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Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Erasmus's *De Copia*, and Sentential Ambiguity

JEFFREY J. YU

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, immediately after the assassination, Brutus and Cassius make the following metadramatic allusion:

Caesar: How many ages hence
 Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
 In states unborn, and accents yet unknown!
Brutus: How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,
 That now on Pompey's basis lies along,
 No worthier than the dust!
Caesar: So oft as that shall be,
 So often shall the knot of us be call'd
 The men that gave their country liberty.¹

The irony of this passage operates on several levels. There is the obvious self-referentiality of the actors, who emphasize the disjunction between the place and time of the historical event they are portraying and its dramatic re-enactment. Shakespeare, in fact, may have been especially concerned with the nature of his craft when composing the play since *Julius Caesar* is thought to be the first play performed at the new Globe Theatre in 1599. The reference to a play, however, is not necessarily to Shakespeare's work but can refer to other dramatizations of the same subject matter.² Moreover, the allusion, like the other metadramatic references in the play, has been thought to refer to the popularity of Roman subjects in general on Elizabethan stages.³ Furthermore, Cassius refers to multiple performances, and later stagings of *Julius Caesar* up to the present multiply the potential references for a twenty-first-century reader or audience. The final irony of the passage lies in the obviously mistaken gloss Brutus and Cassius impose on the assassination. Subsequent events prove them wrong, as Rome's populace will not glorify the conspirators

as liberators but will, after Antony's funeral oration, drive them from Rome as traitorous assassins.

In their explicit interpretation of the assassination, Brutus and Cassius engage in the kind of unequivocal reading that past critics have imposed on the play as a whole. The play has been read as an unambiguous condemnation of the assassination and the conspirators and a glorification of Caesar. Conversely, *Julius Caesar* has also been interpreted as a denunciation of Caesar and a tribute to the republican nobility of Brutus and Cassius.⁴ The existence of such contrasting readings inevitably casts doubts on both, and more recently, *Julius Caesar* has been acknowledged to be an ambiguous work that does not assess the principal characters, conflicting politics, or the assassination itself in black and white but in many shades of gray.⁵ Such acknowledgment has been due, in large measure, to a greater appreciation of the complexity and contradictory nature of Renaissance conceptions of Caesar. Thus, Shakespeare chose not to impose a didactically political or moral theme on his material, which could not support it anyway. Instead, Shakespeare made the very ambiguity of Caesar and his assassination the focus of his play.

The heart of this ambiguity is identified by Cicero in act 1, scene 3, the night before the assassination. Casca reports the terrible portents he has witnessed to Cicero, and Cicero responds with the following *sententia*:

Indeed, it is a strange-disposed time:
But men may construe things, after their fashion,
Clean from the purpose of the things themselves.

(1.3.33–35)

Cicero's aphoristic lines transcend their context as a mild rebuke of the frightened Casca; they are the focus of the entire play, encapsulating the manner by which characters and events, especially Caesar and his assassination, are interpreted in the play. The times are indeed strangely disposed, as Rome undergoes its transformation from republic to empire, and, as Cicero observes, one's "fashion," that is, one's personality, predispositions, and biases, dictate one's perceptions of reality, including one's self-perception. Interpretation, Cicero tells us, is a woefully subjective enterprise, fraught with the perils of error, and *Julius Caesar* is full of such errors—and perils—especially for those who ignore the "fashions" of others and their own.

The primacy of Cicero's *sententia* has previously been acknowledged. Rene E. Fortin takes an epistemological approach to the play, arguing that it is a "deliberate experiment in point of view, intended to reveal the limitations of human knowledge" and that Cicero's lines "form the thematic center of the play."⁶ D. J. Palmer similarly claims that "Cicero's words express a truth to which the whole tragedy bears witness" but that that truth is rooted in Elizabethan psychology, which regarded "[d]elusion, bad judgment and immoral or irrational behavior ... as the result of passion supplanting reason."⁷ In a philosophical reading, Julian C. Rice asserts that *Julius Caesar* rejects Brutus's Stoicism and Cassius's Epicureanism as "inadequate both as definitions of human capability and as guides to human conduct"; instead, the play echoes "Pyrrhonic doubt of the capability of human judgment."⁸ More narrowly than Rice, William O. Scott emphasizes skepticism about "uniquely privileged self-knowledge [that] was by no means secure in Shakespeare's time."⁹ Scott, concentrating on Brutus and his mutable self-image, calls into question whether there exists, in Cicero's terms, a "purpose," an accurate knowledge of the self.¹⁰

There exists, however, another means by which to explain how Cicero's observation about the subjectivity of interpretation forms the heart of *Julius Caesar*—an analysis of the rhetorical training provided by Tudor grammar schools. It is generally accepted that Shakespeare attended the King's New School in Stratford, and there he would have been subjected to a rigorous rhetorical curriculum that has been thoroughly researched by T. W. Baldwin and others.¹¹ Drawing on this past work, Marjorie Donker, in *Shakespeare's Proverbial Themes: A Rhetorical Context for the "Sententia" as "Res,"* has more recently argued that the Elizabethan love of proverbs, of aphorisms, of maxims, of *sententiae*, especially their use in grammar school curricula, produced "a strong theoretical paradigm that made the *sententia* the ordering principle of poetic discourse" and that "Shakespeare constructed dramatic poems shaped by the implications, applications, extensions, and other permutations" of a *sententia*.¹² After noting the prominent role of *sententiae* in students' first efforts at construing Latin, Donker observes that, even in later forms, "[s]chool composition was essentially an exercise in the expansion of a sententious statement, which is to say that the *sententiae* were at the heart of

invention in school rhetoric.”¹³ The methods for this “expansion” were to be found in book 2 of Erasmus’s *De Copia*, in addition to classical works such as Cicero’s *Topica* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Donker, however, emphasizes the influence of Erasmus and claims that *De Copia* was “the greatest single influence upon the way Shakespeare orders ideas” and that “Shakespeare was ... the alpha-plus boy who took the Erasmian instructions about varying and amplifying an idea to heights unparalleled in the dramatic poem.”¹⁴ Donker, of course, is not alone in stressing Erasmus’s influence. T. W. Baldwin, for example, concludes that Erasmus gave Tudor writers “their strongly marked sentential set” and labels *De Copia* as the “standard general text on varying.”¹⁵ Marion Trousedale believes *De Copia* to be “the most important” model for invention and that it “provided a kind of grammar by means of which texts were generated.”¹⁶

How are the sentential emphasis of Tudor grammar schools and the lessons found in *De Copia* manifested in *Julius Caesar*? When first approaching such subject matter, a grammar-school-educated Elizabethan would attempt to derive commonplaces from Caesar’s assassination, as Erasmus does in book 2 of *De Copia* in the *exemplum* of the death of Socrates. These commonplaces, or *sententiae*, however, conflict. While Erasmus can praise Socrates with tags such as “death should not be feared by the good man” and “virtue is liable to injury from envy,” he also censures Socrates with the assertion that “the study of philosophy is useless or even pernicious unless one conforms to the general mores.”¹⁷ Erasmus continues by drawing *sententiae* from individual incidents of the episode. For example, after noting that Socrates was “accused through the envy of Anytus and Melitus, two of the most corrupt citizens,” Erasmus derives the following: “Truth creates hatred.”¹⁸ Similarly, because only some of his supporters visited Socrates in prison, Erasmus gleans that “[i]n times of danger it finally becomes clear who are true friends.”¹⁹ To engage in the same exercise with Caesar’s assassination, however, would lead to a more complex web of *sententiae*, many inconsistent or conflicting. Shakespeare, instead, employs a *sententia*—Cicero’s lines—that can subsume inconsistencies and contradictions, the interpretive roots of which may be examined when the *sententia* is analyzed and amplified according to Erasmus’s teachings.

As will be discussed, Cicero's "things" include obvious externals such as omens and other characters, especially Caesar himself. In more fully exploring the *sententia*, however, Shakespeare also presents characters construing themselves according to their own fashions and having their fashions influenced by others. Finally, Shakespeare examines the consequences of ignoring the implications of Cicero's *sententia* when either construing or being construed. Caesar does so, but it is Brutus who becomes the most rigid construer in the play. As a result, Brutus, in this sense, is more Caesarean than Caesar by the play's conclusion.

Erasmus's "First Method of Embellishing ... is to relate at length and treat in detail something that could be expressed summarily and in general," which Erasmus equates to the unrolling of a carpet to display the merchandise within. His first example of this method is the elaboration of the phrase "He lost everything through excess." Erasmus observes that "[t]his expression, complete in itself, and, as it were, all rolled up, may be developed by enumerating a great many kinds of possessions, and by setting forth various ways of losing property," which he proceeds to do, expanding the sentence into a paragraph.²⁰ Shakespeare, likewise, embellishes the first line of Cicero's *sententia*—the "strange-disposed time"—with the play's many omens, portents, and prophecies. Moreover, these "things" are then construed incorrectly as often as correctly, according to the interpreter's "fashion." Calphurnia, for example, whose fashion consists of her love and concern for Caesar, interprets her dream accurately as a warning of the coming assassination. Decius's interpretation, however, is based upon his desire to convince Caesar to meet the Senate and intentionally aggrandizes Caesar. Caesar himself ignores the warning of the Soothsayer, "Beware the ides of March" (1.2.18), understanding it, apparently after his arrogant fashion, as the mutterings of a "dreamer" (1.2.24). Cassius interprets the portents that so affright Casca as "instruments of fear and warning / Unto some monstrous state" (1.3.70–71), associating that "monstrous state" with Caesar's autocratic powers. His intent is to recruit Casca into the conspiracy, so he claims that assassinating Caesar is divinely sanctioned.

In providing these examples, Shakespeare is adhering to Erasmus's instructions on *expolitio*, on "varying the same *sententia* in different ways, and at the same time enriching it."²¹ After noting how changes in words,

deliveries, and speakers can vary a *sententia*, Erasmus goes on to assert that “the most copious *expolitio* consists of seven parts: general statement, reason, double *sententia*, to which a reason also double can be added, *contrarium*, simile, *exemplum*, conclusion.”²² The preceding examples of (mis)interpretation are *exempla* of the *sententia* that Shakespeare uses, according to Marjorie Donker, to “concretize his thematic statement by invoking it, not only as an orator would with the repetition of terms and conceits, but as a dramatist could, and that is with scenes that continue to exemplify it.”²³

Of course, supernatural events are not the only “things” liable to misinterpretation in the play. Cassius will die as a result of such an error. When he sends one of his lieutenants, Titinius, to determine whether the forces in the distance are friend or foe, he has another follower, Pindarus, view the results. Pindarus, however, mistakes Titinius’s enthusiastic reception by Brutus’s forces for capture by the enemy, and Cassius, already discouraged with the progress of the battle, has Pindarus kill him with the same blade he used on Caesar. Soon thereafter, Messala explains the reason for Cassius’s suicide:

Mistrust of good success hath done this deed.
 O hateful Error, Melancholy’s child,
 Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
 The things that are not? O Error, soon conceiv’d,
 Thou never com’st unto a happy birth,
 But kill’st the mother that engender’d thee.

(5.3.66–71)

Following Erasmus’s first method of embellishment, Shakespeare has provided an *exemplum* of a particular fashion—melancholy—and the interpretive consequence of it. He has also engaged in *expolitio* by presenting a variation of Cicero’s *sententia*, albeit a more specific one. To further emphasize the sentential import of his commander’s suicide, Titinius laments that Cassius “hast misconstrued every thing” (5.3.84).

Another example of misinterpretation, and one of the most striking in the play, is the death of Cinna the poet in act 3, scene 3. He dies at the hands of the enraged plebeian mob that has been raised to a murderous fever pitch by Antony’s funeral oration in the previous scene. Cinna has the ill luck of having the same name as one of the conspirators, but his

attempt to identify himself—"I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet" (3.3.29)—is in vain, as illustrated by the cry of one of the plebeians in response to Cinna: "Tear him for his bad verses" (3.3.30). Unfortunately, that is exactly what they proceed to do.

This scene of senseless mob violence not only demonstrates the horrors of civil discord, but parallels the assassination of Caesar himself. Just as the plebeians believe Cinna deserves to die, so do the conspirators think Caesar does. The most important construal in the play, it is based on the conspirators' fashions. Such negative readings of Caesar are initiated in the opening scene of the play by the tribunes, Flavius and Marullus, who chastise the plebeians for forgetting their previous adulation of Pompey and celebrating Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons. The tribunes decide to remove the trophies from Caesar's images and disperse any other groups of celebrants, justifying their actions, as Flavius states, true to their Pompeian perspective:

These growing feathers pluck'd from Caesar's wing
Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
Who else would soar above the view of men
And keep us all in servile fearfulness.

(1.1.72–75)

It is unclear whether the "feathers" Flavius mentions are the trophies or the plebeians or both, but they undoubtedly involve the increasing number of honors Caesar is receiving, honors that the tribunes feel will raise Caesar to a superhuman height from which he can, like a falcon, swoop down on his enemies in a tyrannously arbitrary and indiscriminate manner.

Flavius implies Caesar's great ambition in this brief passage, but there is some ambiguity as to whether Caesar is actively seeking such honors in a quest for authoritarian power or if the honors, unsought for, will lead inevitably to tyranny, demonstrating the corruptive nature of power. This ambiguity will reappear in Brutus's construal of Caesar, and the censure of Caesar by the tribunes is made more puzzling by what is omitted from the scene that Shakespeare's source, Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, emphasizes. Shakespeare makes no mention of Caesar's recent appointment as perpetual dictator, an office Plutarch calls "a plain tyranny."²⁴ Plutarch makes this assessment immediately after giving an

account of Caesar's triumph for his defeat of Pompey's sons and noting that this celebration was the cause of significant offense because Caesar had not vanquished "strangers, nor barbarous kings, but had destroyed the sons of the noblest man in Rome, whom fortune had overthrown."²⁵ Shakespeare, however, only has Marullus condemn the plebeians' fickle loyalties and ask of them, rhetorically, why they celebrate a man "[t]hat comes in triumph over Pompey's blood" (1.1.51). A much greater emphasis could have been placed on the civil wars that preceded the action of the play, thereby casting Caesar in a worse light than the tribunes do. Instead, the horrors of discord are only alluded to, and Caesar is condemned not for what he is but for what he might become. Consequently, Caesar is a more ambiguous "thing," capable of being construed in multiple ways and providing a cipher to demonstrate Cicero's *sententia*.

Brutus, of course, is the pivotal interpreter of Caesar, but in act 1, scene 2, Brutus has not yet developed an unequivocal reading of Caesar because Brutus has not yet construed himself; he has not yet developed his own fashion. In keeping with Erasmus's first method of embellishing, the analysis of the general into specifics, Shakespeare has included one's own identity as one of the "things" construed in the play. While Cicero's *sententia* indicates that understandings may be made based on an individual's "fashion" or self-image, with an implied immutable "purpose" or identity, Shakespeare's Erasmian explication of Cicero's lines also explores the development of such a fashion. In *Julius Caesar*, one's fashion can be influenced by others, and the resulting fashion can lead to misconstruals. Moreover, those who are most aware of the subjective nature of interpretation—whether of events, other people, or themselves—are those most able to manipulate others and those less likely to suffer the perilous consequences of misinterpretation. Cassius and, especially, Antony, are aware of the implications and consequences of subjective (self-)interpretation. Conversely, those who are either unaware of or choose to ignore the "purpose" of Cicero's *sententia*, like Brutus and Caesar, come to regard their own fashions as immutable and, thus, fail to sway others, are themselves manipulated, and prove more prone to misconstruals.

Initially, Brutus is plagued by "passions of some difference" (1.2.39); he is "with himself at war" (1.2.45). These warring passions, Brutus soon reveals, are his republican values and his close relationship with Caesar.

The conflict between these two impulses, these two fashions, must be settled before Brutus construes Caesar, and this self-construal begins in his conversation with Cassius. When Cassius asks if Brutus can see his own face, Brutus notes that “the eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things” (1.2.51–52). In addition, Brutus, perceiving Cassius’s intent, questions his own fitness for opposing Caesar: “Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius, / That you would have me seek into myself / For that which is not in me?” (1.2.62–64). In response, Cassius offers to serve as Brutus’s mirror:

And since you know you cannot see yourself
So well as by reflection, I, your glass,
Will modestly discover to yourself
That of yourself which you yet know not of.
(1.2.66–69)

Cassius claims that he will reflect a feature of Brutus that Brutus himself cannot see. What he is really doing, however, is appealing to Brutus’s republican impulse alone, negating Brutus’s personal ties to Caesar.

Cassius accomplishes this by emphasizing Brutus’s honor. After Brutus proclaims that “I love / The name of honour more than I fear death” (1.2.87–88), Cassius points out that “honour is the subject of my story” (1.2.91). Two of the stories involve Caesar’s physical weakness—his near-drowning in the Tiber and fever in Spain—but the primary narrative appeals to Brutus’s republican honor and, more specifically, to Brutus’s ancestry: “There was a Brutus once that would have brook’d / Th’ eternal devil to keep his state in Rome / As easily as a king” (1.2.157–59). Cassius’s allusion to Lucius Junius Brutus, Brutus’s ancestor and a key figure in the expulsion of the Tarquins and the establishment of the Republic, is effective. Cassius is sensitive to Cicero’s *sententia*, to the fashions of men, and to the malleability of those fashions. As he proudly says at the end of the scene, Brutus’s “honourable mettle may be wrought / From that it is dispos’d” (1.2.306–7).

By the end of their conversation, Brutus is almost won over:

Brutus had rather be a villager
Than to repute himself a son of Rome
Under the hard conditions as this time
Is like to lay upon us.
(1.2.170–73)

The fact that Brutus acknowledges that the “hard conditions” do not yet exist but are only likely to follow is similar to the tribunes’ qualified reference to Caesar’s predatory and tyrannical status,²⁶ and in his orchard soliloquy, in act 2, scene 1, Brutus grapples with this dilemma. He admits that he has “no personal cause to spurn” Caesar except “for the general” (2.1.11–12) but questions how absolute authority, in the form of a royal office, would change Caesar. Although ignorant of any episode when Caesar’s “affections sway’d / More than his reason” (2.1.20–21), Brutus relies on the “common proof” (2.1.21), a narrative template, that power corrupts. Brutus thus settles on the following reading:

Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent’s egg,
Which, hatch’d, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.

(2.1.30–34)

Struggling with the fact that Caesar has done nothing outright to deserve death, Brutus, true to his new fashion, must resort to a construal of Caesar as destined to become tyrannical, just as a serpent must emerge from a serpent’s egg.

After this passage, Brutus reads one of the notes designed by Cassius to convince Brutus of the popular opposition to Caesar.²⁷ As he interprets the note, Brutus makes another reference to Lucius Junius Brutus: “Shall Rome stand under one man’s awe? What, Rome? / My ancestors did from the streets of Rome / The Tarquin drive, when he was call’d a king” (2.1.52–54). At this point, Brutus has sufficiently construed himself as a republican tyrant-slayer to construe Caesar as a Tarquin, and he makes the following pledge to Rome: “O Rome, I make thee promise, / If the redress will follow, thou receivest / Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus” (2.1.56–58). Brutus’s interpretation of Caesar as a Tarquin is, of course, flawed. Caesar is not yet a king, and he has not engaged in tyrannical acts. Furthermore, Brutus’s conception of himself as the reincarnation of his ancestor is largely the result of Cassius’s “reflection” of him as Lucius Junius Brutus. This self-image becomes an inflexible fashion and, as will be later discussed, leads to fateful misinterpretations and arrogant certitude that parallel Caesar himself.

Although he is committed to the conspiracy, Brutus's personal ties to Caesar still exist, and he regrets what he must do. When defending his position that Antony should not be killed with Caesar, Brutus distinguishes between Caesar the Tarquin, who must die, and Caesar the man, whom he loves:

Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.
 We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,
 And in the spirit of men there is no blood.
 O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit,
 And not dismember Caesar! But, alas,
 Caesar must bleed for it.

(2.1.166–71)

This distinction between Caesar the man and the spirit of Caesar, the latter embodying monarchy and despotism to Brutus, corresponds to Caesar's portrayal in the play as a public, political figure whose private character is subordinated in order to appeal to the fashions of those around him. *Julius Caesar* provides only occasional glimpses of the private Caesar; his public "spirit" is what comes to dominate, and Brutus's reading is simply one interpretation of that "spirit." Caesar, however, is capable of adopting several personae. Whereas Brutus comes to consider himself only as a true republican Roman who is honor-bound to slay Caesar, Caesar is capable of presenting himself variously according to his perception of how he is construed by others. Caesar is an actor, like Cassius, adopting the role he feels is most amenable to the fashions of his given audience. His acting, however, negatively affects the better judgment of his private and mortal self. His performances, moreover, are subject to interpretation by those in his audience who do not construe Caesar as he thinks they do, and this audience includes both the characters in the play and the audience of *Julius Caesar* itself.

These processes are all apparent in act 1, scene 2. The scene begins with Caesar's grand entrance at the head of his impressive train. Caesar also utters the first words of the scene, calling on Calphurnia, and the crowd is immediately silenced by Casca's words: "Peace, ho! Caesar speaks" (1.2.1). After instructing Calphurnia to position herself within easy reach of Antony when he runs his course as part of the celebration of the Lupercalia, Caesar reminds Antony "[t]o touch Calphurnia" (1.2.7)

so that she may “[s]hake off [her] sterile curse” (1.2.9). Antony, of course, will not forget: “When Caesar says, ‘Do this,’ it is perform’d” (1.2.10).

In itself, the majestic spectacle of Caesar’s entrance supports the fears of the tribunes, voiced in the opening scene, as Caesar appears, if not a monarch, certainly as a man who does not “fly an ordinary pitch.” His image, however, may not be entirely of his own making. The deferential, even obsequious, reactions of Casca and Antony to Caesar’s words demonstrate that they evidently interpret his position, at least in public, as one of great, perhaps even absolute, power. Caesar, however, makes no arrogantly authoritarian statements here, but the treatment he receives from Casca and Antony defines his almost royal status. Such status has been created, as the tribunes mentioned, by the increasing honors Rome is granting Caesar and not necessarily by Caesar’s active pursuit of such honors. Caesar, of course, is aware of his position and has no qualms about adopting a royal persona to appeal to the apparent fashions of those around him.

Apparently comfortable and secure in this part, Caesar’s desire for a child can prompt fears that he intends to establish a monarchic dynasty—a course of action anathema to republican Roman values. Plutarch makes no mention of Calphurnia’s barrenness, so it seems likely that Shakespeare intended to introduce Caesar’s dynastic ambitions despite the fact that no one expresses any suspicion over the matter here. For a Renaissance audience, however, Caesar’s desire for an heir would have obvious implications, implications of a positive nature. The Tudor dynasty was sometimes regarded as analogous to the Roman imperial dynasty, which, like the reign of the Tudors, ended a period of bloody civil wars.²⁸ The peaceful transfer of power from one ruler to the next was a critical concern of Shakespeare’s audience, especially given the age of Elizabeth when *Julius Caesar* was first staged in 1599, and Caesar’s apparent first steps to ensure the establishment of a hereditary monarchy, unthinkable in republican Rome, would have been lauded in Renaissance England due to the fashion of the times.

The scene continues with the Soothsayer’s warning and Caesar’s rejection of it, which may be considered proud confidence, in keeping with his exalted status, or instead arrogant hubris, in accordance with the portrait of Caesar painted by the tribunes and Cassius. It may also simply be a dismissal of the supernatural by a man firmly rooted in reality, but the

fact that Caesar has just expressed his belief in the customs of the Lupercalia, commanding that no ceremony be left out, would indicate that Caesar takes the warning seriously. A man of his stature, however, should not be frightened by the mutterings of a “dreamer.” In addition, even before the warning is given, the distinction between Caesar the man and Caesar the spirit is emphasized when the Soothsayer is brought before Caesar through the press of the crowd. Caesar commands him, “Speak. Caesar is turn’d to hear” (1.2.17). The fact that Caesar must turn to hear is an allusion to his deafness, which Caesar himself admits to Antony later in the scene, thus confirming his physical frailty previously evoked by Cassius.²⁹ With the Soothsayer, however, the allusion is subtle and easily overlooked, and with Antony, the admission of deafness seems intended for his ears only. Caesar, on display, does not want to expose his mortal state and subvert the way, in his mind, he is interpreted by others. Caesar’s desire to transcend his mortality is also evident in his third-person self-reference, repeated throughout the play, when he addresses the Soothsayer. Such references can be interpreted as betraying his arrogance, but they also emphasize his public/private split. Caesar’s name takes a life of its own as “Caesar” becomes a symbol that is construed by others and by himself.³⁰ His perception that all of Rome desires a royal leader, a “Caesar,” however, will contribute significantly to his assassination.

The split between Caesar the man and Caesar the symbol or spirit is highlighted when he re-enters after Antony’s offstage offering of the crown to him before the Roman populace. First, the demeanor of those around him illustrates his status, much as Casca’s and Antony’s lines did in the opening of the scene. Caesar is obviously angry, and as Brutus observes, “all the rest look like a chidden train” (1.2.182). No one will cross the great Caesar when he is in this state, and Cicero, although incensed, says nothing. The domineering stature of Caesar, however, is immediately juxtaposed with his very human fear of Cassius, which he communicates to Antony:

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

(1.2.189–92)

As Caesar is construed by the tribunes and Brutus, here Cassius is construed by Caesar. A shrewd judge of character, Caesar is ominously correct in his assessment of Cassius,³¹ but Antony dismisses Caesar's fear, praising Cassius's character: "Fear him not, Caesar, he's not dangerous. / He is a noble Roman, and well given" (1.2.193–94). Antony may simply be trying to calm Caesar, or Antony has misinterpreted Cassius, his fashion being a belief in the inviolability of Caesar. After the assassination, however, Antony will learn his lesson—Cicero's *sententia*—and scrutinize the fashions of others before construing them, confirming Cassius's assessment that Antony is, indeed, a "shrewd contriver" (2.1.158). In the case of Caesar's assessment of Cassius, although Caesar is clearly correct in his suspicions, his grandiose fashion prevents him from taking the threat to heart, just as he rejected the Soothsayer's warning. He proclaims to Antony, after the latter's reassurance of Cassius's harmlessness, that "I fear him not" (1.2.195), only to qualify his confidence with the following admission: "Yet if my name were liable to fear, / I do not know the man I should avoid / So soon as that spare Cassius" (1.2.196–98). As Caesar reveals, he is a "name," not a man. Caesar continues to describe Cassius accurately, saying that Cassius is "a great observer, and he looks / Quite through the deeds of men (1.2.199–200). Caesar describes Cassius's interpretive skill but also, ironically, demonstrates his own as he subsequently identifies Cassius's motive for conspiring against him: "Such men as he be never at heart's ease / Whiles they behold a greater than themselves, / And therefore are they very dangerous" (1.2.205–7). Caesar, however, again catches himself deviating from his persona:

I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd
Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar.
Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf,
And tell me truly what thou think'st of him.
(1.2.208–11)

Caesar's depiction of himself as larger than life, as immune to mortal threats, prevents him from fully acknowledging and acting upon his fear of Cassius. Even with a trusted supporter, Caesar must construe himself after his regal, omnipotent fashion, a fashion, at least in part, based on the understandings and resulting behavior of others. After calling attention to his physical weakness, however, Caesar's last line, a request that Antony provide his genuine assessment of Cassius, might indicate that

Antony had withheld it when he discounted Caesar's fears. Caesar may be aware of his follower's interpretive abilities, and Antony will emerge as the most adept construer in the play.

In Casca's account of the events that just took place offstage, it becomes apparent that Caesar does have the improvisational skills necessary to appeal to the fashions of others. Although he usually plays a regal role, he is fully capable of playing the part of a frail mortal when circumstances dictate it. Unfortunately for Caesar, however, his performance is vulnerable to varying interpretations. According to Casca, Caesar's rejection of the crown offered to him by Antony "was mere foolery" (1.2.232), and that, in reality, Caesar "was very loath to lay his fingers off it" (1.2.238). Casca also describes Caesar's histrionic gesture of submission to the will of the people immediately prior to his epileptic fit: "he pluck'd me ope his doublet, and offer'd them his throat to cut" (1.2.261–63). After his collapse, Caesar excuses any of his words or actions that might have given offense on the basis of his "infirmity" (1.2.268) and, according to Casca, referred to the crowd as his "worships" (1.2.268). This is clearly a different Caesar from the one who denied his fear of Cassius to Antony, but this Caesar, even though he has not been granted the crown, has won the hearts of the crowd. In contrast, Casca construes Caesar as a dissembling would-be tyrant eager for popular support, and here again Caesar is defined by the perceptions of another. The actions described by Casca, however, occurred offstage, and it is necessary to determine how Casca's fashion has influenced his interpretation.

An important part of Casca's fashion is his contempt for the plebeian crowd. He makes this apparent when assessing the cause of Caesar's fit as the rabble's "stinking breath" (1.2.243). Casca's scorn of the masses is so great that he even envisions their breath as pestilential. Caesar's wooing of plebeian support, therefore, is repugnant to the elitist Casca, and he equates it to drama: "If the rag-tag people did not clap him and hiss him, according as he pleas'd and displeas'd them, as they use to do the players in the theatre, I am no true man" (1.2.255–58). This meta-dramatic allusion has a distinctly Elizabethan flavor, and Casca can be regarded as voicing Puritan opposition to the theater, paralleling Cassius, who, as Caesar says, is humorless and "loves no plays" (1.2.200). In the present context, however, Casca's remark has greater resonance as an expression of authoritarian fear of such large gatherings as potential

hotbeds of discontent, civil unrest, and rebellion. Casca, an aristocratic senator, both recognizes and is repulsed by Caesar's manipulation of the plebeians, and he may also be fearful of its repercussions.

Of course, the historical Caesar did all he could to curry popular favor,³² but here Shakespeare stresses the danger in such an enterprise—the alienation of the opposing faction. While Casca may be the “blunt fellow” (1.2.292) Brutus calls him, the fact that Caesar has allowed himself to be interpreted as a dangerous and disingenuous populist by some of Rome's powerful nobility calls his judgment into question. If this is an orchestrated charade designed to have royal power thrust upon him, ostensibly against his will, Caesar has overplayed his hand. Not only has he erred in anticipating the plebeians' reaction to the spectacle, but he has revealed the object of his ambition to even the most obtuse of his potential enemies. It is Caesar's assumed desire to be king, after all, that enables Brutus to construe him as a nascent Tarquin. Like Cinna the poet, who is killed for what his name signifies to the mob, “Caesar” is marked for death as a result of the construals of the conspirators.

The next time Caesar appears, with Calphurnia in act 2, scene 2, he again misinterprets. The scene opens with Caesar noting the unnatural events of the night and Calphurnia's cries in her sleep. Seemingly in response to such events, Caesar orders a servant to “bid the priests do present sacrifice, / And bring me their opinions of success” (2.2.5–6). This action confirms Cassius's earlier observation that Caesar “is superstitious grown of late” (2.1.195) and parallels Caesar's order that the ceremonies of the Lupercalia be followed precisely. Caesar's fear of Cassius has apparently increased to a general feeling of anxiety and a correspondingly cautious fashion. When the servant enters with news that the augurs' sacrifice contained no heart, however, Caesar interprets the omen in his self-aggrandizing fashion: “The gods do this in shame of cowardice: / Caesar should be a beast without a heart / If he should stay at home to-day for fear” (2.2.41–43). At this point, Calphurnia falls to her knees and Caesar acquiesces to her request and agrees not to venture out: “Mark Antony shall say I am not well, / And for thy humour I will stay at home” (2.2.55–56). The decision is abrupt and seems the result of Calphurnia's gesture of submission. Significantly, Caesar refers to himself in the first person here, offering a glimpse of the genuine, private Caesar, who seems to possess

sincere affection for Calphurnia. In explaining that his decision is based solely on Calphurnia's "humour," however, Caesar denies the fear he has already betrayed, in much the same way he denied his fear of Cassius. Even at his most vulnerable, Caesar cannot completely shed his grandiose and invulnerable fashion.

When Decius enters, Caesar relates Calphurnia's dream to him and offers his wife's ominous interpretation of it, an interpretation based on her concern for her husband's safety.³³ Decius responds with his interpretation, which is intended to draw Caesar forth. Decius, who had earlier claimed that "when I tell [Caesar] he hates flatterers, / He says he does, being then most flattered" (2.1.207–8), reads the dream as signifying Caesar's rejuvenating influence on Rome as a martyred saint. Caesar approves of Decius's interpretation but does not agree to meet the Senate until Decius goes even further with his appeals to Caesar's ambition and pride. Decius first dangles a crown in front of Caesar: "The Senate have concluded / To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar" (2.2.93–94). Decius also hypothesizes about possible rumors concerning Caesar's cowardice that might circulate if he stays at home: "If Caesar hide himself, shall they not whisper, / 'Lo, Caesar is afraid?'" (2.2.100–1). Decius knows Caesar's fashion well, for even if Caesar had no desire for the crown, his pride would not allow him to be branded a coward. Thus, Caesar resolves to meet his fate. As Calphurnia stated earlier, Caesar's "wisdom is consum'd in confidence" (2.2.49), and his confidence is the result of his fashion, which is based, at least in part, on his perception of how he is construed by others.

After Caesar makes his decision, Brutus and some of the other conspirators join him. Caesar assumes another persona here, that of the amiable comrade and peer. Caesar does not employ any of his third-person self-references here and adopts the manner of a first among equals, not the manner of a monarch. Caesar courteously greets each of his visitors in the course of the brief episode and, like a good host, offers refreshments: "Good friends, go in, and taste some wine with me; / And we, like friends, will straightway go together" (2.2.126–27). Knowingly or not, Caesar's qualifying "like" provides an ironic twist that stings Brutus, as illustrated by his aside: "That every like is not the same, O Caesar! / The heart of Brutus earns to think upon" (2.2.128–29). Caesar's behavior

emphasizes the betrayal of the conspirators, and it is difficult not to sympathize with the doomed Caesar at this point, despite his previously arrogant manner. Caesar, however, may not be as sincere as he seems. He may be playing upon the fashions of his noble audience much as he did with the plebeians in the crown episode, and adopting such an affable persona is certainly wise among the most powerful men of Rome, whose influence is being threatened by Caesar's increasing authority. Whether genuine or not, Caesar's affability would have been better displayed earlier. Caesar has neglected to assuage adequately the interests and principles of the conspirators. Antony's offering of the crown left Caesar vulnerable to the charge of royal ambition, leading to Brutus's reading of him as a potential Tarquin. Furthermore, Cassius would not have plotted against Caesar's life had he enjoyed more of Caesar's favor. While Caesar can skillfully manipulate a specific audience, he does not possess the necessary ambiguity to appease different factions at the same time. He can masterfully manage the plebeians and effectively appeal to aristocratic camaraderie, but he neglects the nobles in the former instance and, despite his behavior in this scene, is insensitive to the nobles' fashions again just before the assassination.

Once again in public, the imperious Caesar re-emerges in the assassination scene. When Artemidorous pleads that Caesar read his suit revealing the conspiracy, Caesar employs the royal "we" in dismissing the suit: "What touches us ourself shall be last serv'd" (3.1.8).³⁴ When calling the gathering together, Caesar even refers to the Senate as if it were a possession: "What is now amiss / That Caesar and his senate must redress?" (3.1.31–32). As Metellus Cimber presents his appeal that his brother be recalled from exile, Caesar engages in a disdainful rebuke of him for even attempting flattery, a rebuke that is obviously hypocritical in light of Caesar's earlier susceptibility to Decius's persuasive appeals. This is a public forum, however, and despite the fact that Metellus, like Calphurnia earlier, kneels in submission to the great Caesar, no repeal is forthcoming. Caesar reaches new heights of arrogance with Metellus; using the third person, he scorns the supplicant as a "cur" (3.1.46) and portrays himself as infallible: "Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause / Will he be satisfied" (3.1.47–48).³⁵ The appeals of Brutus and Cassius elicit even greater arrogance from Caesar, who elevates himself to celestial status:

I could be well mov'd, if I were as you;
 If I could pray to move, prayers would move me;
 But I am constant as the northern star,
 Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
 There is no fellow in the firmament

(3.1.58–62)

After this speech, when Cinna apparently touches Caesar, the latter reiterates his superhuman self-conception: “Hence! Wilt thou lift Olympus?” (3.1.74). Caesar’s regal public persona has become a divine one. Whether his affable behavior in the previous scene was an act or not, that Caesar is nowhere to be found here, and his seemingly infinite arrogance only reinforces the conspirators’ belief that he deserves to die.

Caesar’s last line emphasizes the split, noted by Brutus earlier, between Caesar the man and Caesar the symbol or spirit. He cries out, “*Et tu, Brute?*—Then fall Caesar!” (3.1.77). The Latin phrase, which may be rooted in Suetonius and apparently was a dramatic commonplace at the time,³⁶ not only stresses Brutus’s betrayal of Caesar but also recalls Caesar’s rumored paternity of Brutus.³⁷ The very human shock of Brutus’s ingratitude, betrayal, and even patricide is thus juxtaposed with Caesar’s imperious persona, illustrated by his third-person self-reference. Caesar first addresses Brutus, then the world. The first utterance comes from Caesar the man, whom Brutus so yearns to spare, while the second is the product of the spirit of Caesar, which Brutus must slay.

In the assassination scene, Caesar demonstrates the failing that leads to his twenty-three dagger wounds. He cannot adequately satisfy his entire audience, a diverse Rome. His self-aggrandizing posturing fosters fears of both authoritarian rule in republicans like Brutus and the resentment of those, like Cassius, out of favor. Caesar errs in taking the flattery and adulation he receives to heart, and his resulting self-construal turns some of his fellow nobles against him. Caesar can effectively manipulate the plebeian masses, eliciting their sympathy for him as a great man, but still a man. Caesar can also assume an affable nature among his peers, as he does just prior to the assassination. Such behavior, however, is too little, too late. Caesar dies, in essence, because he can be interpreted, because he is not ambiguous enough.

The construals of Caesar do not end with his death, however, for Caesar’s legacy is interpreted according to the same processes as the living

Caesar was. The most obvious examples are the funeral orations of Brutus and Antony, for which Shakespeare found no model in Plutarch, who only provides a reference to the lucid, epistolary style of Brutus and Antony's more colorful, Asiatic manner.³⁸ The orations, like the death of Caesar, demonstrate the need to cater to an audience's fashion; the ultimate failure of Brutus and the success of Antony are determined by their adherence to Cicero's *sententia*. Brutus's oration is deliberative, a type usually found in political assemblies and designed to appeal to the audience's reason. As Brutus himself notes, "Censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge" (3.2.16–18). Brutus mistakenly imagines that the masses hold the same values he does and trusts they will see the logic in his argument that Caesar's ambition threatened the freedom and liberty of Rome: "Who is here so base, that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude, that would not be a Roman?" (3.2.30–32). While these rhetorical questions are effective, it soon becomes apparent that his message has been grossly misinterpreted when one of the plebeians shouts, "Let him be Caesar," and another responds, "Caesar's better parts / Shall be crown'd in Brutus" (3.2.52–53). The deliberative oration has its place in a republic in which free and open discussion is accepted and encouraged, but the political atmosphere of Rome is no longer free. The masses want a strong leader to end the instability, conflict, and war of the preceding years. They want a Caesar.

Antony's oration and subsequent appeals to the plebeians are far more effective than Brutus's speech primarily because of Antony's ability to adapt to the fashions of his audience. In the scene preceding his oration, Antony states that he will gauge "[i]n my oration, how the people take / The cruel issue of these bloody men" (3.1.293–94). He is more flexible than the idealistic Brutus and willing to sacrifice his own fashion for his audience's. His oration is of the demonstrative or epideictic type, used primarily on ceremonial occasions in praise of a person and as a forum for the speaker to display his rhetorical skill. Antony's speech is also in verse, not the prose of Brutus, and Antony effectively embellishes his oration with anecdotes, irony, and even Caesar's body to appeal to the fashions of the plebeians. To arouse the guilt of the mob, Antony first notes the past deeds of Caesar—his many victories, his sympathy for the

poor, and his refusal to take the crown that Antony himself offered to him—to refute Brutus’s argument that Caesar’s ambition was leading Rome into tyranny. Antony’s lines are punctuated with the ironic assertion that such evidence must *not* be as it seems because Brutus sees it otherwise, and Brutus, as Antony says, “is an honourable man” (3.2.84). Aware of the respect the plebeians have for Brutus, Antony does not directly contradict Brutus’s claims, but the plebeians become unsure of where the truth lies. When he continues, Antony produces Caesar’s will as an appeal to the mob’s greed, and it produces the desired result, as one of the plebeians gives voice to the feelings of them all: “They were traitors. Honourable men!” (3.2.155).

Antony, however, is not finished. After displaying Caesar’s bloody mantle, pierced through by the conspirators’ daggers, making a special note of “the most unkindest cut of all” (3.2.185), that of Brutus, Antony then reveals the body itself as a gruesome climax. The mob is now in a state of fury, but Antony does not release them yet. Instead, he speaks to them as equals, ironically detaching himself from any responsibility for their subsequent rampage:

I am no orator, as Brutus is,
 But (as you know me all) a plain blunt man,
 That love my friend; and that they know full well
 That gave me public leave to speak of him.
 For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
 To stir men’s blood; I only speak right on.

(3.2.219–25)

Antony proves correct Cassius’s assertion, in reference to Casca, that such a show of bluntness “gives men stomach to digest his words / With better appetite” (1.2.298–99). Antony’s feigned humility also parallels that of Cassius, who, after moving Brutus to an emotional outburst in act 1, scene 2, refers to his persuasive appeal as “weak words” (1.2.174). Antony continues with the grisly image of Caesar’s wounds as “dumb mouths” (3.2.227), which, had they Brutus’s eloquence, would “move / The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny” (3.2.231–32). Antony concludes by reading the will, which the mob had forgotten, and finally lets them go: “Mischief, thou art afoot, / Take thou what course thou wilt!” (3.2.262–63). After bringing the plebeians to a murderous fever pitch by appealing to their

fashions, Antony has subtly baited them further and further before, as he pledged earlier over the dead Caesar, letting “slip the dogs of war” (3.1.273). The first victim of these dogs is, of course, the unfortunate Cinna the poet.

Antony manipulates the mob in this scene with the same techniques Caesar apparently did when he was offered the crown by Antony. It would seem that Antony has learned some valuable lessons from his adored mentor, but he does not fall prey to the same mistake as Caesar, who allowed himself to be perceived as desirous of the crown by even the dull Casca. Before confronting the conspirators in act 3, scene 1, Antony had sent a servant ahead to gain Brutus’s assurance of Antony’s safety, and when Antony arrived, he knew well enough to efface himself before the assassins or risk suffering Caesar’s fate. Antony possesses an acute awareness of the fashion of his time as well as the flexibility to adapt to it. Such flexibility is something Caesar lacked, and Caesar’s rigid royal fashion doomed him to death.

Ironically, the same inflexibility that doomed Caesar also results in Brutus’s failure and establishes a kinship between the two, as Brutus becomes as arrogantly authoritarian as Caesar. As discussed above, Brutus construes himself, in large measure, according to his perceptions of how others, especially Cassius, define him—as a tyrant-slayer like his ancestor, Lucius Junius Brutus. This self-image, which is even more restrictive than Caesar’s since Caesar can project others, leads Brutus to err tragically. First, against Cassius’s advice, he decides that Antony should not be killed with Caesar: “For Antony is but a limb of Caesar. / Let’s be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius” (2.1.165–66). Brutus, true to his noble republican values, wants to avoid a bloodbath and sanctifies the murder of Caesar as a religious rite. He is equally concerned, however, that the assassination does not “seem too bloody” (2.1.162) to the people of Rome. It is his public image, or his interpretation of it, that grants him his identity. Brutus’s decision is also based on Antony’s attraction “[t]o sports, to wildness, and much company” (2.1.189), a side of Antony that is alluded to several times in the play. The sparing of Antony, of course, proves to be the conspirators’ undoing, but Brutus’s fashion of ascetic republicanism—he is “not gamesome” (1.2.27)—prevents him from construing the threat Antony poses and performing what is expedient. Brutus makes a similar

mistake in allowing Antony to deliver his funeral oration. In act 3, scene 1, after the assassination, Antony pledges to support the conspirators if they can demonstrate that the killing of Caesar was justified. Brutus, possessing idealistic confidence in the righteousness of the deed, is sure that Antony, like the plebeians, will be satisfied and grants Antony's request that he be allowed to speak at Caesar's funeral, despite Cassius's objections.

As Caesar's imperiousness elevates his self-conception above the sphere of mortal men, so does Brutus's republican part. Brutus is not only inflexible but self-righteously authoritarian. The first glimpse of this domineering trait is provided just prior to Brutus's decision that Antony should not be slain with Caesar. When Cassius suggests that Cicero be made aware of the conspiracy, Brutus argues against it, reasoning that Cicero "will never follow any thing / That other men begin" (2.1.151–52). Implied in Brutus's objection is his fear that his authority would be challenged by Cicero, and his status as leader is confirmed by his comrades' abrupt reversal of their previous enthusiasm for the inclusion of Cicero. Ironically, Cicero, the greatest orator of the day, might have been of some assistance in gaining and maintaining popular support after the assassination. Knowing the power of eloquence, he would certainly have opposed Brutus's decision to allow Antony to deliver his oration.

Brutus's authoritarianism is most pronounced in the quarrel scene. He has Cassius enter his tent where, Brutus says, "I will give you audience" (4.2.47), a line that could easily have come from the lips of Caesar and presages Brutus's even greater arrogance as the scene continues. Cassius first complains about Brutus's condemnation of Lucius Pella for taking bribes, but Brutus is steadfast, just as Caesar refused to recall Publius Cimber from exile. Cassius continues to press his suit, arguing that "[i]n such a time as this it is not meet / That every nice offence should bear his comment" (4.3.7–8). As Cassius accurately observes, a time of war does not allow the luxury of standing on noble principle. Brutus, however, just as he demonstrated in his funeral oration, cannot adapt to the changing circumstances. He accuses Cassius himself of accepting bribes and reminds Cassius that Caesar died "for justice' sake" (4.3.19). Brutus's obsession with justice, while admirable, is simply unrealistic in a time of war. Just as he had proclaimed that he would "rather

be a villager" (1.2.170) than a Roman under Caesar's tyrannical yoke, here Brutus would "rather be a dog" (4.3.27) than sacrifice his principles. Overlooking petty corruption is far different from accepting the rule of a tyrant, but Brutus, due to his fashion, cannot make the distinction.

As the scene continues, Brutus becomes more and more like Caesar. As Caesar had contemptuously referred to the kneeling Metellus Cimber as a "cur," Brutus demeans Cassius, portraying him as a fool. Cassius, of course, is enraged and claims, "When Caesar liv'd, he durst not thus have mov'd me" (4.3.58). Brutus is probably correct in observing that Cassius would not have "tempted" Caesar as he has Brutus (4.3.59), but Brutus's next speech reinforces his similarity to Caesar. Just before his assassination, as previously noted, Caesar compared his constancy to the northern star, and here Brutus dismisses Cassius's threats in a similar manner:

There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats;
For I am arm'd so strong in honesty
That they pass by me as the idle wind,
Which I respect not.

(4.3.66–69)

Both Caesar and Brutus rigidly and arrogantly maintain their personae. Caesar's claim of constancy, it should be remembered, is undermined by the fact that he has just displayed, with Calphurnia and Decius, vacillation in his decision to meet the Senate. Brutus is likewise guilty of hypocrisy. After claiming he possesses an armor of honesty, he reveals that he is angry with Cassius for not sending him the money he requested. Brutus needs the money because, he says, "I can raise no money by vile means" (4.3.71). Although vehemently opposed to corrupt financial gain, Brutus would accept such tainted funds from Cassius.

Brutus's arrogance appears again when he overrules Cassius's suggestion that it would be best to allow Antony and Octavian to march to them. Brutus argues that they should march to Philippi to engage the enemy because Antony and Octavian would be able to gain reinforcements along the way. Cassius, against his better judgment, acquiesces: "Then, with your will, go on" (4.3.223). Just as Caesar, when he initially decided not to venture forth on the Ides of March, proclaimed that no excuse was necessary because "[t]he cause is my will" (2.2.71), so Brutus's will is likewise unbending, as Cassius understands. Brutus's willfulness,

of course, proves to be his undoing, just as it was for Caesar. The Ghost of Caesar is not so much a spirit of revenge as a part of Brutus, and it even identifies itself as “[t]hy evil spirit, Brutus” (4.3.281). This spirit, the spirit of Caesar and of Brutus, is a phantom of a tragic, arrogant fashion that leads them to their deaths.

Both Brutus and Caesar fall victim to their blindness to all the implications of Cicero’s *sententia*, implications made evident as Shakespeare analyzes the *sententia* following Erasmus’s precepts in *De Copia*. Caesar, although aware of the fashions of his various audiences, cannot adequately appeal to them all. He becomes too restricted to an offensively royal public persona based, in part, on how he perceives he is construed, and the conspirators construe him as a “Caesar” who may be justifiably slain. In denying his private self and his better judgment, he misreads many warnings and ventures forth on the Ides of March. Brutus is likewise the product of his perception of how he is construed. As reflected in the distorted mirror that is Cassius, he sees himself as his ancestor Lucius Junius Brutus, the expeller of the Tarquins and the founder of the Republic. Brutus, however, is even more rigid in his fashion than Caesar is in his. He cannot sacrifice his ideals of republican honor and justice to allow Antony to be killed with Caesar, and he woefully misinterprets the fashion of Rome, projecting his own values onto his plebeian audience during his oration. He becomes so self-righteously arrogant that he cannot accept the suggestions of others if they contradict his own. It is Antony who possesses the greatest understanding of Cicero’s *sententia*. He is both perceptively sensitive to the fashions of others and chameleon-like in his flexibility of character. His eventual fall, however, is foreshadowed by the emergence of Octavian at the conclusion of the play. Caesar’s heir, who utters the final lines of the play, is even addressed as “Caesar” (5.1.24) by Antony. Antony is more than just perceptive—he is prescient.

Given Shakespeare’s characterizations of Brutus and Caesar, are they both to be censured for their faults? There are certainly aspects of their characters deserving of reproof, even contempt. Yet Brutus’s idealism can be admirable and Caesar’s authoritarianism is precisely what Rome wants and needs. Moreover, their struggles with the inherent dangers of interpretation and their construals of themselves at the expense of their private selves can arouse empathy as well as condemnation. Judgments,

however, are not what *Julius Caesar* is meant to elicit. Confronted with the ambiguous and contradictory Caesar of Renaissance tradition, Shakespeare chose to dramatize the processes, encapsulated in Cicero's *sententia*, that operate when judgment is attempted. He illustrates the manner in which reality is construed by the perceiver and dramatizes a Caesar of signifiers, instead of grappling with an evasive signified.

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NOTES

¹ All quotations of *Julius Caesar* are from the Arden edition, ed. T. S. Dorsch (1955; London: Routledge, 1989), and hereafter are cited parenthetically in the text; 3.1.111–18.

² The anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* is dated circa 1595. The lost plays about Caesar that predate Shakespeare's are an anonymous *Caesar and Pompey* (c.1576–82) and the Admiral's plays *I and II Caesar and Pompey* (1594, 1595), as noted by Albert Tricomi in "Shakespeare, Chapman, and the Julius Caesar Play in Humanist Renaissance Drama," in *Reconsidering the Renaissance: Papers from the Twenty-first Annual Conference*, ed. Mario A. Di Cesare (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 399.

³ T. J. B. Spencer, *William Shakespeare, The Roman Plays: "Titus Andronicus"; "Julius Caesar"; "Antony and Cleopatra"; "Coriolanus"* (London: Longmans, Green 1963), 7–8.

⁴ Ernest Schanzer notes the conflicting assessments by John Dover Wilson, who condemns Caesar, and Sir Mark Hunter, who praises him, in *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare: A Study of "Julius Caesar," "Measure for Measure," "Antony and Cleopatra"* (New York: Schocken, 1963), 10–11.

⁵ See Schanzer, 10–70, and Mildred E. Hartstock, "The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*," *PMLA* 81 (1966): 56–62.

⁶ Rene E. Fortin, "Julius Caesar: An Experiment in Point of View," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19 (1968): 342, 344.

⁷ D. J. Palmer, "Tragic Error in *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21 (1970): 400–1.

⁸ Julian C. Rice, "Julius Caesar and the Judgment of the Senses," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 13 (1973): 239. Rice's essay concludes with the observation that Cicero's lines are a "depiction of the human condition" (254).

⁹ William O. Scott, "The Speculative Eye: Problematic Self-Knowledge in *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Survey* 40 (1987): 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹¹ T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944). Later important works on the impact of petty and grammar school curricula include Virgil K. Whitaker, *Shakespeare's Use of Learning: An Inquiry into the Growth of His Mind and Art* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1969) and Joel B. Altman, *The*

Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

¹² Marjorie Donker, *Shakespeare's Proverbial Themes: A Rhetorical Context for the "Sententia" as "Res"* (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁵ Baldwin, 1:101, 2:179.

¹⁶ Marion Trousdale, *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 7, 57.

¹⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas (De Utraque Verborem ac Rerum Copia)*, trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963), 90–91.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Donker, 119.

²⁴ Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, in *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1964), 77. All subsequent quotations of Plutarch are from this edition.

²⁵ Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, 76.

²⁶ Similarly, when Cassius recruits Casca into the conspiracy in act 1, scene 3, he notes that Caesar may not be actively seeking absolute power but is almost forced to attain it: "Poor man! I know he would not be a wolf, / But that he sees the Romans are but sheep" (1.3.104–5). Cassius, of course, is not concerned with political issues like Caesar's usurpation of republican rule, and his statement is designed to appeal to Casca's masculine pride.

²⁷ Historically, the notes *were* written by the people of Rome. Shakespeare has made this change to emphasize the scheming of Cassius.

²⁸ J. Leeds Barroll, "Shakespeare and Roman History," *Modern Language Review* 53 (1958): 328–29.

²⁹ Caesar's deafness, like his poor swimming skills, is Shakespeare's invention.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of the use of proper names in *Julius Caesar*, see Madeleine Doran, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language: Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 121–50.

³¹ Plutarch writes that when Caesar admitted his fear of "pale-visaged and carrion lean people," he was referring to Cassius and Brutus (*The Life of Julius Caesar*, 85).

³² Plutarch states that “to win himself the love and good will of the people, as the honourablest guard and best safety he could have, [Caesar] made common feasts again and general distribution of corn” (*The Life of Julius Caesar*, 78).

³³ Jan H. Blits thinks Calphurnia’s dream is an invention of Caesar’s intended to test Decius, and Decius’s response confirms Caesar’s suspicions about the plot on his life. Blits also feels that Caesar willingly accepts his fate as the price of his apotheosis. See Blits, *The End of the Ancient Republic: Essays on “Julius Caesar”* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1982), 83.

³⁴ Plutarch has Caesar attempt to read the suit, but the press of well-wishers prevents him from doing so (*The Life of Julius Caesar*, 91)

³⁵ See Dorsch’s note (65) on the last two lines of this passage, which have received significant commentary due to Ben Jonson’s different version of them—“Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause”—and Jonson’s denigration of them as nonsense.

³⁶ See Dorsch’s note (67) for an account of the traditional nature of Caesar’s final line.

³⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Marcus Brutus*, 105.

³⁸ Dorsch, xi.