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Altra onomastica

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NAMES AND SOURCES IN *JULIUS CAESAR*

Abstract: Shakespeare's central plots usually rely heavily on primary source plots. At the same time, he often renamed characters and added characters to modify the themes and actions of his source plots, especially in his comedies. However, he usually added far fewer names in his histories and tragedies. Thus, his relative use of names from source plots compared to his addition of new names, the subject of my research, is a useful indicator of his partial reliance on plot sources and of his apparent presumption of their non-fictive status. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare closely follows the action described in Plutarch's chapters on Marcus Brutus and Julius Caesar in his *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (North's 1579 translation). He adds a few names from other sources and coins a few of his own. Thus, *Julius Caesar* typifies Shakespeare's use of names in his histories and tragedies and reflects his apparent presumption of Plutarch's non-fictive status. At the same time, Shakespeare uses far more names from Plutarch's life of Brutus than from his lives of Julius Caesar or Mark Antony. Thus, his thematic emphasis is on Brutus and on his sense of 'honour' as a tragic strength. It is Shakespeare's first great tragedy, typified by the irony of the protagonist's virtue.

Keywords: Source plots, borrowings, coinages, etymologies.

1. *Introduction*

Shakespeare's central plots usually rely heavily on primary source plots (i.e., sources that reflect the play's sequence of events, not just character names or traits), and when we can identify Shakespeare's primary plot sources, his uses of names can help indicate his relative reliance on those sources, his apparent presumption of their fictive or non-fictive status, and/or his narrative and poetic creativity.

In his comedies and romances, as I have shown in my recent book, *Names as Metaphors in Shakespeare's Comedies*, he often renamed and added characters as part of his reinterpretation of his source plots. *The Winter's Tale*, for example, follows the plot of Greene's *Pandosto* very closely, but Shakespeare changed all the names, added characters (Paulina, most significantly), and switched the settings to create a happy ending. His names in such cases reflect his reinterpretation of the characters and their relationships and mark his imaginative independence from his source plots.

Most of Shakespeare's tragedies and histories differ markedly from his comedies and romances insofar as he usually used most of the names and characters directly from his source plots. Nonetheless, the names he uses in these plays still have onomastic significance. That is to say, his relative retention of names from his plot sources suggests that he presumed his sources were authoritative in some sense or essentially non-fictive. For example, he relied primarily on Holinshed for his history plays and on Plutarch for his Roman plays.

In such cases, Shakespeare's reinterpretations are largely reflected in the changes he makes in the words and actions of pivotal characters in the plot source. These changes mean that the names represent different things metonymically and give thereby new or heightened symbolic meanings to the names. In all cases, the new names reflect the symbolic significance of the character by referring to its meaning in a different context (literary or historical), to a descriptive meaning, or to a phonological approximation of such meaning. Each name is symbolic insofar as it refers to something else with which it shares at least some attributes, i.e., as an analogy.¹

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar (hereafter *JC*) includes a total of 74 references to characters or other types of personal names. Forty-five are to named characters, seven of which are Shakespeare's coinages. Shakespeare also adds four mythological references, two of which are thematically significant. Fifteen references are to generic characters, five are given names for which the full name is understood, and five are personifications.

Thirty-nine of the named characters can be found in Plutarch's *The Life of Marcus Brutus*.² Twenty-two can be found in Plutarch's *The Life of Julius Caesar*;³ however, all but two of these names can also be found in *The Life of Marcus Brutus*. Similarly, the nine names that can be found in Plutarch's *The Life of Marcus Antonius*⁴ are all duplicated in *The Life of Marcus Brutus*. Thus, it seems reasonable to infer that Shakespeare relied primarily on Plutarch's *The Life of Brutus* in his use of names. This preponderance of borrowings parallels his thematic focus on the character of Brutus, rather than on Caesar, the title character. It follows that Brutus is the primary subject of this essay.

¹ GRANT W. SMITH, *Names as Metaphors in Shakespeare's Comedies*, Wilmington, DE, Vernon Press 2021.

² In GEOFFREY BULLOUGH, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. V, New York, Oxford University Press 1964, pp. 90-135.

³ *Ivi*, pp. 58-89.

⁴ In DAVID DANIELL, ed., *Julius Caesar*, The Arden Shakespeare. London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 1998. DANIELL reproduces the most relevant sources from BULLOUGH, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources ...*, cit. Some of DANIELL's selections are used here as a convenience in referring between Plutarch's and Shakespeare's texts.

As with Brutus, Shakespeare's characterizations of other pivotal characters personalize and exaggerate what we can see in Plutarch's objective descriptions, and such characterizations give their names heightened symbolic meanings. That is to say, the names become associated, in a metonymic sense, with an added and different set of words and actions than we see in Plutarch. The name *Brutus* comes to epitomize a mixture of political naiveté and impulsive idealism, and the name of *Antony* comes to symbolize the cynicism and danger of populist rhetoricians. Similarly, Shakespeare adds to the words and actions of other pivotal characters to reinterpret the historical events at hand – specifically, those of *Cassius*, *Caesar*, and *Casca*.

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the symbolic significance of *Marcus Brutus's* name, and describe, in brief form, the symbolic potentialities of Shakespeare's seven coinages and five personifications.

2. *Marcus Brutus*

The symbolic value of Brutus's name lies in the difference in how Plutarch and Shakespeare describe the idea of *honour* as it is associated with Brutus's character. Plutarch describes the perception of Brutus's *honour* in objective terms, such as his lineal heritage and the respect given by others. Shakespeare develops Brutus's personal and subjective sense of *honour* and enhances its value thereby. His development of Brutus's character becomes a redefinition of *honour* by making Brutus's sense of *honour* an interior, inherent, and private element of his character. Of course, his inner character elicits more empathy than any shower of material *honours*.

Brutus's sense of *honour* contrasts with the public honours sought by Caesar. His subjective sense of *honour* dictates his reasoning for joining the conspiracy, for sparing Antony's life as an ancillary act to the assassination, for trusting in the rationality of citizens, and for pursuing an immediate battle at Philippi. Thus, Shakespeare presents Brutus's sense of *honour* as a tragic virtue (much like Hamlet's sense of *conscience* or Othello's sense of *justice*). It is a very admirable trait, but it leads, ironically, to disaster – specifically, to civil disorder and to Brutus's own death.

The following sections will describe the symbolic meanings associated with Brutus's name.

2.1. Honour as an inward virtue

In describing the assassination of Julius Caesar, Shakespeare and Plutarch both focus on the character of Brutus as the necessary leader in the eyes of the other conspirators. Plutarch presents a duplicitous side of Brutus's character: to recruit more conspirators, Brutus gathered friends to hear their general opinions without disclosing his own intentions; he was also careful to hide his intentions in public. Thus, Plutarch's description of Brutus emphasizes outward appearances and more than a little hypocrisy. Shakespeare expunges Brutus's devious recruitment of conspirators described by Plutarch. Brutus is consistently motivated by his inherent sense of *honour* and is even ashamed to meet his fellow conspirators at night. He recognizes the conspiracy as the child of essential darkness, i.e., *Erebus*: «Not Erebus itself were dim enough / To hide thee from prevention» (2.1.84-85).⁵ Nonetheless, Shakespeare's Brutus is totally dedicated to the common good rather than his personal good: «For let the gods so speed me as I love / The name of honour more than I fear death» (1.2.88-89). Of course, his vow, noble in itself, leads to his death, and deepens our remorse.

Cassius seizes on Brutus's interior focus, «I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus» (1.2.90), but Cassius consistently focuses on objective measures, such as Caesar's physical infirmities and the comparative sounds of their names: «Why should that name be sounded more than yours?» (1.2.142). Brutus brushes aside these objective comparisons:

For this present,
I would not, so with love I might entreat you,
Be any further moved. (1.2.164-166)

Brutus is simply not convinced either by Cassius's objectivist arguments or by the favors Caesar has shown him. However, he is very much disturbed by the public and observable «honours that are heaped on Caesar» (1.2.131).

For Brutus, *honour* is a private virtue, and it is in the privacy of his orchard that Brutus quietly concludes,

It must be by his death: and for my part
I know no personal cause to spurn at him
But for the general. He would be crowned:

⁵ All references to Shakespeare are from WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Gen. eds. S. Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller, New York, Penguin Books 2002.

How that might change his nature, there's the question. (2.1.10-13)

In his garden, Brutus tells himself that he has never «known when his [Caesar's] affection swayed / More than his reason» (2.1.20-21). Caesar has always been both just and kind, as kings in Shakespeare's time were assumed to be, but still Brutus rationalizes that if Caesar is crowned, «then I grant we put a sting in him / That at his will he may do harm with» (2.1.16-17).

Thus, Brutus's decision to join the conspiracy is based on internal speculation about possible changes in Caesar's character. His logic is purely hypothetical, and in this decision, as in all his subsequent decisions, Brutus is never led by the simple pragmatism of others. He adheres stubbornly to his private convictions – a trait that is often much admired.

Shakespeare's focus on inward virtue also peeps through when Brutus is confronted by his wife, *Portia*. She wounds herself to show that she can withstand the obvious pain and begs Brutus to share his troubles with her, as she has just demonstrated to him. Plutarch says that «he did comfort her the best he could» and that he also let her see the «dagger by his side under his long gown» as he left for «Pompeys porche» (in Bullough 1964, 99). That is to say, Plutarch tells us that Brutus lets Portia know his immediate intentions and the coming dangers.

In *JC*, Portia also bares her «voluntary wound» (2.1.299) and begs Brutus to share his “secrets” (301). He is amazed at seeing her wound and hearing her eloquent words, but he confides nothing. He hears a knock on his door and asks that she «Leave me with haste» (308). He keeps his intentions a secret and soon leaves with his fellow conspirators. Portia is left in ignorance and confusion. Like other Shakespearean characters, Brutus may be a conflicted man, but he never shares his doubts with other characters, not even with his wife (cf. *Macbeth*).

2.2. *Idealistic sense of honour: sacrificing Caesar and sparing Antony*

Brutus's idealistic sense of *honour* not only leads him to join the conspiracy, but also leads him to spare Antony when killing Caesar. According to Plutarch, the conspirators had previously agreed to «kill no man but Caesar onely» so that their action would be seen as a blow for everyone's «libertie». However, immediately after the assassination, «All the conspirators, but Brutus, determining upon this matter, thought it good also to kill Antonius, because he was a wicked man, and that in nature favored tyranny».⁶

⁶ BULLOUGH, cit., 103.

Their reasoning was very practical. Plutarch explains, however, that Brutus objected for two reasons: first that it would be inconsistent («not honest») with their previous agreement to kill only Caesar, and second «that Antonius being a noble minded and coragious man»⁷ – supposedly like all the conspirators themselves – would shed his loyalty once he knows Caesar is dead and would then help the conspirators calm and unify the country.

Shakespeare enhances the idealism of Brutus by moving the question earlier in time (eliminating the logical inconsistency) and by developing the spiritual significance of the assassination. Cassius suggests killing Antony when the conspirators assemble at night. He warns,

We shall find him [Antony]
A shrewd contriver. And you know his means
If he improve them may well stretch so far
As to annoy us all: which to prevent
Let Antony and Caesar fall together. (2.1.155-160)

To maintain his idealistic sense of *honour*, Brutus countermands Cassius, «Our course will seem too bloody» (161). He projects his own idealism when judging others and ignores the potential of far greater bloodshed to come from civil war.

And for Mark Antony, think not of him,
For he can do no more than Caesar's arm
When Caesar's head is off. (2.1.180-182)

Shakespeare also colors the nighttime meeting of the conspirators to suggest the spiritual significance of Caesar's assassination. Casca describes the night as portentous:

It is the part of men to fear and tremble
When the most mighty gods by tokens send
Such dreadful heralds to astonish us. (1.3.53-56)

Brutus also describes the spiritual implications of the assassination clearly and explicitly.

O that we then could come by Caesar's spirit
And not dismember Caesar! But, alas,
Caesar must bleed for it. (2.1.168-170)

⁷ *Ibid.*

In killing Caesar, they should «be sacrificers but not butchers» (165), and «Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods» (172). After the assassination, Brutus leads the conspirators in a ritual of bathing their of their «hands in Caesar's blood» (3.1.106). It is as if Caesar were a religious sacrifice and a parallel to the crucifixion of Christ.

Obviously, Brutus ignores the generally presumed authority of rulers articulated by Paul in *Romans* 13:1 («Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God».⁸) Caesar was the ruler of Rome in fact, although not with title of *king*. Thus, Caesar would have been seen as the de facto regent of God, even though not in name, at least in the eyes of Queen Elizabeth, and the assassination of Caesar was as certain to bring chaos and destruction as would the deposition of a monarch, regardless of good intentions.

2.3. Honour and belief

In his high-minded sense of *honour*, Brutus dismisses the practical threat from Antony, «for he is given / To sports, to wildness and much company» (2.1.187-188). He sees Antony as a man of worldly pleasures and, therefore, as posing no danger in speaking at Caesar's funeral. Plutarch points to this decision as Brutus's «second fault», the first being his refusal to consent «that Antonius should be slain».⁹ In Plutarch's words, the crowd turned against the conspirators when Antony read Caesar's will. When they heard that every citizen is bequeathed 75 Drachmas, their material interests aroused their empathy for the bloodied robes of Caesar, and «there was no more order kept amongst the common people».¹⁰

Shakespeare follows the action described by Plutarch precisely but exaggerates Brutus's naïve trust in the common people and in the efficacy of his *honour*. Even before Antony's speech, Brutus makes the word *honour* the rhetorical focus of the play. He pompously explains to Cassius: «I will myself into the pulpit first, / And show the reason of our Caesar's death» (3.1.236-237). He assumes that the citizens of Rome will recognize his inherent *honour*, and that their respect for his *honour* will in itself generate true *belief* in what he says:

Romans, countrymen and lovers, hear me for my cause and be silent, that you

⁸ MICHAEL D. COOGAN, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Augmented Third Edition*, New Revised Standard Version, New York, Oxford University Press 2007.

⁹ BULLOUGH, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* ..., p. 104.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 105.

may hear. Believe me for mine honour and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe. (3.2.13-16)

That is to say, Brutus expects that his inherent *honour* should be both the cause and effect of their *belief*. Their *belief* should need no further evidence than his simple words. His funeral speech is, in fact, effective; the plebeians do *honour* him; some even cry out that he should be crowned king in place of Caesar.

Ironically, it was just such public *honours* heaped on Caesar that first rankled Brutus's inward sense of *honour*. However, as Brutus leaves the scene, he asks that the crowd «[d]o grace to Caesar's corpse and grace his [Antony's] speech / Tending to Caesar's glories» (3.2.58-59). In doing so, Brutus ignores how the *honours* just now heaped on him are even more transitory than the public *honours* previously heaped on Caesar.

2.4. Honour and eagerness for battle

Unfortunately for Brutus, allowing Antony to speak at Caesar's funeral is not the last of his big mistakes. His personal sense of *honour* and self-righteous convictions lead him to push blindly for an immediate battle at Philippi. As Plutarch explains, Brutus's penchant for battle stems from a self-confident habit of his mind:

But Brutus in contrary manner, did always before, and at that tyme also, desire nothing more, then to put all to the hazard of battell, assoone as might be possible: to the ende he might either quickly restore his country to her former libertie, or rid him forthwith of this miserable world . . . (in Bullough 1964, 118)

Plutarch and Shakespeare both focus on the military actions of Brutus and Cassius rather than on those of Antony and Octavius to emphasize the errors of the conspirators.

Shakespeare follows Plutarch's sequence of events but heightens the drama by compressing the action, by highlighting the conflicts between Brutus and Cassius, and by adding religious and mythological symbolism. Specifically, Plutarch describes the final action as two battles over a twenty-day period. Shakespeare reduces it to a single day to include a sense of recognition (*anagnorisis*) and intensify the dramatic focus.

The contrast between Brutus and Cassius shows once again Brutus's prideful self-assurance. Cassius urges caution, «'[t]is better the enemy seek us, / So shall he waste his means, weary his soldiers» (4.3.197-198), but once again Brutus gives no ground:

Our legions are brimful, our cause is ripe.
 The enemy increaseth every day;
 We, at the height, are ready to decline.
 There is a tide in the affairs of men
 Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; (4.3.213-217)

The battle at Philippi had historical significance for the Elizabethan audience because it led to the establishment of the Roman Empire as a monarchy and to the presumed extension of its legacy in England. To heighten the significance of this battle, and of Brutus's misguided idealism, Shakespeare adds spiritual and religious references. Plutarch, for instance, mentions that a «ghost that appeared unto Brutus shewed plainly, that the goddes were offended with the murther of Caesar».¹¹ Shakespeare enhances this reference by specifying that it is, in fact, the ghost of Caesar, that only Brutus sees the ghost, and that the ghost admonishes Brutus ominously, «thou shalt see me at Philippi» (4.3.281).

Shakespeare also suggests a religious analogy between the death of Caesar and the death of Christ. Plutarch specifies that Caesar «had three and twenty wounds upon his body» (in Bullough 1964, 86), but Shakespeare raises the number by ten, to «three and thirty wounds» (5.1.52). There is no way of knowing why Shakespeare changed the number of wounds, but thirty-three might easily be an allusion to Jesus' age at the time of his crucifixion.

As in other tragedies (*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*), Shakespeare introduces a storm and omens on the eve of the big battle. In this play, even Cassius, an ardent Epicurean and empiricist, begins to believe in omens. Plutarch tells a story of two mighty eagles that happened to come with the conspirators from Sardis, but Shakespeare puts the story in Cassius's own mouth:

This morning are they fled away and gone,
 And in their steads do ravens, crows and kites
 Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us
 As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem
 A canopy most fatal, under which
 Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost. (5.1.83-88)

Thus, Shakespeare shows that even the skeptical Cassius is beginning to «partly credit things that do presage» (5.1.78).

Antony also prophesies the gruesome consequences of Brutus's actions when he is left alone with Caesar's body:

¹¹ Ivi, p. 89.

And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
 With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
 Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice,
 Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war,
 That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
 With carrion men, groaning for burial. (3.1.270-275)

Ate was the daughter of Zeus and the mythological goddess of impulsive behavior and specifically of blindness. In *The Iliad*, *Ate* (translated as «Ruin») is said to outrun prayers and to mislead men into error and punishment.¹² Thus, Antony's reference to *Ate* is important thematically because it points to the ghost of Caesar, to the mental impulsiveness of the principal conspirators, and to their poor eyesight, which leads directly to their defeat.

As the battle is about to commence, Cassius worries about Brutus's overconfidence and eagerness for battle. He tells *Messala* (a member of a distinguished Roman family and later pardoned and befriended by Octavius), «[b]e thou my witness that against my will / (As Pompey was) am I compelled to set / Upon one battle all our liberties» (5.1.73-75). However, Cassius is actually defeated by his misinterpretations. He has bad eyesight, and his fears about Brutus's zeal for battle seem confirmed when *Titinius* reports:

O Cassius, Brutus gave the word too early,
 Who having some advantage on Octavius
 Took it too eagerly: his soldiers fell to spoil,
 While we by Antony are all enclosed. (5.3.5-8)

To verify *Titinius's* report, Cassius orders him to ride his horse «up to yonder troops» (5.3.16) to see if they «are friend or enemy» (18). Because of his poor eyesight, he asks his Parthian slave, *Pindarus* (as noted by Plutarch¹³), to report what happens to *Titinius*. *Pindarus* misinterprets what he sees, saying that *Titinius* is captured by rival troops rather than welcomed by friends.

Cassius thus thinks that Brutus has been defeated by Octavius's forces just as he has been defeated by Antony's. Brutus has, in fact won, but to Cassius, all seems lost. Impulsively, Cassius orders *Pindarus* to strike off his head. Plutarch mentions that it is the same sword he used to assassinate Caesar, but Shakespeare puts the words in Cassius's mouth as an ironic recognition:

¹² RICHMOND LATTIMORE, Trans. *The Iliad of Homer*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 1951, pp. 502-512.

¹³ BULLOUGH, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* ..., cit., p. 123.

And when my face is covered, as 'tis now,
 Guide thou the sword – Caesar, thou art revenged
 Even with the sword that killed thee. (5.3.44-46)

He then compounds the irony when Titinius returns with a garland for his general's brow. Upon discovering Cassius's body, Titinius (whom Plutarch describes as «one of Cassius chiefest frendes»¹⁴) kills himself with the same sword: «This is a Roman's part. / Come, Cassius' sword, and find Titinius' heart» (5.3.89-90).

When Brutus arrives at the scene, he honors Cassius and Titinius with wording similar to Plutarch's:

Are yet two Romans living such as these?
 The last of all the Romans, fare thee well:
 It is impossible that ever Rome
 Should breed thy fellow. (5.3.98-101)

However, Brutus also refers clearly to the spiritual context of their deaths:

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet.
 Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords
 In our own proper entrails. (5.3.94-96)

Such a reference constitutes his recognition of tragic error. Before the assassination and on the eve of battle, Brutus explained the ghost as a «weakness of mine eyes / That shapes this monstrous apparition» (4.3.274-275). Now, he seems to recognize that Julius Caesar had legitimate authority in Rome, that it was spiritually blessed, and that such a blessing transcends his personal sense of *honour*. Both he and Cassius have been physically and spiritually blind to oppose a legitimate ruler, and their misdirected obsessions have led them to defeat and self-destruction.

The legitimacy of monarchical government may seem foolish to most of us, but such an assumption is also an affirmation of civil law that transcends an individual's ideals, however noble those ideals, or that person, might seem to be. As we see in this play, Brutus's ideals lead to mayhem and destruction.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 123.

3. *Seven coinages*

Lucius: The name *Lucius* was a common name in classical Rome, and Shakespeare uses it differently in five plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Cymbeline*, and *JC*. In this play, Shakespeare uses it twice, once for Lucius Pella, who never appears on stage, and once for Brutus's servant boy with special symbolic meaning. The simple lexical meaning of *Lucius* is 'light,' and clearly associates the servant boy with themes of *light* and *darkness*. Alone at night in his garden, Brutus contemplates the danger Caesar presumably poses. He calls on Lucius, his servant boy, to awaken and to bring him a taper. Lucius promptly agrees, and Brutus then decides, «[i]t must be by his death» (2.1.10). In making this decision, Brutus identifies himself with his ancestor, Lucius Junius Brutus, who drove the Etruscan king out of Rome in 510 BCE. That is to say, the name *Lucius* is symbolically associated not only with *light*, but also with the name of Brutus's famous ancestor and his actions. These associations are immediately reinforced by the actions of the servant. Not only does Lucius bring a light to Brutus's darkness, but he also brings one of the 'bills' that urges Brutus to awaken: «'Brutus, thou sleep'st; awake and see thyself'» (2.1.46). Thus, when Brutus calls for Lucius to awaken, he also invokes his own identity out of the dark night. Perhaps the audience will also feel that darkness may portend death. The name is an etymological coinage because its symbolism is not borrowed from a character in a secondary source.

The Ghost of Caesar: Plutarch describes an incident in Sardis where Brutus and Cassius prepared for the battle at Philippi. In his tent, late at night, Brutus «saw a wonderfull straunge and monstrous shape of a body coming towards him. » Brutus asked, «what cause brought him thither. The spirit aunswered him, I am thy evil spirit, Brutus: and thou shalt see me by the citie of Philippes.» Brutus then «called his men unto him» who denied hearing or seeing anything.¹⁵ Shakespeare moves this incident chronologically to the night just before the battle of Philippi and names the Ghost and the men sleeping nearby (see the following). Naming the Ghost (4.3.272) symbolically links the approaching death of Brutus to his assassination of Caesar. In his final scene, Brutus notes that the Ghost had also appeared to him in Sardis, as described by Plutarch.

Varrus: Brutus asks Lucius and two of his soldiers to sleep in his tent the night before the battle at Philippi (4.3.238ff). The names of these three characters, like the naming of Caesar's Ghost, are Shakespeare's additions to

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 116.

Plutarch. Their primary dramatic function is to deny hearing or seeing the Ghost. The denials of the three minor characters emphasize the exclusivity of Brutus's spiritual experience. The Ghost appears only to Brutus, and only Brutus gets the ominous message. *Varus* was a Roman surname derived from the adjective *varus*, meaning 'knock-kneed' or 'crooked'.¹⁶ It is etymologically descriptive. Shakespeare's symbolic use of the name might refer to the appearance of the actor or, more likely, to the spiritual disability of the character.

Claudio: Claudio is the other soldier besides Varrus whom Brutus asks to sleep in his tent before the battle. The name *Claudio* derives from *claudus* meaning 'limping' or 'lame',¹⁷ and Shakespeare uses the name in both *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Measure for Measure*. In each case, the character blunders because of a moral lapse. Like Varrus and Lucius, Claudio does not hear or see the ghost that visits Brutus. The name is borrowed from other sources and is etymologically descriptive of a disability.

Publius: Plutarch uses the name *Publius Silicius* for a senator who cried when he heard Brutus proscribed as an outlaw by Roman judges.¹⁸ *Publius* was, in fact, a very common praenomen for public officials in Rome. Shakespeare uses it as a reference to three people in *JC*. Only one *Publius* appears on stage, but because the name has three references, we may assume each reference to be a separate coinage.

The only *Publius* to appear on stage is a senator whom Caesar greets in a friendly way on the morning of the assassination: «And look where Publius is come to fetch me» (2.2.108). As they make their way toward the Senate, Publius tells Artemidorus, who is trying to warn Caesar, to step aside: «Sirrah, give place» (3.1.10), but this Publius is not a conspirator. He is instead an example of a respected senator who is «quite confounded with this mutiny» (3.1.95). Brutus rushes to confirm his tactical but idealistic goal of maintaining civic unity: «Publius, good cheer. / There is no harm intended to your person, / Nor to no Roman else. So tell them, Publius» (3.1.89-91). The name thus fits the character as a public official and illustrates the dismay of the noble, as well as Brutus' naiveté.

Shakespeare also uses the name for two characters referred to by others. Brutus and Cassius both refer to the brother of Metellus Cimber as *Publius Cimber* in their appeals to Caesar to lift the banishment. Plutarch does not mention the brother's name. It is Shakespeare's invention and is symbolically indicative for the brother's social status.

¹⁶ D.P. SIMPSON, 1963. *Cassell's New Compact Latin-English English-Latin Dictionary*, New York, Dell Publishing Co 1963, p. 233.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 39.

¹⁸ BULLOUGH, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources* ..., cit., p. 108.

Finally, Lepidus consents to the murder of his own brother, «[u]pon condition Publius shall not live, / Who is your sister's son, Mark Antony» (4.1.4-5). Antony had no such nephew, but the scene dramatizes how the lust for power among the triumvirs overrides the most basic human relationships. The relationship to Antony is the only important thing, and the name *Publius* is a common praenomen socially appropriate for such a nephew. Thus, Shakespeare uses the name *Publius* almost as if it were a generic label.

4. *Five personifications*

Shakespeare's characters often personify major themes in reflective passages and thereby make the themes seem more relevant to their characters. Good examples are Rosalind and Celia's discussions of *Nature* and *Fortune* in *As You Like It*. JC includes relatively few personifications, but these few clearly intensify the characterizations of Brutus, Antony, and Portia.

Brutus is obviously conflicted in his decision to join the Conspiracy, which he expresses in a personification: «O conspiracy, / Sham'st thou to show thy dangerous brow by night, / When evils are most free?» (2.1.77-79). The other conspirators have come to him in the middle of the night, and Brutus recognizes that the conspiracy itself may be among the many evils that fill the darkness. Of course, it will hide itself «in smiles and affability» (2.1.82), but it will be seen even if shaded by Erebus.

Brutus is also ambivalent about death, as he personifies the Fates after the assassination.

Fates, we will know your pleasures.
That we shall die we know; 'tis but the time
And drawing days out, that men stand upon. (3.1.98-100)

In killing Caesar they have simply shortened the time that he would fear death, but they must now live in fear of their own time. Thus, Brutus seems to recognize the trajectory of his tragedy.

Antony expresses his bold cynicism in a pair of personifications following his famous speech. Left alone, he chortles over the anger of the commoners: «Mischief, thou art afoot: / Take thou what course thou wilt» (3.2.251-252). He gloats about the Mischief he has created and does not care about collateral harm to the innocent. In fact, he emphasizes his callous disregard for others moments later by personifying Fortune: «Fortune is merry / And in this mood will give us anything» (3.2.256-257). All he looks forward to is

gaining power. The next scene shows the dismemberment of the innocent “Cinna the poet”» (3.3.29).

Shakespeare’s Brutus does not share his thoughts or plans with Portia, but she is a pillar of loyalty and expresses her virtue in a personification of Constancy: «O constancy, be strong upon my side» (2.4.6). Her determination is remarkable because it has no empirical support. Her loyalty to Brutus is based on nothing more than her personal love, and in that regard Shakespeare portrays her as an ideal for wives of his time.

5. *Summary*

In his tragedies, Shakespeare uses far more names from his plot sources than he does in his comedies. Thus, his reinterpretations of his plot sources are reflected less in the names and characters that he adds to the plots and far more in the changes he makes in the words and actions of pivotal characters drawn from his sources. His plot source for *JC* is various chapters of Plutarch’s *Lives*, but especially his chapter on Brutus. The changes Shakespeare makes in the words and actions of characters described by Plutarch give different symbolic meanings to their names.

This study describes in detail the changes we can see in one of the five pivotal characters of *JC*, i.e., Brutus. In briefer form, it also describes the symbolic values of coinages and personifications.

Brutus is clearly the central character of this play, not the title character, and the central theme is Brutus’s *honour*. Plutarch describes the perception of Brutus’s *honour* in objective terms, such as his lineal heritage and the respect given by others. Shakespeare develops Brutus’s personal and subjective sense of *honour*. It is also a rigid sense of *honour* that dictates his reasoning for joining the conspiracy, for sparing Antony’s life, for trusting in the rationality of citizens, and for pursuing an immediate battle at Philippi. Each of these decisions proves to be decisive mistakes. Thus, Shakespeare presents Brutus’s sense of *honour* as a tragic virtue (much like Hamlet’s sense of *conscience* or Othello’s sense of *justice*). It is a highly admirable trait, but it leads, ironically, to disaster – specifically, to civil disorder and to Brutus’s own death. The irony of Brutus’s *honour* marks this play as Shakespeare’s first great tragedy.

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