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“Pluck but his name out of his heart”: A Ceasarean Cross-Section

Paul Innes

An alternative title for an essay might be *Julius Caesar: The Graveyard of Critics*. The play seems to attract waves of attention, perhaps because of its peculiar status. It is produced at the self-conscious end of a century, and the expectation of the end of a reign. The moment is also that of a new beginning, the erection of the Globe theatre.¹ The play negotiates a late Elizabethan “re-presentation” of a crucial period in Roman history.² Furthermore, critical reception has been patchy, varied and at times downright hostile, both to the play and to other critics.

These intersecting and conflicting sets of issues constitute the terrain over which representations are played out. Disentangling them would be impossible, even if such a project were considered desirable. Cross-fertilisation has nourished Renaissance studies for years now. Even so, some attempt should be made at this particular juncture to undo the complexities of the play and its reception. The beginning of a new millennium for the various cultures that reproduce notions of “Shakespeare” would seem like a good point of reflection. But the variety of reactions to Shakespeare’s plays lays bare the grounds on which those reactions are themselves constructed. The high culture with which Shakespeare has become associated can be seen, positively or negatively, to be under threat. As a writer whose works of popular culture have been promoted to the status of classics, Shakespeare could be seen to be threatened by the rise of a new complex of popular cultures hell bent on forgetting him. In this context, the question arises: what is it about *Julius Caesar* that has caused another wave of critical interest over the last twenty years or so?

Re-presenting the critics

Why bother? We are not exactly short of overviews of criticism of this play, both of the tradition in general and of newer works.³ However, scrutiny of the ways in which criticism has moved on from the kind of hostility briefly characterised above to an engagement with issues of politics and representation does have a purpose. There has to be a reason for this movement, and it can be traced to the earlier critics' dissatisfaction with both the structure of the play and its characterisation of Rome's upper classes.

Alan Sinfield describes a five-part process here.⁴ Overall, his discussion falls into three broad categories. Firstly, he narrates the earliest responses in terms of a rejection of the structural imbalances perceived to make the play faulty, including the removal of scenes that seem to these interpreters to be superfluous, including the death of Cinna the Poet. This is then followed by a more modern emphasis on character psychology. And, finally, he argues for a more cogently politicised awareness of the various contexts surrounding the play, both in its own times and later. Interestingly for my present purposes, he focuses upon the killing of Cinna the Poet in a way that deliberately challenges its earlier excision. Sinfield's analysis is more subtle than this schematic description suggests, but his problematising of the two categories of structure and character is worth noting.

One would expect Sinfield not to be alone in reacting against previous generations of commentators, and this is indeed the case. Steve Sohmer provides a detailed reading of the figure of Brutus that suggests he may not be the good hero-figure familiar from earlier critics. Sohmer refers to Cicero in order to trace an intertextual analysis that underpins Shakespeare's representation of Brutus. This comes in the context of the argument between Brutus and Cassius at IV.iii:

Readers of Cicero would know that Shakespeare's Brutus is lying. The historical Brutus was not above usury. In 50 BC Brutus had used his influence to exempt from the usury laws a loan made to the people of Salamis at the confiscatory interest rate of 48 per cent. Brutus also notoriously concealed the fact that he himself was the lender. In letters to Atticus, Cicero roundly deplored Brutus's behaviour on both counts.⁵

Sohmer's assumption that such a learned reference is relevant bears some watching, since the implication is that someone in Shakespeare's theatre would have been well-educated enough to make the connection. Sohmer continues:

The argument over money between Brutus and Cassius is entirely Shakespeare's invention. It reveals Brutus as a hypocrite, and prepares his hypocrisy in the so-called 'double-report of Portia's death'.⁶

This discussion needs to be further glossed with a caveat: the incident reveals Brutus as a hypocrite to *at least some* of Shakespeare's audience. There is the possibility of multiple, even contradictory, responses to Brutus at this point in the play, and the basis on which a response will be made depends on the extent of one's prior knowledge of other texts from Roman history.

In fact, Sohmer takes his argument to its logical conclusion. He quotes Ernest Schanzer's summing-up of critical responses to the play from 1955 in order to foreground his own reaction against the assumptions of prior critics.⁷ Despite his incredibly detailed descriptions of calendrical and liturgical issues in the play, however, Sohmer's own position comes into the second of the two groupings suggested by Sinfield when it comes to overall critical analysis. This is understandable, given the extreme difficulty of generalising on the basis of micro-textual information, but some of his conclusions could be questioned. For example, one might not agree with his assertion that "Beginning with *Julius Caesar*, the plays seem to cast transcendental shadows which elude interpretation".⁸ Even so, the recognition that character-based criticism can be challenged is an important one.

Other critics have of course noticed the same sets of problems as Sinfield and Sohmer. Richard Wilson has summed up the more recent reactions to the play:

And, as the essays in this volume show, this meant attending, above all, to the ways in which *Julius Caesar* processes the Roman past through the Elizabethan present, with an eye always to future audiences.⁹

His formulation is therefore very similar to that which begins the present essay. But his comment comes as part of the Introduction to a collection of essays that deliberately respond to a perceived lack of awareness on the part of the earlier critics. In other words, a critical shift is being enacted upon *Julius Caesar*, and it is one that finds an emphasis only on structural or character problems to be reductive of the possible meanings that can be generated by this play.

The problems inherent in such a project have been very precisely delineated by Margreta De Grazia. Many recent critics are extremely self-reflexive in a way that once again marks them off as reacting against a received tradition, and de Grazia analyses the issues at stake:

The question is, then: in our eagerness to make the Renaissance relevant to the Modern, have we not been precipitous in identifying it as the onset of the Modern? This is not to say that nascent individualism and capitalism cannot be found in Shakespeare's time. Yet it is to ask, does it make sense to make the nascent dominant before history does?¹⁰

Coming in the context of a discussion of *King Lear*, de Grazia's question strikes at the very heart of much of our contemporary Shakespeare criticism. The implication is that a criticism that seeks to pay attention to historicity needs a particularly rigorous awareness of the very specificity of the period under enquiry. In other words, it is not enough to see the Renaissance as Early Modern or proto-Modern or some such formulation. Nor is it enough to describe it as a period of transition somehow sandwiched between the Medieval and the Modern. It is indeed all of these, but it is something more as well, and it would be the task of a materialist criticism to

investigate exactly what that means. This kind of criticism has of course been emerging for quite some time, but it has a different trajectory from a broadly historicist wish to interrogate and make sense of the past. It should be possible to note areas of unintelligibility as well, moments at which a modern or even postmodern sensibility seems inadequate to apprehend a Renaissance text.¹¹

What is important here is the often overlooked fact that all of the critics discussed in this necessarily brief excursion agree on one thing: that *Julius Caesar* disrupts easy categories of structure and character. The earlier critics deplore the play because of this; later ones take it as their cue for a whole series of movements away from a criticism centred upon either of these two elements. There are various ways in which this is accomplished, but the focus returns constantly to the very issues of representation with which this essay began. Where Wayne Rebhorn sees the necessity of analysing the Elizabeth re-presentation of Rome, Richard Wilson discerns a need for an informed awareness of the carnival culture that underpins the culture of Renaissance public performance. Wilson goes so far as to suggest that there is in this period a “collision of codes and voices” rather than a unity.¹² How the Shakespearean play-text manages the multiplicity of competing discourses has become the subject of critics such as Wilson. John Drakakis focuses most exactly on representation in political terms, seeking “that liminal area where ideology and subjectivity intertwine”.¹³ The title of Drakakis’ article refers to theatrical representation, a sign, perhaps, of a perceived need to integrate performance issues.

Wayne Rebhorn also sees the play as dealing with a series of problems that have much wider social ramifications than an emphasis on character alone would allow. He identifies similarities between Caesar and Brutus that could be interpreted

in purely psychological terms, especially their inability to take heed of others' opinions. But he sees this kind of analysis as crucially limited:

Such similarities have been used to qualify Brutus' status as the hero of the play, to identify moral failings in him that constitute his 'tragic flaw'. I would argue that the play not only undermines – without cancelling – the differences between Brutus and Caesar, but, more important, as it links the pair together, it stresses their resemblances to all the other aristocrats as well and identifies emulation as the common denominator of the entire group.¹⁴

Rebhorn reminds us that these stage characters operate within a whole network of social competition that indeed defines their identity – the implication, of course, being that they are not purely discrete individuals. This early "New Historicist" essay accomplishes a great deal more, however. Rebhorn also positions the play in relation to the culture for which it was produced:

Such a concern with aristocratic self-definition was of vital interest in Elizabethan culture and was in good measure the result of the dislocations caused by social mobility and the ontological insecurity that mobility produced for Englishmen used to living in a seemingly immutable, intensely hierarchical society.¹⁵

A two-part process is at work here: the play is not simply "about" Romans; it reproduces them in inevitably changed form so that they can be recognised by Elizabethan contemporaries.¹⁶ Such a productive interplay of meanings would simply be stifled by an emphasis on character alone. Indeed, Rebhorn goes on to make an analogy that has immense significance for a contemporary Elizabethan:

Caesar can thus be read as Essex if both are taken as representative types, illustrations of aristocratic emulation and factionalism that were played out to their logical, tragic conclusions.¹⁷

Rebhorn's analysis demonstrates that there are many social reverberations around tragic action and its consequences, and also serves as a fine example of a movement in some critical circles in a new direction.

In a similar manner, a writer who seeks to return to the play's initial context while remaining aware of the emergence of modern meanings is Naomi Liebler. In

her book *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, she shares some of the same concerns as Richard Wilson, with her recovering of the popular culture of public performance.¹⁸ But she accomplishes much more than this by undoing the very basis of character criticism. She moves away from an insistence on the individual which she sees as basically anachronistic, to a discussion of the social nature of this play and others.¹⁹ But she also returns us to Aristotle's very definition of tragedy. For Liebler, following Aristotle, *hamartia* is an impossible choice, or rather a choice that cannot be made without violating one or other of the fundamental codes at stake in the tragic action:

The fact that the tragic heroes' chosen actions "miss the mark" (the literal meaning of Aristotle's *hamartia*) does not make those actions or those heroes failures. The precise circumstances of tragedy involve situations in which the task to be done is itself impossible. Tragedy does not represent the failure to do noble, difficult, necessary things; it represents the attempt to do them in a context that will not permit them to be done.²⁰

Thus, for example, Orestes does not have some kind of character flaw that allows the tragedy to be centred upon him as an individual. Rather, the divinely sanctioned laws that govern his society force him into a no-win situation. He absolutely must avenge his father's death by killing his murderers, and yet he cannot do so because one of them is his mother, and there is an equally absolute prohibition against matricide. The tragic problem is a dilemma, not a character flaw. Liebler's understanding of tragedy as a fundamentally social form enables its revaluation, and this includes Shakespeare's plays. It opens up the possibility of recovering at least some of the "multiple resonances"²¹ that have been occluded by the insistence of later cultures on the primacy of individual experience.

When she turns her attention to *Julius Caesar*, Liebler takes on the double problem of structure and character by analysing the figure of Brutus. Her approach here is different from that of Sohmer, with his intertextual re-reading of Brutus'

hypocrisy. Liebler is much more interested in how this figure functions: “Brutus’ *hamartia* is his inability to preserve the Republic, to predict the outcome of the history in which he himself participates”.²² Thus *hamartia* is indelibly linked with choice in action, not some internal psychological individuality.

A critical trawl that raises awareness of fundamental issues surely has some resonance for this essay. The difficulty now is how to develop these Roman and Elizabethan social indices in a way that makes sense for a contemporary 21st century reader or audience.

Names

Right in the middle of *Julius Caesar* comes an incident that has puzzled and attracted commentators in equal measure, the seemingly senseless lynching of Cinna the Poet:

3. Pleb: Your name, sir, truly.
 Cinna: Truly, my name is Cinna.
 1. Pleb: Tear him to pieces, he’s a conspirator.
 Cinna: I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet.
 4. Pleb: Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.
 Cinna: I am not Cinna the conspirator.
 4. Pleb: It is no matter, his name’s Cinna. Pluck but his name out of his heart, and turn him going. (III.iii.26-34.)²³

Given the discussion above of the importance of moving away from character to a more socially aware engagement with representation, it would seem important to try to deal with this extremely difficult incident. The scene is perhaps the most problematic in the play for any observer to deal with fully and effectively. Perhaps the simplest way to do so is simply to cut it as not making any sense. But as Dennis Kezar has pointed out, the scene is the Shakespearean play’s elaboration of a short scene from Plutarch.²⁴ Kezar engages with and challenges Gary Taylor’s reading of the scene, arguing against Taylor’s assertion that Shakespeare here opposes poetry to

politics.²⁵ The raising of this issue in a scene that is extended and refined from Plutarch would seem to be a convincing counter to simply removing it altogether. After all, if a critic believes in coherence, then surely this example of Shakespeare's imagination at work absolutely must be retained.

Kezar makes an important assertion later in his essay when he sees it as emblematic of the ways in which the play as a whole tackles representation: "In this scene Shakespeare schematizes the fate of all communication in the play".²⁶ Richard Wilson similarly comments upon the Gary Taylor article in the context of his overall discussion of the scene and its critics. He picks up on the problem of meaning, but he also explicitly politicises it: "The fact that this formalism is propagated in a play put on at the popular playhouse only betrays the bad faith, of course, of the notion that literature has no ideology".²⁷ What these various discussions reveal is that the scene represents something other than itself, which for these critics manifests itself as an instance of the relationship between violence and representation.

But might not such a conclusion seem too abstract for a play that represents violence so directly? Although Cinna the poet is murdered off-stage, the implication that he is torn apart by the mob is quite open. The extreme nature of the violence must surely point to something more than a debate about art and politics. It might be possible further to interrogate this scene by reference to the critical issues highlighted in the previous section of this essay. The focus here will be upon the function of names in *Julius Caesar*, the very denoting of the inviolable status of the individual so beloved of so many.

To return to Cinna's murder, and the title of this essay, the comment by the Fourth Plebeian recognises that one's name is so much a part of one that it nests in that crucial internal organ, the heart. This could be glossed by a recognition that

one's name is so closely a part of one that it inheres in the heart of the matter. Even so, it can also be ripped out like the heart itself, or "pluck'd" out as the rioter would have it. This does not only enact violence on the individual, it recognises that the name is open to a social engagement, albeit in this case an incredibly vicious one. An assertion that the name has a wider social function should not come as a great surprise, given the Elizabethan anxiety about name, inheritance, lineage and family, and at this point one would remember Wayne Rebhorn's insistence on the social competitiveness of both the Romans and the Elizabethans, or at least their upper classes. To impose a later culture's view of the name as purely 'private' would therefore be anachronistic, to put it mildly.

The rioters simply do not care that they have the wrong man in this scene, but they do take his name as being a good enough excuse to kill Cinna. The emblematic status of the scene needs to be investigated. Kezar, Taylor and Wilson are all correct when they sense that the scene is doing something in addition to its bare violence; I would add that the scene emblematises a very serious concern throughout the play with representations of the multiple social meanings of names. This makes the play non-realistic in the Brechtian sense, but it also places it very precisely at the moment of its construction.

The primary name, of course, is that of Julius Caesar, the aspiring man of the play's own title. But 'Caesar' is itself a title. It refers to the ruling dynasty of the early Roman Principate and Empire. It then carries on through the later Empire as the secondary co-ruler of the Augustus of each half of the empire after Diocletian. From there it becomes a title continued in what is known in the West as the Byzantine Empire, leading to the Czar of Russia. It is also the Kaiser of Germany (which is, incidentally, how the Roman contemporaries of Gaius Julius Caesar would have

pronounced it). 'Caesar' is not just the name of an individual, it is the name of political power. If this is so, then the tragedy of Julius Caesar is, in social terms, intelligible in a way that the tragedy of the individual Julius Caesar has never been: his name haunts the text (literally, for Brutus at least) after his death, such that the second half of the play works out the tragic trajectory of who will inherit the name of Caesar and, thus, his power.

In a different context, infused with anthropology and rites of passage, Marjorie Garber has also analysed the significance of names in *Julius Caesar*:

Of all Shakespearean *nomen-omen* instances, however, none is more striking than the episode of Cinna the poet in *Julius Caesar*. (The Roman plays, with their natural interest in the cognomen, seem to take 'name' as a thematic element with some consistency.) On his way to Caesar's funeral, Cinna is halted by a gang of plebians who challenge his loyalty and ask his name. Unluckily, he bears the name of one of the conspirators, and the plebians, taking the name for the thing, fall upon him and beat him [...] The scene is a vivid emblem of the confusion which has fallen upon Rome after the murder of its ruler.²⁸

Although Garber's discussion comes in a wider context of how Shakespearean plays deal with the transition between various stages of life, her vocabulary is most suggestive. The way she uses the term 'emblem' is especially significant given the comments made above. Garber goes on very carefully to connect the name of 'Caesar' with Octavius' coming of age, symbolised by his assumption of the family name of Caesar which will very soon become the patronym of a dynasty.²⁹ She does so via the struggle not only between the conspirators and the 'Caesareans', but by means of the almost submerged conflict between Antony and Octavius. Shakespeare does not give any details at all of the massive military campaign fought out between Antony and Octavius that raged across Italy after the conspirators fled to Greece to raise troops there.³⁰ In this war, Octavius proved successful, partly through a superior generalship which is conventionally absent from his portrayal in both *Julius Caesar*

and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and partly because Caesar's veteran legions fought for Octavius as Caesar's named successor. It is crucial in this context that Octavius is not recognised as Caesar until Act V, as Garber notes, and here both Antony and Brutus refer to him as such. At least some of Shakespeare's audience would have known the history of the Italian conflict between Octavius and Antony that led to the recognition of the former as Caesar's real heir.

In Roman history, these two were not the only possible inheritors of what psychoanalysis might call the name of the father. Brutus was a third:

Decius: Here lies the east; doth not the day break here?
 Cinna: O, pardon, sir, it doth; and yon grey lines
 That fret the cloud are messengers of day.
 Casca: You shall confess that you are both deceiv'd.
 Here, as I point my sword, the sun arises,
 Which is a great way growing on the south,
 Weighing the youthful season of the year. (II.i.101-108)

Here Casca makes emblematic use of the conventional Renaissance pun on sun/son to point out Brutus, who is at a different point on the stage conversing separately with Cassius.³¹ The royal associations of the sun come together with a very precise intertextual reference to Brutus as illegitimate son of Caesar.³² Again, some of Shakespeare's audience would have been aware of this possibility, adding to the whole atmosphere not only of plotting Caesar's death, but of who will succeed him as well. Will it really be a new version of the old Republic with so much at stake?

There is even more to the name of Caesar. Gaius Julius was also *pontifex maximus*, the very title, as Steve Sohmer reminds us, inherited by the Popes.³³ Sohmer inevitably sees this as a negative association, due to the Protestant hatred of what they saw as Anti-Christ. But for Renaissance England the self-conscious growth of an Empire links with the Caesars with Henry VIII, who not only proclaimed English suzerainty over the whole British Isles, but most famously united the royal

power with the religious – just like the Julius to whom he is compared in Wyatt’s famous sonnet. And it cannot go unremarked here that James of Scotland is the most likely candidate to succeed to Elizabeth’s throne, thus uniting the Scottish and English crowns, just as this play is being produced. James’ relationship to Henry is almost exactly that of Octavius to Julius; James is one generation further away, but the correspondence can only be echoed in the play’s fraught problematising of succession, in a manner so similar to exactly that which occupied the minds of so many English at the turn of the seventeenth century.

If the death of Cinna the poet were the only instance of names and their importance, then all of the associations just charted could be construed as a misreading. But it is followed by another short scene in which names are central: the proscription scene. Here, the Second Triumvirate carves up the spoils:

Antony: These many then shall die, their names are prick’d.
 Octavius: Your brother too must die; consent you, Lepidus?
 Lepidus: I do consent –
 Octavius: Prick him down, Antony.
 Lepidus: Upon condition Publius shall not live,
 Who is your sister’s son, Mark Antony.
 Antony: He shall not live; look, with a spot I damn him.

(IV.i.1-6)

The generative language masks political horse-trading of the most cynical kind. A brother and a nephew are both consigned to death in another scene that is emblematic of the play’s insistent concern with relative rank and political power. I would argue that it is no accident that the two scenes of Cinna’s death and the proscription come together. They constitute the aftermath of Caesar’s death and precede the destruction of the conspirators.³⁴ This placement is pivotal, condensing the play’s concerns in a way that moves the tragedy of Caesar towards its inevitable and logical conclusion with the deaths of the conspirators.

Julius Caesar therefore does not have a double structure at all. It simply plays out the progression of a tragedy that cannot be reduced only to some notion of character psychology. The lexical item that is the phrase ‘Julius Caesar’ has much more linguistic force than this: it is a multiple metonymy, a link to many discourses of inheritance and power that can easily be missed because of an ahistorical assumption that tragedy lies in the singular personage. This assumption, as Naomi Liebler reminds us, is itself based on a misreading of Aristotle, which seems fitting enough given the play’s constant rehearsing of mistakes and misunderstandings, manipulated as they are by and through language and performance. And one final mistake needs to be corrected: Caesar was not born by section, as his name suggests; it was his father. The Elizabethans got that wrong, and this should serve as a reminder to those of us who would seek to unscramble the codes and associations of this play.³⁵

Given the forces associated with names in the play, with their writing, powers of inheritance and so on, Caesar’s own use of his name stands out:

Sooth:	Caesar!
Caesar:	Ha? Who Calls?
Casca:	Bid every noise be still; peace yet again!
Caesar:	Who is it in the press that calls on me? I hear a tongue shriller than all the music Cry “Caesar”! Speak, Caesar is turn’d to hear (I.ii.12-17).

Caesar’s slippage from first to third person here takes place just before the soothsayer delivers his first warning, and many other examples could be adduced. This could be taken to be just one more example of Caesar’s pompous nature at work. However, there is again an intertextual echo. In the case of Caesar’s pronouncements about himself, a double representation is in operation. He is linguistically divided from his own sense of self at these moments, but also this is a secondary use of the narrative technique Caesar used in his published work on the Gallic Wars – and the technique is so well-known that the Asterix books caricature him for it.

It is not the first time that intertextuality has been noted in this discussion. It is now time to work through the implications, because if some, but not all of the audience will understand these allusions, what does this technique say of the production of meanings in the play as a whole? To recall the earlier references to multiple discourses noted from critics such as Richard Wilson, John Drakakis and Naomi Liebler, what we are beginning to discern here is a multiplicity of simultaneous representations. Not all of the meanings will be available to all of the audience members, but all of them are active at least to some extent, such that different, even contradictory meanings are produced at exactly the same time. This is almost like an extension of Shakespeare's wordplay, but because of its intertextual roots it cannot be defined purely in terms of Shakespeare's own creative consciousness. It is more like a kind of logic, a set of conditions within which Renaissance stage representations are constructed and played out, at least in plays that purport to be dealing with some historical material.

Renaissance Performance

How might such a logic be grasped? If representation of historical events and characters takes place on different levels at the same time, then there is an inevitable issue about how far the play of meanings extends. It could be so radically dispersed that it constitutes a kind of postmodernism before its time. But the movement does not have to be either all fragmented, or indeed all united in a single tragic figure. It is now time to turn to the knowledge we already have of the conditions of Renaissance performance to try to begin, at least, to untangle how this operation might have worked on the stage.

In a sense, our concept of the ‘audience’ gets in the way. The multiple meanings possible in a play such as *Julius Caesar* need to be related to a more dynamic idea of how Renaissance audiences responded to the plays they saw and heard. Thus, there is not a single audience at all – and work has already been done by Andrew Gurr on the heterogeneous social composition of the London play-going public that would back up such a claim.³⁶ He has, in collaboration with Mariko Ichikawa, more recently expanded on his work on the sociology of the theatres by speculating upon what would have happened in performance itself:

But three-dimensional acting makes it wrong to think of any ‘normal’ direction to look in. Acting in the round requires a non-linear positioning, facing in whatever direction the action requires.³⁷

This is a direct result of the very architecture of these theatres, and we are only beginning to scratch the surface of what this might mean in practice. The plays are radically dynamic in a way that cannot physically take place on a proscenium stage. The two authors refer to Robert Weimann’s ground-breaking work on the zonal nature of such staging³⁸ and indeed they go on to try to work out, following Weimann’s commentary, how *Hamlet* might have been staged.³⁹

Part of the problem for my own essay is that these are only preliminary steps. Weimann’s work needs more fruitful development, if only because much performance study still seems mired in the kind of critical stage characterised in Sinfield’s second category mentioned previously. Character psychology is one example, here drawn from the work of John Russell Brown:

Stanislavski’s concept is particularly appropriate for Shakespeare’s plays which for centuries have held audiences’ attention by truth of utterance, and by reality and depth of characterization.⁴⁰

The critical position of this book shows its age (it was first published in 1966), and it would be a simple matter to follow on from my earlier comments on character

psychology. Truth, reality and characterisation are all herded together in defence of a performance tradition that is somehow identical over the span of centuries. The seventeenth to eighteenth century period is glossed over, and Stanislavski is somehow correct for Shakespeare (Chekhov would definitely not agree!). These are familiar assertions, and despite the value of such books in reminding us of the debt to theatre and performance, the overall commentary can be seen to be extremely problematic indeed in relation to the kinds of representations of *Julius Caesar* now under discussion. It could be argued that this is not entirely fair, since of course this kind of critical vocabulary was unavailable to John Russell Brown at that time, which would be a reasonable enough point to make. However, performance study still holds on to these kinds of character-based notions:

When an actor finds what is useable for himself or herself, the result is a new interpretation. But this does not imply that Shakespeare was weak or uncertain in purpose as he wrote. Such a variety is possible because his mind focused on the inner beings of his characters, rather than on their outwardly visible physique or their past history.⁴¹

In this later book, Brown continues to insist on recognisably Stanislavskian acting techniques even as he tries to update his earlier work. The assumptions that underpin the insistence on performance can be seen to undermine their usefulness as a *caveat* to the excesses of the text-based literary critical tradition.

There are more extreme examples, such as can be found in the Preface to Ralph Berry's book *Shakespeare In Performance*: "The taming of the audience is the central challenge to all playwrights"⁴². As a massive over-generalisation this one is hard to beat – one could just imagine, say, Brecht's response. "Taming" them implies that there is a hierarchical privilege accorded to the playwright who does the taming, but whether this is adequate to explain the popular culture of Shakespeare's stage is a moot point. The difficulty lies in how to take such generalised writing about

performance and taking something useful from it that can be related specifically to the Renaissance staging of the plays. But of course there are other options, and some of them have been explored much more helpfully:

In a culture in which those who would oppose theatrical representation continued to insist upon the power that inheres in the theatrical image itself, *Julius Caesar* is not so much a celebration of theatre as an unmasking of the politics of representation per se. The play does not *express* meaning; rather, in its readings of Roman history it *produces* meanings.⁴³

The emphasis Drakakis places here on the politics of representation depends upon a self-reflexive awareness that infuses the Renaissance stage, and it is of course a critical commonplace that Shakespeare's plays are well aware of their artificiality. In this respect, Steve Sohmer explores the representational conventions that inform the use of the pulpit in *Julius Caesar*.⁴⁴

But to return to a scene that has already been discussed, it might be possible to suggest the kinds of representational practices that can be enacted on this kind of stage. I have already referred to the way in which Casca points towards Brutus in the conspiratorial gathering in Brutus' house (II.i). Sohmer is interested in the astronomical exactitude of this scene, possibly played with Casca pointing towards the Tower of London, traditionally said to have been founded by Caesar during one of his British excursions.⁴⁵ But if Brutus and Cassius are separated by from the rest of the group as the stage directions indicate, then what is seen in action is a convention of the zonal stage. One pair of characters is in a separate stage location from the others, and the larger group forces attention upon the smaller pairing. The dramatic effect of this could be intensified if the Casca group is in the central downstage position, effectively right in the middle of the round and, hence the audience. In effect, the majority of the audience is drawn into possible collusion by means of

Casca's gesture. And others with a different point of view will see this operation being enacted, both upon Brutus and other parts of the audience itself.

But all of this takes place in the midst of the multiple productions of meaning traced out earlier in this essay. How does this multiplicity relate to the kinds of movements and moments possible on the contemporary Elizabethan stage? Sohmer interprets the issue as a doubling of effect: "Shakespeare wrote for two audiences, which is why his occasional *Julius Caesar* still stands today".⁴⁶ Sohmer's interest is in what he sees as the two kinds of audience member who attended one of these plays: the majority, and the educated.⁴⁷ But if the audience is split by multiple viewing positions, multiple levels of education and multiple social ranks, surely much more is happening than a mere doubling of meaning?

Representations

Simultaneous different possibilities are produced by and through *Julius Caesar*. The identification of the major critical issues of character and structure is in itself nothing new, but it has cleared the way for an investigation of the play's interrogation of names, intertextual reference and, ultimately, Renaissance playing. Much work of this kind still needs to be done on this play alone, never mind the whole bloated *corpus* of the plays and their critics. But the various representations that have been touched upon – and produced – by this essay constitute the terrain over which meanings are enacted. This is only to be expected in a volume concerned with representations, published at this particular historical juncture. Perhaps the play haunts recent criticism because of the way it continues to evade a full elaboration, and perhaps this is because of the vertiginous gulf that separates the Renaissance from the 21st century.

It has been the contention of this essay that *Julius Caesar* is not in any simplistic way about Julius Caesar. The play has been taken as a test case for an attempt to produce an analysis that is aware of other criticism, the play of language, and Renaissance performance, something of a tall order for a short essay. Pinning down multiple meanings is never easy in such circumstances, especially when total fragmentation is being avoided. Hence this attempt could be seen to be as sceptical of an easy dizziness of meaning as it is of monolithic constructs. “Shakespeare” is one of those constructs, but at least the critical tradition that has helped to put this edifice together can be unpicked because of its uneasiness about *Julius Caesar*, not to mention other plays. The tracing out of multiple meanings necessarily entails a deep suspicion of any straightforward reduction of the play of meaning by reference to a single point. What is needed is more materialist criticism and performance issues will necessarily be a part of it. But this area in particular needs further exploration. By linking it to a more conventional reading process, it should be possible to locate these plays more precisely within the moment of their initial production than has been managed until recently. Such a project has an agenda, of course, but then all criticism does. Shakespeare has always been appropriated by someone or other; we need to pay more attention to the performance of that appropriation. *Julius Caesar* is a site of contestation, reworking and representation. It remains to be seen what new resonances will emerge.

¹ For a detailed discussion of *Julius Caesar* and the opening of the new Globe, see Steve Sohmer: *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: The Opening of the Globe Theatre 1599* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

² Wayne Rebhorn: *The Crisis of the Aristocracy in Julius Caesar*, reprinted in Richard Wilson ed: *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays* p.32 (New Casebook series: Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002).

³ See, for example: Robert S. Miola: *Shakespeare and His Sources: Observations on the Critical History of 'Julius Caesar'* in *Shakespeare Survey* Vol. 40 (1987); John Ripley: *Julius Caesar on Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), especially the Introduction, pps.1-8; and the Introduction to Wilson (2002).

⁴ Alan Sinfield: *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) pp.10ff.

⁵ Sohmer (1999) p.157.

⁶ ibidem.

⁷ "There is widespread disagreement among critics about who is the play's principal character or whether it has a principal character, on whether it is a tragedy and if so whose, on whether Shakespeare wants us to consider the assassination as damnable or praiseworthy, while of all of the chief characters in the play violently contradictory interpretations have been offered". Ernest Schanzer: *The Problem of Julius Caesar*, in *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol.6 (1955). Quoted in Sohmer (1999) p. 184.

⁸ Sohmer (1999) p. 185.

⁹ Wilson (2000) p.2.

¹⁰ Margreta de Grazia: *The Ideology of Superfluous Things* in Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass eds: *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.20-21.

¹¹ For a much more detailed discussion of these issues than is possible here, see Francis Barker: *The Culture of Violence: Essays on Tragedy and History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) pp.195ff. As a British Cultural Materialist critic, Barker is well aware of the constant conflation of British critics such as himself with the project associated with the American New Historicists. This is something he deplores for political reasons and for reasons of critical clarity and rigour; his differentiation between historicism and materialism is produced within this context.

¹² Richard Wilson: *Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) p.45.

¹³ John Drakakis: *Julius Caesar and the Politics of Theatrical Representation* in Graham Holderness, Bryan Loughrey and Andre Murphy eds: *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (New York: Longman, 1996) p. 39.

¹⁴ Reborn in Wilson (2002) p.30.

¹⁵ Ibidem p.31.

¹⁶ See also Gary B.Miles: *How Roman Are Shakespeare's "Romans"?* in *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol.40, 1989.

¹⁷ Reborn *op. cit.* p.48.

¹⁸ Naomi Conn Liebler: *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁹ Ibidem p.13.

²⁰ Ibidem, p.20.

²¹ Ibidem, p.37.

²² Ibidem, p.106.

²³ All references to the play are taken from the second edition of *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

²⁴ Dennis Kezar: *Julius Ceasar and the Properties of Shakespeare's Globe* in *English Literary Renaissance* Vol.28, 1998, p.25.

²⁵ Kezar refers to Gary Taylor's essay *Bardicide* in Tetsuo Kishi, Roger Pringle, and Stanley Wells eds: *Shakespeare and Cultural Traditions: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Tokyo 1991* (Newark, 1991).

²⁶ Kezar (1998) p.44.

²⁷ Wilson (2002) p.21.

²⁸ Marjorie Garber: *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) p.59.

²⁹ Ibidem p.61.

³⁰ For a discussion of the politics and military history of these campaigns, see: John Warry: *warfare in the Classical World: War and the Ancient Civilisations of Greece and Rome* (London: Salamander Books, 1998), pp.234ff.

³¹ I am grateful for this point to Dr Grzegorzewska of Warsaw University.

³² See Sohmer (1999) pp.83ff for full details and bibliographical references.

³³ Ibidem p.37.

³⁴ Cf. Kezar (1998) p.43 for the confluence of writing and bloodshed in the play.

³⁵ See Sohmer (1999) p.177.

³⁶ See the work of Andrew Gurr in particular: *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, third edition, 1995) and *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, second edition, 1996).

³⁷ Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa: *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 200) p.10.

³⁸ Robert Weimann: *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). See especially pp.208ff.

³⁹ Gurr and Ichikawa (2000) pp.121ff.

⁴⁰ John Russell Brown: *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* (New York and Kent: updated and revised edition, Applause Theatre Books, 1993) p.45.

⁴¹ John Russell Brown: *William Shakespeare: Writing For Performance* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), pp.41-42.

⁴² Ralph Berry: *Shakespeare In Performance* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993) p.vii.

⁴³ Drakakis (1996) p.41.

⁴⁴ Sohmer (1999) p.44.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p.90 and p.94.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p.138.

⁴⁷ For a Lacanian view of doubling in Shakespeare, see: Philip Armstrong: *Watching Hamlet Watching: Lacan, Shakespeare and the Mirror/Stage* in Terence Hawkes ed: *Alternative Shakespeares Vol.2* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).