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What Should Be in that Caesar: The Question of Julius Caesar's Greatness

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It is difficult to disagree with the distinction, offered by a recent editor of the play, that with *Julius Caesar* 'Shakespeare is more interested in Caesarism – a political strategy, an ideology, a movement in history – than in Caesar himself'.[i] However, though Shakespeare does not grant his Caesar many lines, at the hub of the play's inquiry into 'Caesarism' is the issue of his nature as an individual. One of *Julius Caesar*'s more remarkable effects is the double-sided way its sense of historical inevitability seems to tell on the characters. When Brutus muses that 'Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma or a hideous dream' (2.1.63-65)[ii], he seems to feel pulled gravitationally into what we universally recognise as one of the world's all-time pivotal events, unfree to do anything with the helpless, dream-like interim leading up to it; but all at once, he seems to regard the process he is in as originating in his own 'motion', and not irrevocable until the dreadful thing has been acted. Perhaps the interim that weighs on Brutus' mind is dream-like to him

because he somehow senses its lack of true contingency, but then again, perhaps because, from Brutus' perspective, truly anything might happen. *Julius Caesar*'s handling of 'Caesarism' is enriched by this ambiguous relationship between the play's characters and its unambiguous dramatic irony. We absolutely know as they cannot that the hand of fate is on them, for Julius Caesar has his ordained, world-historical role to play, and the conspirators have theirs, and their drama is destined to sum up, for all time, the conflict between the republican and the royal political visions. But do the characters comply meta-theatrically with these over-determined roles or behave as though self-determined? We know 'Caesarism' is a fact of life, to be debated, and lauded or loathed; but just how futile, the play forces us to ask, was resistance to it? And this problem has much to do with that of the quality of Caesar himself. That is, did those who attempted and failed to prevent 'Caesarism' from defining Western life rightly or wrongly assess what sort of person Julius Caesar truly was?

Was Caesar really different and better than other men? Cassius complains that Caesar 'doth bestride the narrow world / Like a colossus' (1.2.134-35), and effectively conveys 'Caesarism' as a massive fact of life, the hugeness of which stands to redefine all terms and rewrite all rules. But to what is this statue-comparison, however comprehensible in this way, actually referring? Is 'Caesarism' the contemplation of exaggerated artifice, or an unavoidable reaction to the presence of a giant? And which proposition emerges as the more foolish to deny? Shakespeare is, of course, very ambidextrous very often, but nowhere more so than here in *Julius Caesar*, pushing on us this question of the dictator's true specialness; indeed, despite Caesar's short time onstage, the play poses the question more intently and complexly than do other contemporary plays on the subject, and goes far further in factoring it into the analysis of 'Caesarism'. And it is a question on which the play encourages us to be doubtful -- unlike its Romans, whose various attitudes are all suspicious. '[W]hat should be in that "Caesar"', demands Cassius; indeed, what? The play challenges us to refrain from hasty judgment as to whether Caesar's worth is substantive or accidental, and whether he deserves to be held exceptional, as a political phenomenon, as a historiographical authority, and as an individual human mind.

As a political phenomenon, Caesar was most often placed in one of two overly simplistic categories: tradition had labelled him a Worthy or a Tyrant. He was a fixture of the Nine Worthies of medieval lore—Joshua, David, Judas Maccabeus; Hector, Alexander, Caesar; Charlemagne, King Arthur, Godfrey of Bouillon--heroes who incontrovertibly stood out over all others in derring-do and constructive leadership.[iii] Shakespeare's England would have received this idea from many sources, prominent among which would be Caxton's preface to his edition of Malory, where the readiest and securest way to elevate Arthur is grouping him with the Worthies: 'For it is notoyrly known through the universal world that there be nine worthy and the best that ever were.'[iv] However, this basic view, approaching Caesar's political significance from the standpoint of his well-earned membership in the most elite of fraternities, could be rendered in much more sophisticated ways; some decades after Shakespeare's play, even Milton, defending tyrannicide, would have to exempt Caesar, recognising him as worthiest to rule ('dignissimus').[v] At the other pole stood the Tyrant conceptions of Caesar influenced by the first-century poet Lucan, whose sensationalistic verse history portrayed Caesar's war with Pompey and liaison with Cleopatra as emanating from a bestial, compulsive drive to consume and destroy. Lucan's horror at Caesar's temerity was captured for Elizabethans in the playwright Christopher Marlowe's translation of the poem's first book[vi]; the 'restles generall' cannot stop himself from rushing to deprive Rome of freedom, his own free will giving way to savagery: 'here, here (saith he) / An end of

peace; here end polluted lawes; / Hence leagues, and covenants; Fortune thee I follow, / Warre and the destinies shall trie my cause' (226-30).

In near-contemporary dramatic renditions of Caesar this dichotomy between the Worthy and the Tyrant tends to be applied; even where plays allow for differing attitudes, they tend to alternate between extremes. Cued by Lucan, and by conventions of the stock Tyrant figure,[vii] several dramas cast Caesar as the Tyrant by dint of his grasping for control when subject to control himself, from effeminizing powers of inner id and outer Fortune, and this is to diminish Caesar in terms not only of negativity, but of commonness as well. Opening Kyd's translation of Garnier's *Cornelia*,[viii] Cicero laments sententiously how 'Equals are euer bandying for the best' (1.35), framing the civil war as wearisome repetition of a common problem. Consequently, to Cornelia, Caesar is fearful not in himself but because Fortune has consistently advanced him, and the Chorus while it cannot allay her fears can try to remind her that he is likely riding for a fall—probability rules him, as anyone (3.1.55-60). Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey*,[ix] lionising Pompey and especially Cato as Stoic sages, emphasises Caesar's enslavement to Fortune to the point where he feels it himself. Sunk in worry before the oncoming showdown, he confronts the very real possibility of defeat as a shattering of his distinctiveness, and thus of his excuse for having 'ransack'd all the world': it simply cannot be that Nature could 'lift arts thus far up in glorious frame / To let them vanish thus in smoke and shame' (2.5.1-23). However, in more even-handed dramas, too, Caesar is categorized as a reiteration of a pattern. In the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge*[x], the spirit of Discord pegs Caesar as merely the beneficiary of luck: 'Though *Caesar* be as great as great may be / Yet *Pompey* once was euen as great as he' (2.Ind.). Even when the Romans extol Caesar, it is in categorical terms, as they affirm him a Worthy; in him 'all is comprehended'—he is comparable to Hercules, Achilles, Alexander, and Hector (3.2). Similarly, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, the final of Sir William Alexander's four *Monarch Tragedies*[xi], leaves Caesar open to debate because his marks *a* case of the common tension between individual achievement and public good. Caesar sees himself as a 'Phoenix', paradoxically, because he can now count himself to have 'equall'd' Alexander the Great and 'all that went before' (2.1.319-26); on the other side, Decius Brutus is indignant that 'He (to himselfe a slave) would make *Rome* thrall' (2.2.880).

The debate over Caesar which Sir William presents, setting a conqueror's worth against a dictator's threat to the state, has often been observed at work in *Julius Caesar*[xii], but not often observed is how that debate is inflected by the play's handling of Caesar's specialness. Not only can the play accommodate either view, the Worthy or the Tyrant, but also, this multi-facetedness is compounded in how the play's special-versus-ordinary dialectic underwrites but also transcends the political alignments. That is, both Caesarism and anti-Caesarism hold Caesar ambiguously special and non-special.

That Caesar actually should be a colossus obviously bolsters the monarchical side. As Warren Chernaik points out, Caesar's actual conquests are scarcely mentioned in the play[xiii], which begins with anguish that his triumph is against Pompey, not foreign enemies (1.1.34-35). In a way, the glory of Caesar's deeds comes across all the more resoundingly for this muting of it: in lieu of Sir William's Caesar's harping on the unmatched significance of subduing Gaul (2.1.335-48), Shakespeare's needs no boasting, on his own part or by proxy. Moreover, he needs no comparison to anyone. Within the 'Worthies' discourse he is an exemplar of a rarefied type, but a type nonetheless, and by leaving his conquests unspoken but understood, he can come off as all the more a Worthy--or as not a Worthy at all but a class by himself.

From another direction, however, the case for Caesarism benefits from his not being very special as a person. From the first scene, we are met with a division between man and meaning, between, as Michael McCanles put it, 'the objective Caesar—the neutral facts about the man himself—and the carefully projected public image of the superhuman conqueror'.[xiv] However, the perceived gap between the public image and the person is part of what makes that image so compelling. Caesar is becoming an icon, a sign that the empire dawning is inevitable and irresistible.[xv] The meaning is much larger than the man, and that meaning seems both inexplicable and incontestable, of overwhelming momentum as a political force and as a conceptual one. Hence the interpretation proffered by Caesar himself of the astounding prodigies being witnessed, that they 'Are to the world in general as to Caesar' (2.2.28-29), and hence Brutus' befuddlement at the offstage popular applause for Caesar's rejection of the crown. It were easier to digest for Brutus if, as he assumes (1.2.79-80, 131-33), the entranced crowd could be imagined as pleading for a hero-king. But they are not. Instead they celebrate something they seem to know not what. With a theatrics rhetorically effective even *for* its conceptual vagueness, Caesar moves Rome to invest him with kinglike mystique by affirming nothing, only divesting himself of any kinglike mystique. No wonder Brutus presses Caska not only to report the Lupercal spectacle but also account for it, break down the 'manner of it', and no wonder Caska could just as easily be hanged (1.2.233-34). With regard to Caesar the person, what does Rome respond to, other than an impersonal aura of awesomeness?

For the anti-Caesarians, meanwhile, arguing Caesar's tyranny would seem predicated on his being common. Here, Caska would write off Caesar's Lupercal display as 'mere foolery' (235), mere showmanship, explicitly because it is an attempt to conceal Caesar's true, basely tyrannical intent, but implicitly because of an objection similar to Cassius', that 'Caesar' is crafted histrionics with no correspondence to flesh-and-blood. He is no icon, but an idol, one crying out for iconoclasm.[xvi]

And yet, too, both the conspirators' sense of urgency before the deed and their rationalisation after it depend on Caesar's specialness. Cassius would have it that Caesar's largeness in the people's minds originates *in* their minds, which have fallen away from the modus operandi of the mentality of true Romans: 'What trash is Rome? / What rubbish, and what offal? when it serves / For the base matter to illuminate / So vile a thing as Caesar?' (1.3.108-111). The comparison of reputation to combustion, with Caesar's brightness generated not from himself but from dulled popular thinking, like garbage set aflame, strikingly expresses the superficiality of Caesarism—but the metaphor is soon undone. He and Caska agree that their enterprise requires the deep-penetrating persuasiveness of Brutus, since, says Caska, 'that which would appear offence in us / His [Brutus'] countenance, like richest alchemy, / Will change to virtue and to worthiness' (158-60). If the Romans' minds are 'base matter' in esteeming Caesar, it is base matter so well integrated, so stable and settled in its current state, that nothing short of alchemy will be needed to produce a different form of combustion. The hint is that the highest opinion of Caesar is 'base' not so much in being trash as in being *basic*, elemental and essential. Turning this opinion into approval of his murder will demand extravagant rhetorical pyrotechnics, measures extremely intricate and delicate, and under suspicion of fraudulence.

Indeed, Brutus we soon see needs to practise a kind of ideological alchemy on everyone, including himself. His 2.1 'It must be by his death' soliloquy concedes that no sign has appeared of a Caesar whose 'affections swayed / More than his reason' (20-21); the only way to pigeonhole him as a common Tyrant will be to stress the probability that everything about him will change, and he will transmute into

commonality and tyranny. Sadly for the purposes of exposition and justification, 'the quarrel / Will bear no colour for the thing he is' (28-29). Regarding the existing Caesar, there is no *colour* to be had, no exculpatory explanation--no way to 'spin' actions against him. The recourse then must be convolution and obfuscation, and not merely in that the colour's basis must be an imaginary, prospective future Caesar; the case must also posit a haze of self-contradiction on the uncommon versus the common. Caesar is an uncommon hero uncommonly self-controlled, but 'common proof' (21) warns us that ambition lurks within modest appearances and metastasises with promotion; the uncommonly good carriage must be reread as indicating commonly bad motive. Moreover, the common, proper response to such a Tyrant ought to be, especially for true Romans, the most strenuous resistance—a 'purpose necessary and not envious', as Brutus says to his fellows (177). But how can proper anti-Tyrant protocols be applied to an as-yet-non-tyrant whom everyone adores *but* the envious? Brutus must argue the assassins as being *constrained* to move and hence doing the only reasonable thing, and simultaneously as moving on the most abstract and theoretical of promptings, stretching themselves to foresee and forestall a danger unlike any other. A logical colour remaining thus elusive, Brutus the alchemist avoids logic and tries to transmute base matter into gold using distinctions hollow but high-sounding: he tells the masses, 'as he was valiant, I honour him: but as he was ambitious, I slew him' (3.2.25-27). What Caesar 'is' forces his opponents to deal in rhetorical alchemy, which seems to indicate his specialness. Brutus must suggest that this emergency warranted unwarranted action, being sui generis: 'not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more' (21-22).

That Brutus and Cassius finally cannot formulate 'reasons / Why and wherein Caesar was dangerous' (3.1.221-22) might well speak to Caesar's being uniquely beyond criteria for judgment—but it might do no such thing. It might be that branding Caesar a common Tyrant is actually much simpler than Brutus makes it. Similarly, it may be that what seems a Caesarian control over the story issues naturally from Caesarian excellence, or it may be far otherwise, from a suppression of alternative storytelling modes.

The play opens on this note. When Murellus complains about the citizens' stony hearts (1.1.33-52), as they are comfortable enough with the calamity of Caesar's ascendancy to 'cull out a holiday' from it, he is also complaining about neglect of the right retrospective vision. He demands, 'Knew you not Pompey?'; they certainly *did*, and their worship of him then should translate into an entirely different understanding of the unfolding of events than they have now. The tide of Caesarism, to Murellus, seems to reorient knowledge of the past. For him, Pompey it was who stood *for* Roman values and *as* Rome's darling, so that embracing his killing, and his killer, as heroic is equivalent to embracing that killer's rewriting and distorting of the record. Pompey had a history, and the people's love of him helped validate and further set down that history, and now that history is obscured in favor of another—one which, to Murellus, is degrading to both Rome and to the historical truth. However, if a degradation, this new history, wherein the people cannot know Pompey as they knew him, and wherein instead they know and propagate general knowledge of Caesar triumphant, is fast becoming *the* history. Such is painfully driven home with Caska's mention of how Murellus and his compatriot Flavius 'are put to silence' (1.2.285).

Ugly though this silencing of alternative history seems, we must wonder: *does* the new history degrade the truth? Was Julius Caesar a historiographical tyrant? Given the preeminence of Caesar's Commentaries as an indispensable part of the humanistic education, it would seem fairly easy to divorce his historiographical specialness from the question of his role in history. T. W. Baldwin proved long ago the high probability 'that if Shakespeare completed grammar school, he had read Caesar'; indeed, as far

as exposing students to the best authors was concerned, 'We may regard Sallust and Caesar as universal'.[xvii] The Renaissance's schoolmaster, Erasmus himself, endorsed the singularity of Caesar the author, in the *De Ratione Studii* placing him on a short list of those every learner of Latin should read: in the *Ciceronianus*, the arch-humanist's critique of Ciceronians, who would raise Cicero to a status above all other writers, entails pointing to Caesar, who far surpassed him in propriety and elegance.[xviii] For almost any literate sixteenth-century person, Caesar was a unique Worthy in being the historian of his own worthiness; even while the medieval romanticising of his name was still resonating, in the Renaissance Caesar's fame took on a much more realistic and much less fanciful aspect, as, love or hate the politician, one had to admire the writer's gravitas and perfection of decorum. He had sung his own praises *without* singing them, by employing a straight-forward, mature, just-the-facts style to describe the momentous events in which he had taken part. The weight of Caesar's Commentaries virtually guaranteed a view of their author's singularity: they must be read and their sprezzatura must be imitated, and their content must be believed.

For Englishmen this historiographical dimension of Caesar's specialness took on a peculiar poignancy, for the Caesarian dominion over historical epistemology keenly affected their power of national storytelling. As a side-story of his account of his campaigns against the Gauls, Caesar told of how he had undertaken two expeditions to the terra incognita of Britain, learning a little something of its barbaric people and successfully beginning the process of subjugating them. This side-story effectively became the opening chapter of English history, owing both to the monolithic presence of the Commentaries and to the absence of any native competitor, beyond the hyper-enthusiastic and hyper-imaginative medieval Welshman Geoffrey of Monmouth (Galfridus). Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* purported not only to fill in the gap of more than a millennium's worth of knowledge about the ancient Britons, but also to set the record straight about Caesar's invasions in particular; just as Caesar was *not* to be held as the original source of information on Britain, so too was his adventure there *not* the easy, casual conquest over a lot of savages he had made it sound like. He actually went to Britain regarding it as a rival Trojan-derived civilization almost on a par with Rome itself, and was twice humiliated there before winning Britain only by dint of British infighting. For support Geoffrey cites a line from Lucan, on how Caesar showed his back to the Britons.[xix] They are magnified by their stout resistance to such a singular personage, and yet also by how they prove him not truly to be such; just as Lucan would reveal Caesar's tyranny against Rome and Romanitas, so would Geoffrey elaborate on Lucan to reveal the historiographical usurpation Caesar had committed against Britain.

Furthermore, despite the transparency of Geoffrey's aims and despite Caesar-the-historian's nearly unmatched predominance, the twelfth-century monk's protest against the mighty conqueror could in Shakespeare's time still stir English hearts. Humanistic education and humanistic advancements in historiography made Geoffrey pale beside Caesar, but the Galfridian ideal of alternative, native voices, of feeling enabled to challenge an imperialistic, monologic authority for ownership of the story, did not quickly dissipate. To this a later Shakespearean play, *Cymbeline*, testifies. As the Roman emissaries attempt to claim the tribute due them because of Caesar's conquest of Britain, King Cymbeline's vicious Queen is roused to push forward a competing narrative: 'A kind of conquest / Caesar made here, but made not here his brag / Of "Came, and saw, and overcame:" with shame / (The first that ever touch'd him) he was carried / From off our coast, twice beaten' (3.1.23-27).[xx] She is a villain from the start, and the play ends with her and her viewpoint disavowed in favour of a dignified rather than slavish

capitulation to Rome; nevertheless, her speech shows Shakespeare's awareness of how the Galfridian ideal of historiographical independence could strike a chord.

Shakespeare does not overtly bring this awareness to bear on *Julius Caesar*, but the concern about subverting Caesar's right to dictate memory of the past is not confined to Murellus. Antony's funeral oration overwhelms Brutus' in large part because it proposes to the Romans a clear and basic means of framing what has happened, and even offers evidence for it, with the mantle Caesar wore warring on the Nervii (3.2.168-71) and, finally, with Caesar's will. Brutus' oration's paradoxes, nuances, and abstractions cannot keep up with the 'plain, blunt' Antony's posture of merely rehearsing what has taken place (211); against Brutus' imaginative exercise in divining Caesar's prospective ambition, Antony sets the generally-witnessed fact of Caesar's thrice-rejected crown (94-100). Antony's exordium, citing the *sententia* that 'The evil that men do lives after them: / The good is oft interred with their bones' (76-77), is calibrated to be undone by the content of his speech; the crowd's hearing the plain, blunt what-has-happened will guarantee their assent to Caesar's good living after him, and their interring of his potential ambition. Hence the exordium is more than an *occupatio* device, disclaiming a purpose of glorifying Caesar. It also lays the groundwork for viewing Caesar as exceptional as an object of remembrance, since the *sententiae* of memorialising are inapplicable to him. To wit: for Caesar alone, good far, far outlasts evil in retrospect, even as a *consequence* of a lack of polishing his story. The plain, blunt historical truth yields the irrefutable conclusion of Caesar's singularity: 'Here was a Caesar: when comes such another?' (243). There is a certain parallel to be made, then, between the plain, blunt funeral oration by Antony and the plain, blunt Commentaries by the man it implicitly but powerfully praises. And yet, Shakespeare does not seem to encourage us to react like this crowd. 'He would not take the crown; / Therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious', declares the Fourth Plebeian (113-14); we might sympathise with their inability to respond for very long to Brutus' strained logic, but surely we dislike the reductiveness of their logic here. Could it not be that much more has happened than Antony refers them to, awareness of which would impede this too-easy, too-certain 'therefore'? And even if all facts do prove Caesar a unique Roman, should we not at least suspect that his form of anti-Roman ambition might be unique as well?

Like the Caesar of the Commentaries, Antony has parlayed a plain, blunt style into seizure of historiographical control, over both the matter to be read and the manner in which it is to be read. Perception of and revulsion at the germination of this control lie at the heart of Cassius' bitterness toward Caesar. Perhaps recalling the Galfridian argument of Britain as Rome's sister Trojan civilisation, fully Rome's equal in the legacy of their common ancestor Aeneas, Cassius analogises himself to Aeneas, and the helpless Caesar, whom Cassius once saved from drowning, to the helpless, carried Anchises (1.2.110-15). By Shakespeare's time, of course, the Virgilian connection between Caesar and Aeneas was completely standardized: in *The Faerie Queene*, when the Troy-descended knight Paridell relates Rome's founding and names Aeneas' son as 'Iulus', Spenser tells us nothing new. However, his Paridell is a blackguard, and his best knight, Britomart, is there to admonish him that he has omitted part of the story—the Galfridian part about Troy-descended Britain, and how it can 'dare to equalise' Rome.[xxi] Similarly, in trying to displace Caesar as an Aeneas-figure, Cassius dares to equalise him, by telling a counter-history unfairly unheard. Like Britomart's stance toward Paridell, Cassius convicts Caesar not so much of lying, as of neglecting the whole truth and of fostering the biases facilitated by ignorance of that whole. If the people knew the Caesar-story Cassius knows, from the dictator's almost drowning to his being shaken by a fever in Spain—''Tis true, this God did shake' (121), bearing it 'As a sick girl'

(128)—their historical 'therefores' would be different. Their conclusions would either be uncertain, or certain, as Cassius' and Britomart's are, in positing natural equals. Hearing Cassius here, especially in light of Murellus in 1.1, we must see validity in being uncertain. It is hard at very least not to ask why purveyors of Pompey the Great's glory should be marginalised and silenced, why stories illustrating Caesar's ordinariness should not be told, and why Cassius, or indeed any leading Roman of the Republic, should not be able to analogise himself to Aeneas just as convincingly as Caesar can. And yet, simultaneously, being certain about the counter-history smacks of absurdity. If Cassius like Britomart brings us to valid doubt about the officially-sanctioned history, he also has something of the childish fury of Cymbeline's Queen. They protect not the truth from obscurity, but themselves from rankling feelings of inferiority.

How unfounded are such feelings? Perhaps no one should enjoy the Caesarian privilege of storytelling, and protest against such privilege is good in itself. But perhaps this protest flies in the face of the fact of Caesar's voice being unlike any other. Of this, the very existence of Brutus at the time *Julius Caesar* depicts makes for quiet but strong evidence—and in the play he does not simply exist, but takes center stage. The play's reticence on Caesar's actual accomplishments can help build a sense of the colossal, and so can its making little of Caesar's pardoning Brutus even after he sided with Pompey. This Caesar doesn't need to boast, nor to hold over others' heads that they breathe at his discretion. In Sir William's drama the conqueror is made to trumpet his own 'clemency' toward the republicans he beat at Pharsalia (2.1.479-515), and Brutus is made heavy by his cognisance of his 'debt' to 'that great mans grace' (3.1.1127-42); in *Caesar's Revenge* an entire scene (1.2) is devoted to Caesar's granting Brutus his life: the amazed Brutus wonders 'To what a pitch would this mans vertues sore / Did not ambition clog his mounting fame'. But in Shakespeare an issue has not been made of Brutus' owing Caesar his life, which makes the debt to Caesar, and Caesar's untroubled cancelling of it, loom all the greater in the case for Caesar's unique fairness. Antony casts Caesar as living out and dying in peculiarly generous sentiments, a view corroborated by Brutus' mere presence there. The 'Ingratitude' Antony decries, 'the most unkindest cut of all' (3.2.179-84), is in this light especially damning of the counter-narrative: Brutus has taken Caesar's life because of abstractions and prospective fears, whereas in factual history Caesar gave Brutus his life, disallowing ideological fear in favour of forgiveness and love. Why *not* entrust such a singular person, so above grudges against his foes, with singular storytelling power? Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster*, grading Caesar the writer with the highest marks, makes just this connection: his books were so 'perfectly done', that not even 'his greatest enemies could euer find the least note of parciality in him (a meruailous wisedome of a man, namely writing of his owne doinges)'.[xxii]

Thus, however insufficient his self-criticism as a conqueror and as a reporter, Caesar in each capacity was renowned to be objective and even indulgent toward others, despite formidable incentives to be far otherwise; this graciousness is certainly reflected in North's Plutarch.[xxiii] In The Life of Caesar, the great biographer stresses the lavishness of Caesar's treatment of Brutus in the wake of Pharsalia: 'For *Caesar* did not only saue his life, after the battell of PHARSALIA when *Pompey* fled, and did at his request also saue many moe of his friends besides: but furthermore, he put a maruellous confidence in him' (p. 739). The confidence seems all the more to be marvelled at, that is, for its emergence in place of the distrust that would afflict just about any other civil-war winner. And something very like this marvelous confidence enables Caesar to write his rightly famous memoirs. North's Plutarch includes a Comparison of Alexander the Great with Julius Caesar, and the latter is credited with nearly incredible success as a writer, by any standard, but all the more given the tumultuous environment of writing: 'in the middest

of his continuall troubles, he did reade, meditate, spake, wrote, and left behind him the goodliest booke that a martiall man, and one that entertaineth the Muses, can deuise to take in his hands' (p. 748). Whatever the dangers of the moment, he was composed enough to compose brilliantly, for all times, the history of that moment. And so in each case, giving Brutus life and giving posterity the Commentaries, Caesar's is a mind refusing to become discomposed by any base considerations.

This immunity to fears and this kindness to foes, as an actor in *and* as a commentator on history, both flow into a key concept the Comparison soon discusses: 'His magnanimitie weighed more, then any other vertue they could note in him: which is as much as if one would say, that *Caesar* outweighed all the other Captaines of the GREEKES and ROMAINES'. Whatever the 'daungers' surrounding him, even 'by some of his owne people', he 'weighed them not'; decisive and nearly always victorious on the battlefield, he consistently 'vsed moderation, gentlenesse, and humilitie in his victories': in fact, Caesar's 'gentlenesse is so much spoken of, that men iudge that that was one of the occasions of his death'. Whatever his excesses—on which the Comparison is explicit, remarking how Caesar 'distained his life with a continuall violent desire to subdue his countrie' (p.745)—Caesar's mind was the very essence of magnanimity, a courageous generosity and a generous courage that applied itself regardless of circumstances. It could even apply itself alongside or despite his voraciousness and rapaciousness.

That Caesar's mind generated its own special, super-heroic mixture of generosity and fortitude was an idea of him that could not have been lost on Shakespeare. Of the many experts on magnanimity one might choose, Thomas Rogers seems as lucid as any: 'Magnanimitie is a certain excellencie of the minde, placing before her eyes at all times vertue and honor, and to the attaining of them bends all her cogitations and studyes'. Such a mind is incapable of the non-virtuous thought, the thoughts of fear or cruelty, bound to visit any other mind in extremes: 'if he be in aduersitie he mourneth not, in prosperitie he insulteth not'. More positively, the magnanimous man 'sets th'example of Caesar before his eyes, and is to nothing more redy then to mercifulnes', and he 'looueth to emulate the best'—'He is of the best nature, and therfore as nigh as he can, hee will be the best man'.[xxiv] It was a commonplace that for Caesar in particular, magnanimity expressing itself in emulation, the striving not merely for political supremacy but for ever higher splendour, and to exceed the glory of the most glorious of all, was intrinsic to cogitation; with success merely 'still kindling more and more in him, thoughts of greater enterprises', as North's Plutarch noted, 'This humour of his was no other but an emulation with himselfe as with another man, and a certaine contention to ouercome the things he prepared to attempt' (p. 737).[xxv] Even readers of Marlowe's Lucan might perceive something of this special-and-higher-thinking mind, the energies of which would seem communicated in his magnetic effect on his men. In Marlowe's astonishing wording, a representative soldier, poised to transgress the Rubicon and violate the sacred Republic beyond, gives voice to the unbreakable spell Caesar's sheer charisma has cast: 'Love over-rules my will, I must obay thee, / *Caesar*, he whom I heare thy trumpets charge / I hould no *Romaine*'; 'What wals thou wilt be leaveld with the ground, / These hands shall thrust the ram, and make them flie, / Albeit the Citty thou wouldst have so ra'st / Be *Roome* it selfe' (360-87).

And yet, dramatic portrayals of Caesar did not exactly capture a mind thinking singularly, even when they referenced his magnanimity. Unsurprisingly, Chapman's Caesar's claim to magnanimity is debunked: referring to his rival's epilepsy, Pompey insists that 'your disease the gods ne'er gave to man / But such a one as had a spirit too great / For all his body's passages to serve it . . . . Goats are of all beasts subject'st to it most' (1.2.244-56). His ambitious thoughts are not only debasing—they make for a

diagnosable illness, a kind of constipation of mental waste-fluid. In *Caesar's Revenge*, aspiring thoughts do not debase him, but still fail to distinguish or elevate Caesar. Congratulated for rejecting the crown, Caesar stipulates that what drives him is not so much magnanimous, Roman public-spiritedness as banal self-apotheosis: 'Of *Ioue* in Heauen, shall ruled bee the skie, / The Earth of *Caesar*, with like Maiesty' (3.4). His thoughts are high, but only in the vein of any prideful worldling. Closer to magnanimity is Sir William's Caesar, but not to singularity. Here, rather than making a singular hero of him, the possibly heroic quality of Caesar's thought mostly factors in to the discussion of his possibly tyrannical motivation, and goes not much further. Antony's paean to his master's magnanimity couches it as generally applicable *sententia*--'True magnanimity triumphs o're all' (2.1.334)—and Caesar differentiates his unquenchable power-thirst from tyranny in that he feels what anyone would (391-94). Brutus tries to grant Caesar the benefit of the doubt, suggesting that 'His thoughts are generous, as his minde is great'; and yet, this speculation quickly turns to generalising on how peace can oftentimes tame *a* man's 'High thoughts which *Mars* inspires' (3.1.1045-58). Cassius' rejoinder accuses Brutus of naivety, as he is measuring Caesar's mind by his own, and 'honest mindes are with least paine deceiv'd' (1061). They differ on what *kind* of mind Caesar has, whether it is the kind guided by compunction and benevolence, like Brutus', or not. The clearest dramatic picture of Caesar's mind's specialness appears in Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One*, and this specialness is brought out through his love affair with Cleopatra. Though no paragon of piety, this Caesar exhibits an intensity of generosity and courage that not only subsists despite but even coordinates with erotic intensity. With this multi-dimensional intensity *The False One* is able to build up Caesar's uniqueness in contrast to that opposition of pleasure to virtue which commonly lays men low, including the Caesar of *Caesar's Revenge* (see 2.3) and, of course, Antony in almost any incarnation .

Julius Caesar's titular character is not afforded this means to appear bigger than others. And yet, even if we restrict our assessment to the little we see of Caesar, it still seems that to dismiss his bigness out of hand, like Cassius—'Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed / That he is grown so great?' (1.2.148-49)--were as rash as to assume it, like Antony, for whom the conspirators have shed 'the most noble blood of all this world' (3.1.156). As Ernest Schanzer put it, 'Shakespeare calls in doubt the validity of Brutus' image of Caesar, just as he calls in doubt Cassius' image, and later Antony's, so that the nature of the real Caesar remains an enigma'.[xxvi] I would add, however, that a sliver of light is shed on this enigma by Caesar's image of himself. His constant mindfulness of keeping up the image of his surpassingly great heart dissociates him from true, interiorly genuine great-heartedness, as has been in many interesting ways described[xxvii]; but on the other hand, that he *is* mindful suggests a mind knowingly operating under pressures both tremendous and un-sharable. This Caesar vouchsafes that he knows he and he alone has to be Caesar with utter consistency, and this burden in itself perhaps does set him apart.

Three times this double-sense is made to infuse Caesar's utterances. The first qualifies his confession of worry to Antony about the malcontented political hunger perhaps signaled by the leanness of Romans like Cassius: 'I rather tell thee what is to be feared / Than what I fear: for always I am Caesar' (1.2.210-11). As he shuffles offstage asking Antony to buzz in his one functioning ear about Cassius' being dangerous (212-13), Caesar himself substantiates Cassius' accusation of Caesarian inflatedness. Old and feeble of body, Caesar is small and common of mind, agitated over circumstantiality in exactly the way magnanimity would preclude, and overeager to cover this disparity up, even in private conversation. And yet, the intimacy of the moment, Caesar having no call to strike a pose, suggests the *sponte sua* quality of the thought here, as though Caesar's mind automatically imposes the dictates of Caesar-ness

on itself. His mind is vulnerable to the ordinary fears of a new-made Tyrant, just as his body is vulnerable to the ordinary physical weaknesses of a man in his age group—but thoughts stemming from this ordinariness are, as if by his autonomic system, naturally detected by and detached from his mind's conception of its own proper thought-parameters. His mind cannot not identify fear as alien to being Caesar, and relocate it from a current felt emotionally to an abstraction understood intellectually. This 'always' working process is in one way mere delusion, his fear expressed as all the more deep-set for the attempt to distance himself from it, but in another way it is indeed exceptional. No one else's mind checks itself this way, with such completeness and such determination.

In fact, no one else's mind works this way at all; only Brutus' *seems* comparable, and our second example proves that he does not feel the weight of Brutus-ness the way Caesar does Caesar-ness. Both Brutus and Caesar can be manipulated, as Cassius and Decius respectively note (1.2.306-21; 2.1.201-10), into certain actions if they are led to believe those actions convey proper Brutus-ness and Caesar-ness. But while the suitability of prospective action to Brutus-ness tortures the conspirator to near self-division, to the point where he is so affected that his wife can scarcely 'know [him] Brutus' (2.1.254), Caesar protects his mind's confidence in Caesar-ness with relentless integrity. When Calpurnia, entreating him to listen to her premonitions, says she 'never stood on ceremonies' (2.2.13), she seems to ask more of her husband than to take ceremonies seriously now—she seems also to be asking him to be less ceremonious, less adherent to the shield of what is appropriate for the demeanour of Caesar. However, whereas Brutus' wife breaks down his veneer, and wins his promise she 'shall partake / The secrets of [his] heart' (2.1.304-05), Calpurnia while she seemingly transmits her fear to Caesar cannot shake his commitment to being 'always' Caesar. Remarkably, his stance of being incapable of acknowledging a survival instinct alters not at all from a change in interlocutors, from Calpurnia alone to Decius; truly, throughout this scene he bends himself to sound like Caesar is supposed to sound, whether in private, in semi-private/semi-public, or, as his entourage arrives, fully in public. Especially telling is his reaction to the horrifying news of the augurers finding no heart in their sacrificial victim: to him, it must mean, 'Caesar should be a beast without a heart / If he should stay at home today for fear' (42-43). Even while this, like the whole scene, exudes both fear and fear of looking fearful, it also insists on the existence of a heart, one with absolute command over what the mind can think. The policing of thought is here so all-encompassing as to produce hermeneutic contortions. No wonder Decius gets Caesar so easily to agree to the unlikeliest of interpretations of the most easily interpreted of prodigies—whatever the bloody statues portend, the reading which to accept precludes fear is 'well expounded' (91). Caesar is already all too disposed to accept the reading that will confirm the presence, and the dominion over thought, of his great heart. That heart is far from confirmed, and it may well seem that Caesar goes to the ultimate lengths to deny its absence, to everyone else and to himself. Nevertheless, the lengths themselves may indicate a different-thinking mind, one busily fusing interior life, private life, and public life into a unified 'always Caesar'.

This fusion is asserted, third and finally, as Caesar is just about to be struck down: 'I could be well moved if I were as you: / If I could pray to move, prayers would move me. / But I am constant as the northern star, / Of whose true-fixed and resting quality / There is no fellow in the firmament' (3.1.58-62). We cannot miss the irony of this moment, insofar as it realises Decius' suggestion about Caesar's predictability, he being so amenable to the flattery of being above flattery (see 2.1.206-07); here before the Senate, Caesar compounds this blindness by flattering *himself* for his anti-flattery. Caesar actually has many 'fellows', for many a Tyrant is marked by the self-flattering notion that he has no fellow, and

that only he among men cannot be flattered. And yet, the constancy of his mind's commitment to Caesar-ness, as, 'Unshaked of motion' (70), it shuts out all the time all un-Caesarly thought, is what has *allowed* his movements to be predicted and what has brought him here, to the point of death. The irony turns back on itself: the success of Decius' prediction, and indeed of the conspirators' whole enterprise, rests on their ability to believe securely in Caesar's unwavering constancy in being Caesar. They, and indeed we, can enjoy such security with no one else in the play's world—certainly not with Brutus, who can never firmly decide if his life's main action is something Brutus would properly do. Caesar's mind can be counted on, in a manner true of no one else's we meet, to be unshakable in its generation of Caesarlike and suppression of unCaesarlike motions.

Since such constancy might amount not to magnanimity but to inane role-playing, a political 'method-acting' he performs even in his bedroom, the 'northern star' speech should not turn us all into nodding Antonys. And yet, we cannot discount Caesar's claim to a stellar human quality, either. It is entirely possible that we do not see more of Caesar because we do not need to in order to understand him: it is entirely possible that, although actually subject to the fear and selfishness unbecoming of Caesar, Shakespeare's Caesar's mind is constant in its reinforcement of proper Caesar-thought, and displacement of anything unCaesarlike. In effect, then, the play asks us to be magnanimous in pondering the question of his magnanimity. We need to be fair and restrained as to whether his truly was a mind like no other.

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[i] Oliver Arnold, Introduction, in *Julius Caesar*, ed. by Oliver Arnold (New York: Longman, 2010), pp. xv-xliii (p. xix).

[ii] References to the play are from *Julius Caesar*, ed. by David Daniell (London: Arden, 2003). I have also consulted *Julius Caesar*, ed. by T. S. Dorsch (London: Arden, 1966).

[iii] For the medieval tradition on Caesar see Almut Suerbaum, 'The Middle Ages', in *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, ed. by Miriam Griffin (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), ch. 22. For an Elizabethan account see Richard Lloyd, *A brief discourse of the most renowned actes and right valiant conquests of those puisant Princes, called the Nine Worthies* (London, 1584).

[iv] William Caxton, Preface, in *Le Morte D'Arthur* Vol. 1, ed. by Janet Cowen (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 3.

[v] John Milton, *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, in *The Works of John Milton* Vol. 7, ed. by Frank Allen Patterson et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 336.

[vi] References are from Christopher Marlowe, *Lucans First Booke*, in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe* Vol. 1, ed. by Roma Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 93-111. For the republican overtones of Lucan's and Marlowe's sense of sublimity, see Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Republican Authorship: Lucan, Liberty, and the Sublime* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 42-49. For the effect of Lucan on Elizabethan-Jacobean republicanism see also William Blissert, 'Lucan's Caesar and the Elizabethan Villain', *Studies in Philology* 53 (1956), 553-74; Paulina Kewes, 'Julius Caesar in Jacobean England', *The Seventeenth Century* 17 (2002), 155-86; Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 53-65. For the Caesar references in Marlowe's Tamburlaine, see Lisa Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp.55-77.

[vii] See Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 56-69.

[viii] References are from *Cornelia*, in *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, ed. by Frederick S. Boas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 101-60.

[ix] References are from *The Tragedy of Caesar and Pompey*, in *The Plays of George Chapman: The Tragedies* Vol. 2, ed. by Thomas Marc Parrott (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), pp. 341-400.

[x] References are from *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey or Caesars Reuenge* (London, 1607).

[xi] References are from *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, in *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander* Vol. 1, ed. by L. E. Kastner and H. B. Charlton (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1921), pp. 344-442.

[xii] For recent specimens see, pro-Caesar, Timothy Burns, 'Julius Caesar: The Problem of Classical Republicanism', in *Shakespeare and the Body Politic*, ed. by Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin Gish (Lanham: Lexington, 2013), pp. 49-77; for Tyrant-Caesar, Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare's Villains* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), pp. 131-37. For the play's ambivalence, see Warren Chernaik, *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 97.

[xiii] Chernaik, p.92.

[xiv] Michael McCanles, *Dialectical Criticism in Renaissance Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 188.

[xv] Mark Rose, 'Conjuring Caesar: Ceremony, History, and Authority in 1599', *English Literary Renaissance* 19 (1989), 291-304.

[xvi] Richard F. Hardin, *Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarchy in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), pp. 152-63.

[xvii] T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), 2, 572-64.

[xviii] Erasmus, *De Ratione Studii* and *Ciceronianus*, in *Opera Omnia* Vol. I.2, ed. by Jean-Claude Margolin and Pierre Mesnard (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1971), p. 116, p. 642. For the importance of the *De Ratione*'s program see Baldwin, 1, 75-93.

[xix] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. by Michael D. Reeve (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p. 79.

[xx] Reference is from *Cymbeline*, ed. by J. M. Nosworthy (Cambridge, MA: Arden, 1960).

[xxi] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977), III.ix.43.5, 44.9.

[xxii] Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London, 1579), fol. 67.

[xxiii] References are from Plutarch, *The Liues of the Noble Grecians and Romaines*, trans. Thomas North (London, 1603).

[xxiv] Thomas Rogers, *A Philosophicall Discourse Entituled, The Anatomie of the Minde* (London, 1576), fols. 140-42.

[xxv] On emulation, including a discussion of this passage, see Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 10-15.

[xxvi] Ernest Schanzer, 'The Problem of *Julius Caesar*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 6 (1955), 303.

[xxvii] McCanles, pp. 188-89. See also Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 129-44.