an Elizabethan concern of Catholic Resistance tracts), of which he and Brutus are leading members. Caesar's rise to power, he argues, would never have happened in the days of their fathers. Cassius, then, makes an argument for the restoration of the Republican system that Caesar has destroyed, which is alluded to at the beginning of the play. To do so, he does not rehearse a list of Caesar's war crimes (as Kyd's Cassius does), but appeals to Brutus' patrician pride and glorious ancestry. More importantly, after Caesar's death he seeks to restore the mechanisms of Republican government, specifically the fair distribution of offices (patronage), which is significant because, at Caesar's whim, he had fallen out of favour and become isolated, and, if not powerless, obscure.

Thus, whilst Shakespeare's Cassius does not make the same kind of Republican arguments that are espoused by his counterpart in Kyd's *Cornelia*, this does not mean that his motives for conspiring against Caesar are entirely personal and vindictive. As I have argued, personal and political motivations are mixed in his rationalisation for conspiring against Caesar, and this is probably reflective of the historical figure too. Scholars need to advance beyond the simplistic view of Cassius as the play's

Machiavel. His arguments for the restoration of the Roman nobility ring true: his “Liberty, Freedom, Enfranchisement!” speech is not merely political sloganeering, but his passionate belief that Rome has been freed from a tyrant, albeit a tyrant who has mainly been depriving the nobility of their birthright. Cassius’ greatest problem, however, is that though he perceives Caesar’s true nature, he mistakenly considers the dictator’s autocratic position as self-evident. Antony, of course, will completely undermine this Republican assertion, and turn the people against the conspirators.

Despite his flaws, and despite the eventual failure of the conspirators, Cassius can indeed be considered in the vein of an Elizabethan patriot, as first suggested by Vikram Chopra (2003; cf. Introduction). In the end, we may conclude that Cassius is an imperfect rebel, compromised by his dubious personal animosity towards Caesar, but no less of a Republican, and defender of his class for that.

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