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"The Power of Speech/ To Stir Men's Blood": The Language of Tragedy in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar

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GAYLE GREENE

Montaigne, "Of the Vanitie of Words"

I am no orator, as Brutus is; . . .
But (as you know me all) a plain blunt man . . .

For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
. . . nor the power of speech
To stir men's blood; I only speak right on.¹

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—he draws attention to the very arts of oratory which have enabled him to seize triumphant control of his world. Indeed, his rhetorical tour de force turns the course not only of the action of the play, but of the tide of times. Effecting the shift of power from Brutus to Antony, it marks the end of the Republic and the beginning of events which will issue in the Empire; and, as his words “inflamm” (l. 146) his audience, their “fire” (l. 117) becomes more than metaphorical, to spark the actual blaze that burns Rome. Nor is the oration an isolated instance: it is but one of a series of persuasion scenes on which the play as a whole is structured, wherein language is used to “work,” “fashion,” “move,” “fire,” its listeners. Earlier in this scene, Brutus persuaded the crowd to accept a version of the assassination, as, earlier in the play, Cassius persuaded Brutus—his words, too, “struck . . . fire” (I.ii.175–176); and, in soliloquy, Brutus “fashion[ed]” (II.i.30) an argument to persuade himself.²

In the Rome of *Julius Caesar*, language is power and characters rise or fall on the basis of their ability to wield words. Their awareness of the importance of language is indicated by terms they associate with it. Words are associated with weapons—“speak, and strike” (II.i.56)—and, at various times, with friendship, love, and life itself.³ Conversely, powerlessness and incapacitation are suggested by terms such as “silence,” “speechless,” and “tongue-tied.”⁴ These Romans identify with their

2. Throughout, these words are associated with persuasion. First, Marullus “moves” (I.i.61) the plebs; then Cassius “works” (I.ii.161, 306) on Brutus, “humors” (l. 312) him; next, Brutus promises to “fashion” (II.i.220) Caius Ligarius, and Decius to “work” on Caesar, to “give his humor the true bent” (II. 209–210). After the assassination, first Brutus, then Antony, “work” on (III.ii.262) and “move” (l. 231) the crowd. The words “work” and “move” are used by Henry Peacham to describe the effect of language on the passions. *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1577), p. 13; quoted in Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York, 1947), p. 328.

3. See also II.i.47, III.i.76, V.i.27–30. Cassius describes friendship in terms of the proper use of words (I.ii.70–77); Portia describes love in terms of vows (II.i.272–273); and Brutus's dying lines suggest that his life has been a tale told by himself (V.v.39–40).

4. The citizens slink off “tongue-tied” (I.i.62) after the rebukes of the tribunes; Caesar falls down “speechless” (I.ii.250); Marullus and Flavius are “put to silence” (I.ii.286). We hear, also, of Caesar's concern to act in accord with what “our elders say” (I.ii.7) and of “that tongue of his that bade the Romans / Mark him, and write his speeches in their books” (I.ii.124–125). Antony describes his death: “But yesterday the word of Caesar might / Have stood against the world” (III.ii.120–121).

names and reiterate their own and one another's names, "sound[ing]" them almost as though "conjur[ing] with 'em" (I.ii.143, 144).⁵ Even the most private scenes, between husband and wife, are characterized by a declamatory style and stance: Portia calls on "vows" (II.i.272) and her Roman virtues to persuade Brutus to tell her what troubles him; Calphurnia, alone with Caesar, argues to prevent him from going to the Capitol.

The markedly rhetorical style has often been noted, and Dr. Johnson's opinion that "Shakespeare's adherence to . . . Roman manners [was] cold and unassuming" has been echoed by critics such as Mark Van Doren, who characterizes the play as "more rhetoric than poetry" and its characters as "more orators than men."⁶ But rhetoric in this play is a theme as well as a style: accorded prominence by structure and imagery, it is integral to characterization, culture, and to the central political and epistemological concerns. In Shakespeare's depiction of Rome as a society of skilled speakers whose rhetorical expertise masks moral and political truth is implied a criticism of rhetoric and of language itself which is central to the play's tragic vision.⁷

I

Problems of language are related—historically and philosophically—to problems of knowledge. Thus an understanding of language in *Julius*

5. R. A. Foakes notes that Caesar's name occurs 211 times (Caesar even once refers to himself as a "name" [I.ii.196]), Brutus's 130, Antony's 68, and Cassius's 39. "An Approach to *Julius Caesar*," *ShQ*, V (1954), 266. See also Madeleine Doran, "Proper Names in *Julius Caesar*," in *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language* (Madison, Wis., 1976), pp. 120–153.

6. *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. (New York, 1960), p. 106; Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare* (Garden City, N.Y., 1939), p. 153. Granville-Barker also found the play "rather frigid"—these "noble Romans flinging their togas gracefully about them . . . speaking with studied oratory." *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (Princeton, N.J., 1946), II, 218.

7. A number of recent studies of Shakespeare's language—James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis, 1971); Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare's Talking Animals* (London, 1973); Rosalie Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton, N.J., 1974)—altogether ignore *Julius Caesar*. Some of Lawrence Danson's remarks are suggestive; *Tragic Alphabet: Shakespeare's Drama of Language* (New Haven, Conn., 1974), pp. 50–67.

Caesar begins from a consideration of its epistemological meaning; and both must be seen in relation to the skepticism and nominalism of the late Renaissance. Whereas traditional readings of the play concentrated on its political meaning, attempting to establish Shakespeare's sympathies as republican or monarchical, recent critics have found the ambiguity to be deliberate, concluding that Shakespeare intentionally obscured the political issues in order to emphasize problems of knowledge.⁸ The play suggests a sense of the limits of knowledge and fallibility of judgment, of the fatal human tendency to—as Cicero cautions—impose subjective distortions on objective realities:

But men may construe things, after their fashion,
Clean from the purpose of the things themselves.

(I.iii.34–35)

Indeed, Cicero, as the representative of rhetoric for the Renaissance, is the most appropriate figure in the play to understand this danger, and seems to appear solely to speak these lines.

Faced with questions of Caesar's nature and potential, Brutus chooses to kill him, and though his action plunges Rome into civil war, nothing we are shown of Caesar enables us to assess Brutus's assessment of him. Since our opinion of Caesar determines our views of the justice of his death, the presentation of Caesar as a public man caught up in posturing and posing obscures the central political problem: our inability to know the "real" Caesar confuses our judgment of the assassination and the assassins. Uncertainty is further suggested by a recurrence of the same or similar words to express contradictory points of view about the same subjects: Brutus's view of the conspirators as "sacrificers, but not butchers" (II.i.166) is qualified by Antony's "butchers!" (III.i.255), the discrepancy impugning the valid-

8. Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare: A Study of Julius Caesar, Measure for Measure, Antony and Cleopatra* (1963; rpt. New York, 1965), pp. 10–70; Mildred E. Harstock, "The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*," *PMLA*, LXXXI (1966), 56–62; René E. Fortin, "*Julius Caesar*: An Experiment in Point of View," *SbQ*, XIX (1968), 341–348, D. J. Palmer, "Tragic Error in *Julius Caesar*," *SbQ*, XXI (1970), 399–409.

ity of both versions.⁹ Further ambiguities are created by a pattern in which characters "construe" various phenomena—the omens of blood and fire, the beast without a heart, Calphurnia's dream of Caesar's statue spouting blood¹⁰—to arrive at contradictory interpretations which reveal more about the characters themselves than the reality they are describing. If we sympathize with Brutus, we will read the omens as signs of Caesar's tyranny and new life to the state, but if we side with Caesar, they signify the conspirators' guilt and civil strife.¹¹ Thus at the heart of the play is ambiguity of an ultimate sort, uncertainty about what the symbolism is symbolizing. Titinius's comment on Cassius's suicide, "Alas, thou hast misconstrued every thing" (V.iii.84), and Mesalla's apostrophe to "error" as the perception of "things that are not" (I. 69), have resonances beyond their immediate contexts, to reflect on the entire enterprise. Like Romeo, Brutus "thought all for the best" (*Romeo and Juliet*, III.i. 104); but, acting with limited awareness of external circumstances and, above all, himself, he incurs tragic consequences. The play suggests a sense of man's tragic blindness—a skepticism comparable to and probably influenced by Montaigne's—which would find further expression, within a few years, in *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida*.

But an attitude toward knowledge implies an attitude toward language, since when truth is thought to be beyond man's reason, it is also usually thought to be beyond his powers of description, and skepticism is ultimately skepticism of the word.¹² Thus Montaigne is as wary of the ability of words to represent reality as he is of man's ability to know that reality. A

9. See also I.ii.255 and III.ii.191; I.i.35 and III.ii.144; II.i.173–174 and V.i.39–40; I.i.32–34 and III.ii.90–91. Schanzer describes the sense of *déjà vu* created by these echoes, the feeling "that we have been through all this, or something very like it before" (p. 70).

10. To Calphurnia, the dream is an omen of death, but to Decius—"This dream is all amiss interpreted" (II.ii.83)—it is an omen of new life to Rome. Both are, ironically, right.

11. Maurice Charney discusses these discrepant interpretations of the cosmic imagery: *Shakespeare's Roman Plays: The Function of Imagery in the Drama* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 41–78.

12. Ernst Cassirer and Wilbur Urban discuss the relationship of skepticism and nominalism. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven, Conn., 1953), I, 122; and *Language and Reality* (London; 1939), pp. 23–24.

corollary to the skepticism implied in *Julius Caesar* is a skepticism concerning language which may be seen against a background of cultural revolution. Written on the eve of the seventeenth century, *Julius Caesar* reflects Shakespeare's awareness of processes at work in the age: the shift from early Renaissance belief in language and eloquence to modern nominalism and an ideal of the plain style, which would lead to the views of Hobbes, Locke, and the Royal Society.¹³ The seventeenth century no longer assumed the right relation of language to reality, but, recognizing its arbitrary and conventional nature, saw it as a hindrance to understanding. Similitude (which included analogy and metaphor) was no longer thought to be a reflection of the world's shape and nature, but a source of error and confusion. This sense of the division of language from reality—one of the meanings implied in the myth of the Fall—is expressed most clearly, in Shakespeare's day, by Montaigne and Bacon. Bacon criticizes language as a main source of error, and Montaigne insists on a plain style to compensate for the distortions inherent in the verbal medium.¹⁴

It may seem strange to attribute to Shakespeare views which prefigure seventeenth-century nominalism; certainly, it is not the most pronounced aspect of his thought. Shakespeare was the supreme expression and embodiment of Renaissance eloquence; he used more words than anyone before or since, reveling in them for their sounds, textures, and rhetorical arrangements as well as for their sense. But in proportion as he knew the power of language, so did he know its danger, and there is another side to

13. For backgrounds on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century attitudes toward language, see R. F. Jones, "The Moral Sense of Simplicity," *Studies in Honor of Frederick W. Shipley* (St. Louis, 1942), pp. 265–287; *The Seventeenth Century: Studies in the History of English Thought from Bacon to Pope* (Stanford, Calif., 1951); Morris Croll, *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm*, ed. J. Max Patrick et al. (Princeton, N.J., 1966); Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700* (1956; rpt. New York, 1961); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1939).

14. Montaigne's views on language are contained in the essays "On Cicero," "Of Names," "Of the Vanitie of Words" (Vol. I), and "Of Glory" (Vol. II), *The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio, ed. Henry Morley (London, 1886). For Bacon on language, see *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath (London, 1858): *The Advancement of Learning*, III, 253–491; *The New Organon*, IV, 39–248; *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning*, IV, 275–498.

his relation to language, a sense implied in a number of the plays, of its capacity to corrupt, conceal, and misconstrue. In *Julius Caesar*, an ambivalence toward language is suggested, a complex awareness of its potentials, from a number of perspectives—psychological, social, political, and epistemological—which corroborates Montaigne's and Bacon's worst criticisms and casts doubts on the value of poetry itself.

II

An analysis of four crucial "persuasion" scenes will demonstrate how language functions to "work," "fashion," "move," "fire" its listeners, leaving the central political questions veiled in obscurity. Brutus is, as we hear repeatedly from him and from others, an honorable man and a man of reason, a stoic who prides himself on reason and is forever urging "reasons" to others;¹⁵ this leads us to expect that his participation in the conspiracy will be undertaken with deliberation and cause. But if we look to the scenes where we most expect to find cause for Caesar's assassination—the scene in which Cassius "seduces" (I.ii.309) Brutus to come into the conspiracy; the soliloquy in which Brutus "fashions" (II.i.30) an argument for himself to join the conspiracy; the forum scene, where first Brutus, then Antony, "move" (III.ii.231) the crowd, Antony "working" (I. 262) and "inflaming" (I. 146) them to riot and mutiny—we find no reasons, only a rhetoric that obscures questions of Caesar's ambition and the justice of his death.

The "seduction scene" (I.ii.31–175), in which "Cassius first did whet [Brutus] against Caesar" (II.i.60), is the first place where we would expect to hear the case against Caesar, or at least some specific grievance. Yet, as Schanzer observes, "in this crucial scene . . . Cassius . . . does not mention any specific acts of tyrannical behaviour" (p. 26). Schanzer concludes that Cassius is not well suited to his role of guileful seducer. His case against Caesar is made in terms like "this age's yoke" (I.ii.61), "these hard

15. Just after the assassination, he offers Antony "reasons" (III.i.224–226). To the mob, he offers "the reason of our Caesar's death" (III.i.237), our "public reasons" (III.ii.7); and, overriding Cassius's plan of battle, he sends them to Philippi and destruction with "Good reasons must of force give place to better" (IV.iii.203).

conditions as this time / Is like to lay upon us" (ll. 172-173)—hardly convincing enough to warrant murder. In fact, on the surface, Cassius and Brutus seem barely to hear or to speak to one another. In the first part of the scene (to line 88), they essay one another, Cassius trying both to ascertain Brutus's feelings and to persuade him of his own point of view, without actually stating that point of view, while Brutus, partly defensive, partly enticed, simultaneously backs off and beckons him on. Twice, Brutus asks directly what Cassius wants of him ("Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius?" [l. 62]; "wherefore do you hold me here so long?" [l. 82], and twice, Brutus's attention is deflected so that Cassius does not have to reply. On neither occasion does Brutus seem to notice or object. The first time, Cassius merely continues his line of thought, without any indication that he has even heard Brutus's question (l. 65);¹⁶ and the second time, rather than waiting for a reply to his question, Brutus continues his own line of thought (ll. 84-88). Twice, Cassius declares intentions to speak of subjects he never again refers to: Brutus's "hidden worthiness" (l. 56) and "honor." Though he announces "honor is the subject of my story" (in the first of the two long speeches, ll. 91-130, which comprise the second movement of the scene), honor is not his subject; it is, rather, his outrage at Caesar's physical infirmities.

Yet by the end of the exchange, they have communicated, and Brutus indicates, in veiled, vague terms, that he assents:

What you would work me to, I have some aim:
How I have thought of this, and of these times,
I shall recount hereafter . . .

.
. . . What you have said
I will consider; what you have to say
I will with patience hear, and find a time
Both meet to hear and answer such high things.

(I.ii.161-168)

16. "Heterogenium is the vice of answering something utterly irrelevant to what is asked"; Joseph, p. 66. Dudley Fenner explains it as a device of sophism; *The Artes of Logike and Rhetorike* (Middelburg, 1584), Sig. E 2^v; in Joseph, p. 300.

In measured, balanced phrases (as though a control of language could assure a control of reality), he refers the whole matter to another time.

Though Brutus nowhere, here or later, insists on clearer definition of Cassius's suggestions, he is persuaded because something else is going on in the exchange. Cassius's real appeal is made in veiled, allusive terms which communicate, not through what they state but through what they suggest: "thoughts of great value, worthy cogitations (l. 49), noncommittal terms with enticing innuendoes which Brutus is echoing by the end of the scene—"such high things" (l. 168). The real argument is made through indirection and insinuation because the actual grounds of Cassius's appeal are not the sort he can state: they are to Brutus's vanity and image of himself as a noble Roman, and are inarticulated because inadmissible.

Cassius reveals these terms in soliloquy at the end of the scene, when he describes the petitions he plans to throw in at Brutus's window:

. . . all tending to the great opinion
That Rome holds of his name; wherein obscurely
Caesar's ambition shall be glanced at.

(ll. 315-317)

"Opinion," "Rome," the "name"—and only then is Caesar's ambition "obscurely glanced at." Indeed, these terms are implicit throughout the "seduction," and are the power of an otherwise nonexistent argument. When Cassius offers to be Brutus's "glass" (l. 67) to show him an image of his "hidden worthiness" (l. 56), Brutus's acknowledgment that "the eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things" (ll. 51-52) is an admission of his dependence on the opinions of others for knowledge of himself. A few lines later, Cassius again evokes the imaginary audience he knows is so essential to Brutus's self-esteem, mirrors without which he cannot see and does not know himself: "many of the best respect in Rome / . . . Have wish'd that noble Brutus had his eyes" (ll. 58-61). A similar appeal is contained in his second long speech ("Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world" [ll. 133-59], where he weaves the words "Rome," "man," "Brutus," "Caesar," "name," "fame," and "shame" into a pattern that creates an ideal of Roman manhood: an ideal represented by the name ("yours is as fair a name," l. 142), by opinion ("When could they

say, till now, that talk'd of Rome . . . " [l. 152], by "our fathers" and the first Brutus (ll. 156-157). According to this ideal, Cassius urges Brutus to define himself, and this "works" (ll. 161, 306) more strongly than logical argument.

"Rome," "honor," "name" are words which are loaded with affective connotations that make them capable of kindling powerful responses. Though for the moment Brutus says nothing, their effect on him is obvious later when, again asked to "see thyself!" (II.i.46), he responds with an outburst about Rome and his ancestors (ll. 52-54). These words are powerful because they enshrine the dominant cultural values, the thought and belief of the past—libertarian ideals of republican Rome passed down through what "our fathers say" (l. 156). They contain what Bacon calls "common and general notions," to which "the individual is bound unless he takes care to distinguish them well" (*Dignity and Advancement of Learning*, IV, 431). They "annex to them"—in Locke's terms—"obscure and uncertain notions," implicit assumptions which are confusing because unexamined:

Men having been accustomed from their cradles to learn words . . . before they knew, or had framed the complex ideas, to which they were annexed, or which were to be found in the things they were thought to stand for; they usually continue to . . . [use them] all their lives; and without taking the pains necessary to settle in their minds determined ideas, they use their words for such unsteady and confused notions as they have . . . [which] manifestly fills their discourse with abundance of empty unintelligible noise and jargon, especially in moral matters, where . . . [the words'] bare sounds are often only thought on, or at least very obscure and uncertain notions annexed to them.¹⁷

These words and notions are bound up with Brutus's conception of himself, determining the way he experiences himself and reality.

The most important of these is "honor." Honor words are used so frequently by Brutus or with reference to him that they become, as Charney notes, "almost an identifying tag for his character" (p. 227, n. 19). Brutus's susceptibility to what touches his honor is indicated by his outburst in this scene:

17. "Of the Abuse of Words," *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, The Works of John Locke* (London, 1824), III, 23-24.

Set honour in one eye, and death i' th' other,
And I will look on both indifferently;
For let the gods so speed me as I love
The name of honour more than I fear death.

(II. 85-88)

Though his general intention is clear, his language is not,¹⁸ and this is typical of Brutus's confusions when his imagination has been kindled and of his real confusions concerning honor: it is, as he says, "the name of honor" he loves. This conception of honor—as "name" or "reputation"—was associated, by the Renaissance, with classical antiquity, and is an aspect of Shakespeare's depiction of Rome.¹⁹ But the idea of honor as a social attribute conferred by the "opinion" of the community is a notion of which Shakespeare is elsewhere critical, one which he associates elsewhere, as here, with confusion in language. For if honor is reputation, it is "a word," as Falstaff observed (*Henry IV*, Part 1, V.i.134), following—or anticipating—Montaigne, who begins his essay "Of Glory" with the statement that the argument about fame is an argument about language, and the relation of a man to his reputation is as tenuous as that between word and thing:

There is both name, and the thing: the name is a voice which noteth and signifieth the thing: the name, is neither part of thing nor of substance: it is a stranger-piece joyned to the thing, and from it.

(II.xvi, 317)

Brutus's uncritical acceptance of the Roman ideal both results from and reinforces the confusions in language which make him obtuse to the real terms of Cassius's appeal.

18. The lines have occasioned a page and a half of notes in the *Variorum Julius Caesar*, ed. Horace Howard Furness, Jr. (Philadelphia, 1913), pp. 33-35. First, there is the question of meaning: if Brutus loves honor more than he fears death, how can he be said to be indifferent to both of them? Then there is the bizarre quality of the image: one eye with death in it, the other with honor, is not poetically evocative (as, say, Hotspur's "... To pluck bright honor from the pale-fac'd moon" [*Henry IV*, Part 1, I.iii.202]). It is merely muddled.

19. For the Renaissance association of fame with classical antiquity, see Curtis Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton, N.J., 1960).

The real strengths of Cassius's argument are thus weaknesses in Brutus's character—his concern with reputation and appearance, his subtle vanity and pride—and it is on these grounds that the noble Brutus is seduced. Depending on the opinions of others for his image of himself, Brutus does not know himself, and is vulnerable to whoever provides the desired "reflection." Indeed, the entire exchange begins with Cassius's assurance that he loves Brutus, and ends with Brutus's "That you do love me, I am nothing jealous" (l. 160), as though its entire purport had been to assure Brutus only of this—which, in a way, it has. It is Brutus's confusion of real and professed motives that accounts for Cassius's verbal obliquity: Cassius "palter[s] with him in a double sense,"²⁰ with different meanings for the heart and ear, seeming to appeal to "honor" and concern for "the general good" (l. 84), while actually appealing to vanity. He is, contrary to what Schanzer says of him, an extremely guileful seducer, who looks quite through the words of men to their real concerns and appeals to the one while seeming to appeal to the other.

But Brutus's fatal confusions are most apparent when, in soliloquy (II.i. 10–34), he defends his decision to take part in the murder of a man he protests he loves. He is, as Antony says, the only conspirator not motivated by "envy of great Caesar" (V.v.70), so we look to these lines when he is alone with himself—the only time in the play—for a cause why Caesar should be killed. Yet the issue disturbingly blurs, disappearing into a tangle of strange and disconnected images of uncertain relevance to one another or to their supposed subject, Caesar. Brutus's language, always more metaphorical than the other characters', is even more metaphorical than usual in this speech. Attempts to make sense of the soliloquy—like John Dover Wilson's "Brutus' theme is the effect of power upon character"²¹—probably represent something like what Brutus would have liked to have said, but nothing this coherent emerges until we have supplied certain missing logical links, and in making this much sense of it, we are ignoring what the language is communicating. Its broken rhythms, uncompleted thoughts, and associational movement present a

20. This is Macbeth's term for what the witches do with him: "juggling fiends . . . / That palter with us in a double sense" (V.viii.19–20).

21. *Julius Caesar: The Works of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, Eng., 1949), pp. xxx–xxxi.

glimpse into the mind of a man who has not slept for weeks and who has never, in his clearest moments, defined the issues that are tearing him. The sequence of thought and statement is not logical, the conscious, active intellect is not in control, and what emerges is a sense of exhaustion, a linguistic image of the "phantasma" (II.i.65) Brutus describes a few lines later.

Brutus begins with "It must be by his death" (l. 10)—words which have more clarity and conviction than any in the soliloquy, until, perhaps, the final "kill him in the shell" (l. 34). Finding "no personal cause to spurn at him" (l. 11), he looks to "the general" (l. 12), but finding no "general" cause either, by the third line, he has shifted to the conditional: "He would be crown'd: / How that might change his nature, there's the question" (ll. 12–13). Now, instead of evidence from Caesar's past or present conduct to answer the "question" he has posed about a hypothetical future, Brutus reaches for a metaphor:

It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
And that craves wary walking.

(ll. 14–15)

Again he returns to the question of Caesar's potential—"Crown him?—That;—" (l. 15). The broken thought creates the sense of groping, but what Brutus is groping for is not, as we might expect, reasons for supposing that Caesar is like an adder; rather, he develops the metaphor: "And then I grant we put a sting in him" (l. 16).

Brutus's next statement is a generalization, somewhat confusingly worded, about the misuse of power: "Th'abuse of greatness is when it disjoins / Remorse from power" (ll. 18–19). But he has difficulty applying this generalization specifically to Caesar, since he can find nothing in Caesar's conduct to warrant it:

. . . and, to speak truth of Caesar,
I have not known when his affections sway'd
More than his reason.

(ll. 19–21)

So he makes another generalization—"But 'tis a common proof" (l. 21)—which he supports with a metaphor: ". . . That lowliness is young ambi-

tion's ladder" (l. 22). Though he has admitted difficulty in applying his general principle to Caesar, finding an appropriate metaphor seems to suffice and relieve him of having to justify its applicability. The relevance of this image to Caesar is even less obvious than that of the "adder"; perhaps, in view of the associational movement of the lines, it is there because it rhymes. It is startling, as Schanzer points out, "to find Brutus . . . speak of Caesar as if he were still at the beginning of his career" (p. 55). But it seems to satisfy Brutus because he develops it for the next seven lines, until the "climber-upward" attains "the upmost round" and,

. . . then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend.

(ll. 25-27)

Though strangely ineffectual for the weight it carries in the argument, the figure seems to serve Brutus's need, demonstrating his general principle about the effect of power upon purpose, while still not specifying its relevance to Caesar. What follows weakens the argument even further: "So Caesar may; / Then lest he may, prevent" (ll. 27-28). The only possible application of "vehicle" to "tenor" puts the whole case back in the conditional. Since "the thing he is" (l. 29) will not warrant killing him, Brutus states his intention to "fashion," "color," "And therefore think him," and thus takes the leap that clinches the argument—once more, reaching for metaphor:

And since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg,
Which, hatch'd, would as his kind, grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.

(ll. 28-34)

There is the same incongruity about this metaphor as the last: Caesar is not "in the shell"; he is, as Brutus himself calls him, "the foremost man of all this world" (IV.iii.22).

What Brutus has said in this soliloquy is that there is no complaint about Caesar as he is or has been, but, on the basis of what often happens to people when they get power, Caesar might, given power, change. Brutus cites no "reasons," no cause, for supposing that he would change: images of "adder," "ladder," and "serpent's egg" develop his argument, carrying it to the conclusion to which he is committed. His thought moves back and forth between general observations about human behavior and metaphors that illustrate them, and nowhere does he look outside this self-referential linguistic construct to the supposed subject, Caesar himself. Brutus could "think him" anything on the basis of metaphors enlisted to support "common proofs," and his interpretation need bear no more, or less, relation to his subject than "a serpent's egg"; but the progression of tenses in the soliloquy, from the tentative "might" (l. 13) to "may" (l. 17), to the final "would" (l. 33), indicates that he has blurred the distinction between the hypothetical or metaphorical and the actual. The tentativeness of the subordinate clauses and appositions of the last five lines are overridden by the inexorable rhythms of "And since . . . And therefore . . . And kill," with their strong sense of causal necessity; the uncertain, choppy rhythms find release in the smooth, clinching "kill him in the shell." With his conscious mind relaxed, the conceptual controls dulled by exhaustion, the mechanism of Brutus's fatal construing is obvious: his willingness to let words do his thinking for him. A sense of the dangers of figurative language is implied comparable to that expressed by Hobbes, who called metaphors "useful only to deceive."²² An influence of language on thought is suggested like that described by Bacon:

. . . words plainly force and overrule the understanding and throw all into confusion, and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies

(*New Organon*, IV, Aphorism XLIII, 55)

22. *Leviathan* (New York, 1958), p. 207. Bishop Sprat asks, "who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties, these species Tropes and Figures have brought on our knowledge?" *The History of the Royal-Society of London, for the improving of natural knowledge* (London, 1734), p. 111. This reading of the soliloquy follows my analysis in "The Language of Brutus' Soliloquy: Similitude and Self-Deception in *Julius Caesar*," *Humanitas: Essays in Honor of Ralph Ross* (Claremont, Calif., 1977), pp. 74-86.

For men believe that their reason governs words; but it is also true that words react on the understanding

(*New Organon*, IV, Aphorism LIX, 61)

The strategies of deception that work privately, between a man and his friend, and, more insidiously, between a man and himself, are merely subtler, less obvious versions of the rhetorical tactics used publicly in the funeral orations. Brutus's oration (III.ii.12-41), his prose, "attic" statement of "public reasons" (l. 7), is traditionally contrasted to Antony's impassioned "asiatic" style, and is usually read as an appeal to the intellect rendered powerless by Antony's more effective appeal to the emotions. These misreadings of Brutus's lines are extremely revealing, since they are based on effects which Brutus himself carefully creates. Brutus explicitly, in the first lines, establishes his authority as a man of reason addressing the reason of others—

Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause, and be silent, that you may hear. Believe me for mine honour, and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe. Censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge.

(II. 13-18)

—associating himself, by the repetition of key words, with honor, wisdom, and judgment. The technique is *ethos*, establishing the personal character of the speaker, on the basis of the principle—stated by Aristotle—that we are likely to accept the argument of a good man. And despite the confusions Brutus has manifested, critics seem simply to have taken him at his word, interpreting the oration, nearly unanimously, as an appeal to the reason—a "straightforward statement" of "real reasons" "logically delivered."²³ Yet when we look more closely, no reasons appear, no argument that could appeal to logic. The one accusation of Caesar—"he was ambitious" (l. 27)—is slipped in among protestations of Brutus's love for him and is nowhere supported or even referred to again.

23. See M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London, 1968), p. 180; T. S. Dorsch, ed., *The Arden Julius Caesar*, p. 78; Ruth Nevo, *Tragic Form in Shakespeare* (Princeton, N.J., 1972), pp. 119-120; Milton Crane, *Shakespeare's Prose* (Chicago, 1951), pp. 144-145; John Palmer, *Political Characters of Shakespeare* (London, 1945), pp. 23-27.

Caesar's ambition is again, in Cassius's phrase, "obscurely . . . glanced at" (I.ii.316-317), in a linguistic construction which makes use of formal patterning, abstract terminology, and brevity to gloss over issue and event. Yet critics who have read the oration as an appeal to the reason are taking their cues from actual elements in it, from rhetorical and syntactical effects carefully contrived to create the illusion Brutus desires.

Brutus's most effective device is to present the issue as though it were a choice between two alternatives which leave no choice but to assassinate Caesar, but which rest on unexamined assumptions concerning Caesar: so that, again, the argument is a self-referential construct that makes sense in its own terms but casts no light outside itself to its supposed subject. He is aided in this by rhetorical figures that are related to logical processes and enable him to suggest logical distinctions and relationships, while actually falsifying the distinctions they imply. The first three sentences (quoted above) make use of one such figure, "antimetabole," a figure which "repeats words in converse order, often thereby sharpening their sense" (Joseph, p. 305). But, while seeming to "sharpen the sense," its function in Brutus's speech is simply tautology: "Believe me for mine honor and for mine honor believe." The necessity of choice between two mutually exclusive alternatives, love of Caesar and love of Rome, is asserted in the line, "Not that I lov'd Caesar less, but that I lov'd Rome more" (III.ii.21-22); but nowhere does Brutus substantiate that these were the alternatives, or that they excluded one another. The question he then springs ("Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all freemen?" II. 23-25) again implies logical distinction and the necessity of choice between alternatives suggested to be mutually exclusive—living in freedom or dying in bondage—but again, without evidence that these were the real alternatives. Both these distortions involve "enthymeme," an abridged syllogism, in which the omission of one premise results in "a strong tendency to accept the conclusion without scrutinizing the missing premise on which the argument rests" (Joseph, p. 178). The implicit premise on which all these claims depend is an assumption about Caesar: that Caesar's nature was such that it was necessary to choose between love of him and love of Rome, that Caesar living would have necessitated their "dying all slaves." This is the missing premise, nowhere confronted or supported, on which Brutus bases his entire case. The rhetorical questions

which conclude his oration again present a choice between alternatives that again rest on an unexamined assumption regarding Caesar: "Who is here so base that he would be a bondman? If any, speak, for him have I offended" (ll. 30 ff.). Brutus creates a context wherein any objection would be an admission of rudeness, baseness, or vileness—so that, within this circular construct, it is indeed true, "Then none have I offended" (l. 37).

There are, moreover, close-knit causal relationships implied within nearly every line that further this illusion of logic. The first three sentences make use of a construction that twice implies causality—"for" (on account of) and "that" (in order that). The next two lines are conditional clauses setting up "if . . . then" relationships. Brutus uses the figure "taxis"²⁴ to mete reward and penalty in a syntactical arrangement implying distribution of effect according to cause: the cumulative effect of "as Caesar was . . . so I," repeated three times, lends finality to the concluding "but, as he was ambitious, I slew him" (l. 27). Of the sixteen sentences in the oration, six begin with "if," lending the final "Then none have I offended" a weight that clinches the argument. Even his last lines, which are not part of the argument but merely refer his audience to the records in the Capitol, use a construction that metes out reward and punishment in logical distribution: "his glory . . . wherein he was worthy . . . his offences . . . for which he suffer'd death" (ll. 39–41). Such syntactical arrangements occur from beginning to end of his speech, creating an illusion of irrefutable logic, causing the mind to fill out the pattern suggested by the syntax and to perceive reasons where there are none.

The oration is far from an appeal to the intellect with "real reasons"; nor is it an ineffective piece of oratory showing the intellectual's inability to communicate with the masses, as it has also been interpreted.²⁵ It is a

24. A figure of division "which distributeth to everie subject his most proper and naturall adjunct" (Peacham, p. 60; in Joseph, p. 319). "As Cicero saith, it helpeth . . . to make things that be compound, intricate, or confused, to appear simple, plaine, and certaine." Blundeville, *Art of Logike*, p. 62; in Joseph, p. 314.

25. Palmer, *Political Characters of Shakespeare*, p. 222. In fact, Brutus's style is not even "attic," as is usually assumed: rather, as R. W. Zandvoort demonstrates ("Brutus' Forum Speech in *Julius Caesar*," *RES*, XVI [1940], 62–66), it is euphuistic. Zandvoort concludes that Shakespeare gives Brutus this style because euphuism is "pre-eminently a style for the

brilliant piece of oratory, brilliantly suited to manipulating a difficult crowd, while resorting to none of the obviously cheap tricks so conspicuous in Antony's performance. Thus it enables Brutus to preserve his conception of himself in his own eyes and others' as a rational man reasonably motivated—an effect he accomplishes with spectacular success, judging from critics' misreadings. In fact, in its use of balance and parallelism to create the illusion of control, it is subject to Bacon's criticisms of Ciceronian rhetoric:

. . . men began to hunt more after words than matter; and more after the choiceness of the phrase, and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, . . . than after the weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention, or depth of judgment.
(*Advancement of Learning*, III, 283)

This is what Bacon calls "the first distemper or learning, when men study words and not matter." As an instrument of "the severe inquisition of truth, and the deep progress into philosophy" (*Advancement of Learning*, III, 284), such language is useless; but as a technique of rhetorical persuasion, it is effective.

All Antony does in the opening speech of his remarkable oration—"Friends, Romans, countrymen" (ll. 75–109)—is to pretend to accept Brutus's claim, Caesar "was ambitious," and then set about undermining it, by twisting a few crucial words. Merely by repeating, at regular and strategic intervals within a subtly changing context, "Brutus says he was ambitious and Brutus is an honorable man," he causes the words "honor" and "ambition" to assume opposite and ironic meanings, and Brutus's claim to redound on itself; the repetition is "antiphrases, or the broad

intellect" (p. 65). Actually, euphuism was not considered to be suited to the intellect at all; it was a highly contrived, elaborate prose style, characterized by repetition and antithesis—the "figures of sound" (*schemata verborum*) or Gorgian patterns, which were the mark of Ciceronian rhetoric. In the traditional twofold division which the Renaissance inherited from Quintilian and the *ad Herennium*, the "figures of sound" were associated with rhetorical embellishment and opposed to the "figures of thought" (*figurae sententiae* or *sententiarum*)—which, interestingly, Antony makes more use of than Brutus. Thus Brutus's oration is more Ciceronian than attic, and Zandvoort, like other critics, is misled by accepted notions of it and of Brutus to misclassify the style he so accurately analyzes.

flout . . . irony of one word" (Joseph, p. 139). Thus twenty-one lines into the speech, "Brutus says he was ambitious, / And Brutus is an honorable man" actually means, "Caesar was not ambitious, nor is Brutus honorable," and by line 155, the crowd itself can draw the conclusion which Antony nowhere has to state: "They were traitors; honorable men!" Master of irony, Antony is a master of language who has power to make words mean what he wills.

His power derives from his understanding of irony, his skill in adapting language to audience, and his superior insight into the value of *pathos* in persuasion. The oration is a lurid and dramatic appeal to a whole range of feelings, from grief for the loss of a leader and friend, desire to honor the dead, to curiosity, greed, fury, and revenge. At the end of this first long section, Antony pauses, ostensibly to compose himself, actually to calculate his effect on the crowd, and from this point on, he makes use of techniques and props to supplement the verbal: the will, the bloody mantle, and the body. In the next long speech (ll. 171-199), he "comes down," has the crowd make a ring around the corpse, and, holding up the bloody mantle, reenacts the murder. Antony's language and action are all concentrated on evoking the deed, with effects quite opposite to Brutus's distancing, obfuscating techniques. Injunctions occur at the beginnings of four lines—"Look" (l. 176), "See" (l. 177), "Mark" (l. 180), "Judge" (l. 184)—building to the final moment when he reveals the body itself: "Look you here" (l. 198). His language is characterized by a quality R. W. Zandvoort describes as "animation," the ascription of life to lifeless objects, somewhat in the manner of the pathetic fallacy (p. 65): Caesar's wounds are "poor, dumb mouths" which "speak for me" (ll. 227-228); the "blood of Caesar" followed Brutus's sword "As rushing out of doors to be resolv'd / If Brutus so unkindly knock'd or no" (ll. 181-182); while Pompey's statue "all the while ran blood" (l. 191). This is the key to the vitality of his language, the energy that enables him to seize hold of his world. Finally, sweeping aside the garment to reveal the body, he releases forces of chaos and destruction: "Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Slay!" (ll. 206-207).

Having worked them to this pitch, Antony is now so confident that he can afford to play, so audacious that he can disavow the very arts of oratory he has so lavishly displayed—"wit," "words," "power of speech" (ll.

223–224)—in a triumphant flourish of his own showmanship. This gesture is an appropriate conclusion to a performance which is pervaded with irony, for irony is the essence of his oration, from his persona of “a plain blunt man / That . . . speak[s] right on” (ll. 220–225), to the more specific rhetorical forms of “antiphrases” and “paralipsis.” “Paralipsis,” a mode of irony which works by disclaiming the very things the speaker wishes to emphasize, is one of his most effective techniques. Repeating the word “wrong” six times within four lines (ll. 125–129), he insinuates that wrong has been done in the very process of denying that it has. Pretending to try to quiet the crowd, to dissuade them from “mutiny and rage” (ll. 123–124), he achieves his ends even as he disclaims them. His handling of the will, “which, pardon me, I do not mean to read” (l. 133), similarly makes use of “paralipsis”: in enumerating all his reasons for withholding the will, he describes exactly the ways it will “inflare” (l. 146) them.

Not the least of his ironies is his claim to appeal to the reason: “O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts, / And men have lost their reason” (ll. 106–107). Yet in a sense, for all his histrionics, Antony does offer more information about Caesar than Brutus did, offering at least the assertions, “He was my friend” (l. 87), he brought captives home to Rome (l. 90), he wept for the poor (l. 93), he thrice refused the crown (l. 99). But at least two of these statements have been contradicted by other characters. With reference to the second, we have Marullus’s words, “What conquest brings he home? / What tributaries . . .” (I.i.32–33). And to Caesar’s refusal of the crown, we have Casca’s wry commentary, “but, to my thinking, he was very loath to lay his fingers off it” (I.ii.237–238)—even without which, we would be a little more judicious than to leap to the crowd’s conclusion, “Therefore ’tis certain he was not ambitious” (III.ii.115). Thus nothing Antony says of Caesar leaves us more enlightened than we were as to his character, and though his language evokes the murder visually and dramatically, questions of Caesar’s ambition and the justice of his death are, again, “obscurely glanced at.”

Antony’s last long speech begins and ends with references to mutiny, at the end of which the mob takes its cue and cries, “We’ll mutiny (ll. 233), proclaiming it as their own idea. The chaos he has prophesied has come; or rather, he has brought it about. Antony wins the day because he is the greatest actor of them all, his is the greatest show, a play within the

play—complete with gesture, action, and props—which reverses the course of the play itself. Unconcerned with morality or truth, his energies are undivided, all geared to the manipulation of others: this is why he so effectively keeps his footing on such “slippery ground” (III.i. 191). The fire imagery associated with his oration (III.ii. 117), his feigned reluctance to “inflamm” them (l. 146), suggests that his words spark the actual blaze: “We’ll burn [Caesar’s] body . . . And with the brands fire the traitors’ houses . . . Go fetch fire” (ll. 256–259). In his soliloquy at the end of the scene—“now let it work” (l. 262)—Antony uses the same verb that Cassius used to describe his seduction of Brutus. Though Cassius’s persuasion of Brutus was subtler, his words, too, “worked” and “struck . . . fire” (I.ii.306, 175).

III

Thus each oration creates its own Caesar, or its own illusion of Caesar. Both cannot be true, yet nothing we have seen of Caesar enables us to know which to accept. The Roman mob first applauds Brutus, then, under the influence of Antony’s oratory, shifts its allegiance to Antony, demonstrating what Montaigne called

. . . that foolishnesse and facilitie which is found in the common multitude, and which doth subject the same to be managed, perswaded, and led by the eares by the sweet, alluring and sense-entrancing sound of his harmonie, without duely weighing, knowing, or considering the trueth of things by the force of reason.
 (“Vanitie of Words,” I, li, 152)²⁶

The crowd reflects its rulers, and their behavior is consistent: in the forum,

26. Because of this susceptibility of the common people, eloquence “chiefly flourishes” in republics rather than monarchies, and especially in periods of civil strife: “It [rhetoric] is an instrument devised to busie, to manage, and to agitate a vulgar and disordered multitude; and is an implemēt employed but about distempered and sicke mindes, as Physicke is about crazed bodies. And those where either the vulgar, the ignorant, or the generalitie have had all power, as that of Rhodes, those of Athens, and that of Rome, and where things have ever been in continuall disturbance and uproare, thither have Orators and the professors of that Art flocked.” (“Vanitie of Words,” I, LI, 152).

as with Cinna the poet, they care only for the word, not the reality, and do not bother with fine distinctions between the two—"It is no matter, his name's Cinna. Pluck but his name out of his heart" (III.iii.33-34). Casca's identification of the mob with an audience, "clap[ing]" and "hiss[ing]" as they "do the players in the theatre" (I.ii.255-258), implies, as well, an identification of the audience with the mob. We have, finally, no better basis than they to judge the truth of Brutus's or Antony's claims, and are left as much at the mercy of rhetoric—"led by the ears" rather than the "force of reason." It is this which accounts for the play's central ambiguities: if a point of view is persuasively stated, it passes for truth.

It also accounts for the sense we have of the characters as constantly observing one another, on the alert for unguarded gestures or natural expressions which might afford a truer glimpse than language does into character and motive. Cassius "observes" less "show of love" from Brutus (I.ii.33); Caesar wishes to see the soothsayer's face (I.ii.20); Brutus observes the angry spot on Caesar's brow, the expression in Cicero's eyes (I.ii.180-186); Caesar remarks on Cassius's lean and hungry look and on *his* ability to see "through the deeds of men" (II. 191, 199). And in fact, such nonverbal physical signs provide, in this play, more reliable bases for knowledge than language does.

Brutus's language functions in several ways to reshape reality. In accepting the issues as Cassius presents them, he accepts words such as "honor" and "Rome" as explaining more than they actually do, substituting them for precise evaluation of complicated realities. His own verbal techniques—the construing figures of the soliloquy, the complex rhetorical patterns of the oration—are ways of distancing and avoiding, of not assigning names to realities. Nor is the soliloquy the only instance of his use of figurative language to support fatal decisions. Brutus similarly envisions the murder as a sacrificial rite (II.i.166-174), defends the decision to spare Antony on the grounds that Antony is "but a limb of Caesar" (II.i.165), and urges the battle at Philippi on the basis of "a tide in the affairs of men" (IV.iii.217)—a particularly compelling image with which he overrides Cassius's objections and any further discussion, assured that the "tide" is "now" (I. 221). Confronted with problems requiring careful assessment, his judgment is confounded by these habits of language.

Julius Caesar follows a pattern familiar in Shakespeare's tragedies: the

protagonist's error, his misjudgment of external reality, is related to lack of self-knowledge and to self-deception, and his confusions are facilitated by language. But, as M. M. Mahood observes, the protagonist's disillusionment, his discovery of evil and deception from within and without, usually involves a discovery about language: that words do not necessitate the existence of the things they name (pp. 181-185). Thus Lear understands that "flattery" has been his undoing (IV.vi.96) and Macbeth realizes that "equivocation" has been his (V.v.42). Hamlet and Troilus express skepticism of "words, words, words" (II.ii.192; V.iii.108), and Timon curses language as though it were the root of evil itself: "let . . . language end" (V.i.220). But Brutus dies deluded, consoling himself that no man was ever false to him; and because he does not awaken to his own self-deception, he never awakens to the deceptions involved in language to express a disenchantment like that of the others. His confusions are too deeply sanctioned by a society that assumes honor is a name and rhetoric is reality. In fact, as the consequences of his deeds unravel before him, Brutus shows even less ability to confront the meanings of things, and there is, in these last scenes, a sense of strain and self-righteousness about him that makes him resemble, increasingly, the man he has murdered.²⁷ And when "Brutus' tongue / Hath . . . ended his life's history" (V.v.39-40), Antony's epigraph preserves the fiction of "the noblest Roman of them all" (l. 68).

But there is another kind of "actor" in the play who does not confuse the self with the role. Whereas Brutus and Caesar are lost in their own language and posturing and beguiled by the rhetoric and role playing of others, Antony and Cassius keep private selves separate from public personae and understand distinctions between words and realities. The pairings are familiar from *Richard II* and *Othello*, where self-deluded word spinners are similarly destroyed by undeluded, unprincipled nominalists.

27. Norman Rabkin discusses a number of similarities in the characters of Brutus and Caesar—a rhetoric that hovers between magnificence and bluster, identification with the name indicative of concern with the public image. *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* [New York, 1967], pp. 105-114. In the final scenes, this resemblance becomes more pronounced, as Brutus seems even more to be holding himself together with high-sounding terms, speaking in ways which are increasingly reminiscent of Caesar's (IV.ii.38; IV.iii.37, 39-40, 66-69).

Victors are differentiated from victims in these plays by their understanding of words.

If figurative language functions only as an instrument of fatal error, then poetry, too, is deprived of meaning or value in educating. This sense of language casts light on the two "poet" scenes—strange, grotesque little episodes which are so puzzling that the second, at least, is usually omitted in production.

The errors and fates of both poets reflect those of the main characters. Cinna has an intuition of truth, a premonition of disaster, but ventures forth to Caesar's funeral in spite of it. (As with Brutus, the "charging" of "fantasy" is "unlucky" [III.iii.1-2].) Asked his name and warned to "Answer . . . directly . . . briefly . . . wisely . . . and truly" (ll. 9-12), he does not answer directly, and his quibbling enrages the mob. As with the main characters, verbal indirection, along with a fatal confusion of name with reality, cost him his life. The second poet acts according to his "fashion" (IV.iii.134) and "humor" (l. 135) rather than a sense of the "time"—as Brutus can see with him, though not with himself. Bursting in to reconcile the quarreling generals just when they have reconciled themselves, he pronounces his advice:

Love, and be friends, as two such men should be;
For I have seen more years, I'm sure, than ye.

(IV.iii.131-132)

Like Cinna, he has some intuition of truth; like Brutus, he is well-intentioned; but his advice is ill-timed, it is bad poetry, it contains a *non sequitur*, and if Brutus's dismissal of him as a "jigging fool" (l. 136) is unkind, it is not inappropriate.

Whatever intuition either character has is beside the point: it has no effect on the action, of others or of their own. Both poets are ineffectual, and their scenes are the closest to anything like "comic relief" in the play. With the second of these episodes, Shakespeare made two significant changes in his source: whereas in Plutarch, a cynic philosopher intervenes and actually stops the quarrel, Shakespeare makes him a poet who bursts in too late. So much for the lofty humanist ideal of the poet, as truth-teller, educator, counselor, and adviser to the prince. The poet in *Julius Caesar* is denied a positive, meaningful function; he is ludicrous, trivial, torn limb

from limb. Rome is no country for poets: "What should the wars do with these jiggling fools?" (IV.iii.136) Nor will the next age in England be.

In *Julius Caesar*, it is the negative potentials of language that are most strongly emphasized. Rhetoric is an instrument of appearance which can make, as Plato says, the worse appear the better. Stimulating passion and imagination, it disrupts the proper workings of the mind, perpetuating psychological and social disorder which, in Christian terms, repeats the error of the Fall.²⁸ Its strength is in human weakness, the corrupt will and unreason: pandering vanity in Brutus and Caesar, it kindles worse passions in the mob. Though language is supposedly man's medium for "coming to terms with the objective world" (as Cassirer calls it),²⁹ it can be enlisted in the service of subjectivity, of seeming rather than signification, to facilitate the perception of "things that are not" (V.iii.69)—to "misconstrue every thing" (V.iii.84). Bacon's criticism of the scholastics for creating verbal systems based on linguistic logic rather than empirical foundations applies as well to these characters and accounts for their tragic confusions. Speaker and listener are locked in what Bacon calls a "contract of error":

. . . for as knowledges have hitherto been delivered, there is a kind of contract of error between the deliverer and the receiver; for he who delivers knowledge desires to deliver it in such form as may be best believed, and not as may be most conveniently examined; and he who receives knowledge desires present satisfaction, without waiting for due inquiry; and so rather not to doubt, than not to err . . .

(*Dignity and Advancement of Learning*, IV, 449)

28. Stanley Fish describes the tradition which associated rhetoric with "the verbal equivalent of the fleshly lures that seek to enthrall us and divert our thoughts from Heaven, the reflection of our own cupidinous desires"; "through rhetoric man continues in the error of the Fall." *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (New York, 1967), p. 61. This sense of rhetoric is consistent with the conception of Rome as the earthly city, "the world" before Christ, which was traditional in the Renaissance and which Shakespeare draws on in *Julius Caesar*. See T. J. B. Spencer, "Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans," *S&S*, X (1957), 27-38; J. Leeds Barroll, "Shakespeare and Roman History," *MLR*, LIII (1958), 327-343; and J. L. Simmons, *Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedies* (Charlottesville, Va., 1973).

29. *An Essay on Man* (New Haven, Conn., 1944), p. 132.

Such confusions account for the chain of events which begins with Cassius's persuasion of Brutus, leads to Brutus's persuasion of himself, Caesar's assassination, and Antony's victory—ending in a new age of Caesar. It was Shakespeare's genius to integrate these criticisms of language into an epistemological focus which is central to the play's tragic vision.