THEATRE, IDENTITY, AND BRUTUS’ GRAND ILLUSION

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I

If drama can be dubbed the art of illusion, Shakespeare stretches the art considerably in Julius Caesar, exploiting the illusion of vision both dramatically and theatrically. Soon after the play opens, Cassius offers to help Brutus to find his ‘hidden worthiness’ (1.2.56), and adds, ‘I, your glass, / Will modestly discover to yourself / That of yourself which you yet know not of’ (67-9).† The proposition strikes the thematic chord of Shakespearean tragedy, guiding the hero into the path of nosce teipsum. As a universal emblem of self-knowledge in the Renaissance, ‘glass’ raises the expectation of the lofty goal of self-discovery to be achieved by Brutus.‡ But, alas, Cassius’ ‘glass’ proves to be much worse than a ‘flatt’ring glass’ (Richard II, 4.1.269) by fabricating alluring images and larger-than-life reflections in compliance with his clandestine intentions and contrivances. The temptation woos and swiftly wins Brutus to find himself in the eye of the beholder, though he dimly senses that Cassius ‘would have [him] seek into [himself] / For that which is not in [him]’ (1.2.63-4). The hero stumbles right at the outset of his quest for self-knowledge when he entrusts his fate to the crafty friend. His eyes of prescience thus bleared, Brutus then sets out, with tragic fortitude and farcical convic-

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tion, to 'see [his] shadow' (57), his looking-glass self, in the mutable gaze of other men and precipitates himself into an increasingly self-delusory world of blurry vision and twisted reflection.¹

Illusion also operates in the theatrical presentation of Julius Caesar. The verbal network of theatrical metaphors, clichés and images, which abound in the play, especially in the earlier parts, serves to manipulate the audience's response and undermine the barriers that separate the text, stage and stalls from one another. The three-way interplay of characters, actors and spectators then gives rise to an illusory environment in which the play unfolds its intensely sober dramatic motif. The stark contrast between the motif and the milieu runs parallel with the relationship between the hero and Roman culture. To begin with, art tampers freely with history to usher in a peculiar mode of representation which tiptoes on the border of sheer anachronism. Elizabethan processions, a form of theatre themselves, are known to have been modelled after Roman triumphs.² It can be conjectured that Shakespeare derived his inspiration for the pictorial details of Roman celebrations of military victory from the contemporary progresses of sovereigns and Lord Mayors who rode through the streets of London:

Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The livelong day, with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome. . . . (1. 1. 37-42)

This is more likely to be a scene of Shakespeare's London than of Plutarch's Rome.³ Posterity makes entry under the guise of its distant

ancestry and sends rigid historicity off the stage for the theatrical effects of empathy and spontaneity.

Next, the boundary between fact and fiction is deliberately obscured, and the audience are kept uncertain which domain they are now in:

If the tag-rag people did not clap him and hiss him,
according as he pleas'd and displeas'd them,
as they use to do the players in the theatre,
I am no true man. (1. 2. 255-8)

By envisioning an imaginary theatre which faithfully copies a real one, the lines provide the audience with a double perspective of theatrical experience in which they are simultaneously at both ends of the playhouse, namely, as spectators and participants of the action. Just as Cassius does to Brutus in the play, the stage holds a fictitious mirror up to the audience who, ready to be taken in, again like Brutus, are led on to see verbally painted images of themselves embedded in the action. The queer feeling of a receding reality further deepens as the actors playing Roman politicians start to act like ‘actors’:

Let not our looks put on our purposes,
But bear it as our Roman actors do,
With untir'd spirits and formal constancy. (2. 1. 225-7)

When the professional makers of theatrical illusion become themselves in a fictional world, the illusion they are at work on grows still more illusory. Later, back in their dramatic roles, they express their anticipation of future dramatization of their deeds, which, again as actors, they are now acting out on the stage:

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn, and accents yet unknown! (3. 1. 111-13)

The present leaps into the future, or the future seeps into the present. The action, via its unique channel of theatre-within-a-theatre, travels back and forth between fact and fantasy, present and past, selfhood and otherness. As the common paradigm of time, space and identity fades, the stage is gradually turned into a neutral zone of perception where different things, and even different selves, lose their distinc-
tion. It may be inevitable that the character of Brutus, moulded against this hazy, protein dramatic background, should remain fluid and susceptible to external forces of transformation.

II

The end of Act 4 Scene 3 brings Brutus into direct contact with an unearthly creature, which 'mak'st [his] blood cold, and [his] hair to stare' (279). The ghost emerges as if taking its cue from the hero's monological murmur, 'O murd'rous slumber!' (266), for his drift into deadly ideas or topics is prone to invoke spirits, as exemplified in 'Thou, like an exorcist, hast conjur'd up / My mortified spirit' (2. 1. 323-4). Brutus, who once wished that he 'could come by Caesar's spirit' (169), somehow manages to recover his composure and confronts the ghost about its identity: 'Speak to me what thou art' (4. 3. 280). If it is Caesar's spirit, Brutus' entreaty has been amply granted. It is presumed in the theatre that the ghost bears unmistakable resemblance to Caesar and that Brutus can recognize it, at least after his initial consternation subsides and his eyes get adjusted to the darkness. He later says, 'The ghost of Caesar hath appear'd to me' (5. 5. 17), though the nocturnal visitor from the unknown country leaves its identity vague by the dubious reply of 'Thy evil spirit' (4. 3. 281).

This episode, brief, abrupt and extramundane as it is, epitomizes the dilemmas of the entire play. Primarily, visual observation cannot reveal much of the murkiness of the Roman 'spirit' or mentality, nor can verbal confrontation elucidate more. Secondly, Brutus' challenge makes clear the way the problem of identity is dealt with in Julius Caesar. What is kept persistently in dramatic focus, amid an array of well-known historical figures and events, is the humanistic concern of who Brutus is and how he comes, or more aptly, fails, to know

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himself. Exploration into his identity is launched when he is agonized by the speculation of what Caesar will be like if crowned: ‘He would be crown’d: / How that might change his nature, there’s the question’ (2. i. 12–13). By pondering and exposing Caesar’s identity, the hero indirectly and inadvertently reveals his own. Caesar, whether living or dead, remains the most reliable touchstone for examination of Brutus’s mental framework. The Ghost scene testifies to this fact by disclosing that the hero, long after he slew Caesar, is still haunted by the same problem of identity that excruciated him before the assassination. Brutus’s inner state of being is little changed by the murder.

The Ghost scene also serves to confirm and enhance the aftereffect of Cassius’ ‘glass.’ What Cassius initiated in his intrigue to eradicate Caesar is resurrected by the latter with a muffled tone of vengeance. The encounter with the ghost elicits from Brutus a remark which may bear on the social as well as personal preconditions of his tragedy: ‘I think it is the weakness of mine eyes / That shapes this monstrous apparition’ (4. 3. 275–6). Indeed, Brutus’ eyes, for all his intellect and scholarship, are helplessly ‘weak’ for seeing into the innermost workings of the human mind and the labyrinthine structure of the power game. His eyesight, or rather insight, fails him repeatedly at crucial turns of his career. Each time he misjudges people or events, he is squeezed further into the tight corner of his idealism and political naivety. Moreover, Brutus remains unable to see himself in the light of reality and historical inevitability. Rome, ravaged by incessant domestic strife, no longer cherishes republicanism as much as Brutus thinks it does; on the contrary, it yearns for a new political system equipped with powerful leadership. To meet the demand, an oligarchical polity already throbs in the womb of time, while republicanism rapidly becomes moribund. Under such circumstances, slaughtering one Caesar only entails the birth of another. Unable to foresee the

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1 Different views are expressed, for example, by M. C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare The Craftsman* (1979; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1969), and Thomas Healy, *New Latitudes: Theory and English Renaissance Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992): the former says, ‘The play is not about Caesar or Cassius or Brutus; it is about the high and palmy state of Rome’ (p. 113), while the latter remarks, ‘What Brutus or any of the characters “really are” is not the centre of their dramatic interest. The play’s interest, rather, is centred on how they act: both what they do and what they say, and the gap between the two’ (p. 45).
political consequences of his action and entangled in machinations, Brutus is bound to lose sight of himself at the crossroads of history.

Beyond the hero's personal traits, the motif of eyesight makes its presence felt on the social plane of the action. Its dominant vocabulary comprises, as expected, words which represent visual images and manifestations. The Plebeians are reprimanded for walking 'without the sign / Of [their] profession' (1.1.4-5, emphasis added). The two Tribunes, whenever they see Caesar's statues, seek to 'Disrobe the images, / If [they] do find them deck'd with ceremonies' (64-5), since Caesar 'else would soar above the view of men' (74). Hearing a soothsayer's high-pitched voice, Caesar demands to 'see his face' (1.2.20) but dismisses him as 'a dreamer' (24), though dream often foretokens reality in this play. Brutus 'forgets the shows of love to other men' (46). Cassius knows Cinna 'by his gait' (1.3.132). Since the Conspirators disguise themselves with hats and cloaks, Brutus' servant cannot recognize them 'by any mark of favour' (2.1.76). Tyranny is 'high-sighted' (118). Portia's self-inflicted wound postulates seeing as a prerequisite for believing. Friendship, when it turns sour, assumes 'an enforced ceremony' (4.2.21), while 'sober form' (40) hides wrongs. The list could be extended, but may be topped by the more prominent instance of Caesar's negative evaluation of Cassius based on his optical scrutiny of the gaunt, sullen-looking Roman. By observing that Cassius is 'a great observer' (1.2.199), Caesar displays his own flair and shrewd insight into human nature. At the same time, however, the anecdote demarcates Caesar's personal limitation. For appearance, no matter how closely observed, lays bare little of the mind's construction, and that is where the flattered Caesar commits a fatal error, as Brutus' self-accusatory comment obliquely shows:

Caes. And we, like friends, will straightway go together.
Bru. (Aside) That every like is not the same, O Caesar!
The heart of Brutus earns to think upon. (2.2.127-9)

Such a salient emphasis on the acts of 'seeing' articulates the concept of Rome as a society immersed in visual identification and signification, as a culture engrossed in grandiose façade rather than inner depth. In Julius Caesar, even matters of life or death are often placed at the mercy of cognition and understanding gained from optical observation. Shakespeare's Romans, it seems, think by the eye and
watch each other habitually. If the eyes fail and the vision proves deficient, the whole country will submerge in illusion. At the nucleus of this ethos towers Caesar, the cynosure of the Roman gaze, and its best embodiment and practitioner is his buoyant henchman, Antony, who ‘is given / To sports, to wildness, and much company’ (2.1.188–9). Brutus first enters as an obscure figure who seems to dwell in a peripheral region of the culture, harbouring more sorrow than anger about the situation. It is, however, not too long before his sorrow is changed to suspicion, discontent and self-justification.

The emulation for high visibility is the harshest and dirtiest in the world of politics where a raw desire for self-aggrandizement knows no bounds. The speech and conduct of Roman politicians are tuned to the unabashed notes of self-appraisal and stylized almost to the point of ritual and theatrical formality. Truly, theatre and ritual are integrated into the realpolitik of *Julius Caesar* as effective vehicles of propaganda, since the mightiest rely on pomp and ceremony to visualize their power. As a result, the action is rife, on one hand, with carefully arranged rituals which appeal through the eye not to reason but to passion: for example, Caesar’s triumph over Pompey’s sons celebrated in the festive mood of the Lupercal, Brutus’ presentation of a political murder in the form of religious ceremony, the Forum scene staged in ceremonial formality. ¹ On the other hand, the action teems with a variety of seemingly Romanized theatrics such as baring one’s chest to lightning, offering one’s throat to be slashed and injuring one’s own thigh to substantiate one’s devotion. Caesar can surely be counted among the best actors with his thronisnical style, albeit handicapped by his partial deafness, which at times makes him literally turn a deaf ear to the voices of truth. His directorial authority is endorsed by Antony: ‘When Caesar says, “Do this,” it is perform’d’ (1.2.10). Caesar invents his own role, plays it with panache and a little bravado, and becomes a living legend, whose naked self is buried deep in his performance. After his demise, ‘Caesar’ is

raised to the height of an emblematic role coveted and pursued by those hungry for power. The rest of the tragedy is something of a race to win the role. The ability to act and conduct ceremony thus makes up a vital part of the second nature of Roman politicians. In fact, so much acting and role-playing are involved and taken for granted in *Julius Caesar* that the characters have no idea where their acting ends and where their real selves start. The whole power struggle might be seen as a political pageant in which the major characters are ‘walking shadow[s], poor player[s]’ (*Macbeth*, 5. 4. 23) who strut and fret their hour on the stage of Rome and are heard no more—with the titular character as the only exception.

The collective preoccupation with appearance is the cause and symptom of self-alienation that grips Shakespeare’s Romans. The Roman self is split between its interior and exterior identity, each seeing the other as a strange, separate object. A corollary of this excessive self-objectification is the use of illeism, the peculiarly detached mode of denoting oneself in the third person, which is not really monopolized by Caesar but shared by many.1 Brutus describes himself as ‘poor Brutus, with himself at war’ (1. 2. 45), clearly displaying his split self, while Cassius says, ‘Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius’ (1. 3. 90). The exterior identity, in the case of politicians, remains in suppression of the interior. This may account for the alarming absence of self-criticizing awareness in the principal characters, above all Brutus, who betrays an increasingly hollow, abandoned interiority after the Temptation scene.2 Portia, in one of the subsequent scenes, expresses her apprehensions of failing to identify her husband visually: ‘And could it work so much upon your shape/... I should not know you Brutus’ (2. 1. 253–5). In addition, Brutus contracts the Roman habit of seeking or making face-saving pretexts. Caesar typically craves to protect his sanctified status from any public imputation when he requires good reason for either going

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or not going to the Senate House. Similarly, Brutus takes pains to ‘fashion’ the planned assassination, more to cajole his external self than to quell his inner qualms. He is already awash in the mainstream culture.

Overexposure to public gaze encroaches upon and gnaws at family life, which is commonly represented by women and children and assumed to be rooted in reality. *Julius Caesar* ousts children totally from its dramatic world: the characters claim that they are a child or descendant of some renowned figure, but they are not a father or mother themselves. Calphurnia’s sterility evinces the barrenness of her husband’s pursuit of power in that it promises him no hope for the future. In this tragedy, the future hinges upon not children but political heirs who are related by the bond of ambition rather than blood. Women are treated as an inferior species whose value is determined solely by its relationships with men. Portia’s identity is delineated by her ‘Being so father’d, and so husbanded’ (2.1.297). The rare personal moments Portia and Calphurnia share with their husbands are disrupted and terminated by intruders who secretly bear a political mission. Even the private quarrel between Brutus and Cassius on the warfield is interrupted by an eccentric poet who behaves in the interest of their soldiers. Private life in *Julius Caesar* is bullied into silence, into virtual extinction, by the male-dominating infrastructure of political emulation, manipulation and bloodshed.

III

As drama has spectacle and speech play into each other’s hands, so does *Julius Caesar* conjoin the illusion of vision with that of language. The play’s language, according to Anne Barton, stands in line with the oratorical heritage of Cicero, from which it derives ‘the art of persuasion.’

the elocutionary technique turns itself into an 'art of dissimulation.' Under the cover of buffoonery, the opening scene demonstrates tellingly that a slight shift of focus in a discourse renders comprehension of even the simplest words extremely difficult. The word 'cobbler,' qualified only by the phrase 'in respect of a fine workman' (i. 1. 10), slips away from its primary sense of 'shoemaker' and into its secondary sense of 'bungler.' The semantic swerve leaves the two Tribunes astray in the track of communication, while the Cobbler feels elated by his manipulation of the socially superior listeners through his witty use of language. What matters dramatically here is that the latter succeeds in 'verbally' hiding his professional identity, which is also obscured 'visually' by his having 'no sign of his profession.'

The crude example is carried over into the next scene, where it is polished immensely and developed into an art. In his efforts to persuade Brutus to conspire with him, Cassius intermingles the illusions of language and vision to his best advantage. Hecalculatingly meddles with the identities of Caesar, Brutus and his own and, with a magician's dexterity, casts a spell of illusion over the hero. He first places himself on a par with Caesar: 'I had as lief not be as live to be / In awe of such a thing as I myself' (i. 2. 95-9). But he knows that he himself cannot become Caesar and yet suspects that Brutus could and would: all he needs to do is to talk the unpolitical hero into the political role of Caesar. Cassius then, with utmost caution and tenacity, compares Brutus and Caesar in various ways, pronouncing their names in that order as much as he can:

Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that "Caesar"?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;
Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em,
"Brutus" will start a spirit as soon as "Caesar." (i. 2. 140-5)

This falters the noble Brutus. For who, among Romans, would not feel flattered upon hearing that he stands abreast with Caesar? Still early in the action, Brutus already looms like a 'shadow' of Caesar.

The Temptation scene initiates a pattern in which two names are juxtaposed and set to emulate for domination and survival, with a
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winner absorbing the essential quality of the other's identity. Part of Caesar's persona is usurped by Brutus in Act II Scene 1, where the hero grows aggressive and opinionated to the exclusion of his introversion and indecisiveness. The Forum scene completes the pattern of transferred identities with the shouts of Plebeians:

3 Pleb. Let him be Caesar.
4 Pleb. Caesar's better parts
Shall be crown'd in Brutus. (3. 2. 52-3)

Brutus is installed, ironically, in the very role he rigorously sought to abolish in behalf of the republican cause. The word 'crown'd' even evokes the image of Brutus seizing hold of what Caesar lusted for but feigned in public not to look interested in—kingship. The dramatic tables are turned upon Brutus, who was once 'Caesar's angel' (3. 2. 183) but now has Caesar as his 'evil spirit.' The political ceremony he has administered is over, and he is in his turn to be sought after as a sacrifice for a new political ritual presided over by those who claim Caesar's legacies of power and wealth.2

Back in the Temptation scene, Cassius moves on to compare Brutus and himself: 'If I were Brutus now, and he were Cassius, / He should not humour me' (1. 2. 311-2). The speech is intended syntactically to accentuate the difference between the two characters, but it also generates a semantic illusion in which the two names, pronounced side by side, grow analogous and interchangeable. Soon after Caesar describes Cassius as one who does not 'sleep a-nights' (190) since he 'thinks too much' (192), Brutus enters absorbed in meditation. His appearance is a duplication of Cassius' pensiveness and insomniac weariness: 'Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar, / I have not slept' (2. 1. 61-2). Moreover, when he opposes the proposal to admit Cicero into the conspiratorial group for the reason that the elder statesman 'will never follow any thing / That other men begin'


Brutus embodies the picture of Cassius being ‘never at heart’s ease / Whiles [he] behold[st] a greater than [himself]’ (1. 2. 205–6). In the ensuing relationship between Brutus and Cassius, the shadow soon outgrows the limited space of the mirror and cracks it. As Cassius lets his fate become engulfed in the vortex of Brutus’ expanding ego, the manipulator turns into a docile follower and the shadow walks abroad under the assumed name of entity. Cassius’ spell of illusion over the hero turns out too potent and goes out of his control: Cassius never again succeeds in persuading Brutus.

The next source of influence over Brutus’ transformation is his wife. Portia, a paragon of the weaker vessel and quintessence of female virtue, conceals her real self and strives to behave like a man towards Brutus in the hope that her little acting may enkindle spiritual masculinity in her troubled and despondent husband. She changes herself into a desirable shadow of Brutus, into a mirror-image she wishes to be superimposed on him, by juxtaposing and identifying herself with him: ‘. . . me, your self, your half’ (2. 1. 274) and again ‘Am I your self. . . ?’ (282). When her spiritual strength is transmitted to Brutus, Portia returns to her original self, a powerless, timorous soul resigned to her own feminine inferiority. All she can do on her second appearance is to wait and worry over the outcome of her husband’s political gamble. After that, her dramatic role as a living personage is all finished. The news of her death is reported in a later scene merely as a foil to the battles of masculine egos.

Antony meekly plays his humble role as a debauche, as ‘but a limb of Caesar’ (2. 1. 165), until the principal leaves the stage of life. The Forum scene unveils Antony’s hitherto hidden talents for rhetoric and tragic acting as well as his ambition. He is pitted against Brutus, with whom he fights a bout of vision and language. Antony deploys both means at his will during his funeral oration, while his rival resorts only to the power of language. After Brutus’ speech becalms the disturbed citizens, Antony transforms them into an uncontrollable mob by means of visual presentation of Caesar’s mangled body and oral presentation of his will. At one point in his delivery, Antony juggles Brutus’ identity with his own in order to augment the stage effects of his performance and manipulate his audience:

But were I Brutus,
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And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny. (3. 2. 228-12)

Antony slides himself behind Brutus’ shadow and filches it. Accordingly, Brutus slips from the exalted status of the Caesar reborn to the disgraceful role of a mirror in which Antony finds an enlarging reflection of himself as an indisputable successor to Caesar. Perhaps the transition takes place earlier, as Maurice Charney points out, when Brutus gives Antony Caesar’s body: ‘Mark Antony, here, take you Caesar’s body’ (3. 1. 244). Fortune ceases to smile at Brutus and starts to be merry with Antony. But the role of Caesar never stays too long in one hand in this play. Antony’s luck is destined to be short-lived as Fortune, with her notorious fickleness, already beckons her real darling into the centre stage of Roman politics. Young Octavius allies himself with Antony, silently snatches Brutus’ habit of refutation and self-assertion, and designates himself without any restraint as ‘another Caesar’ (5. 1. 54). It is also he who is to absorb the survivors of Brutus’ army after the war of Philippi, as if he were a sole winner.

IV

Caesar’s downfall plunges Rome into a state of anarchy. The dogs of war are unleashed and run afoul of Roman virtue and decorum. The established code of life crumbles, to be replaced by a transient system of violence and subversion. The cult and culture of visual identification are entombed with the body of their martyred champion. The first victim of the turmoil is Cinna the poet, whose dream of dining with Caesar forebodes his sharing the same fate as the tyrant. Lured out into a street by an uncanny feeling, he is surrounded and questioned by a group of citizens, whose agitation already incapacitates them from distinguishing him from Cinna the conspirator. The hapless poet cannot be recognized by sight nor his frantic proclamation of his identity listened to. The cataclysmic change in politics has deprived the Plebeians of their sight, the poet of his voice, and the

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society of rational communication. The atrocious murder of Cinna is unsettlingly symbolic in view of Sir Philip Sidney’s defence of a poet as a better guide for understanding Nature than a philosopher or a historian. Without a spiritual guide, Rome can hardly prevent itself from degenerating further into the state of dehumanization, which is featured in the next scene. Placed between the Forum scene (3. 2) and the Proscription scene (4. 1), the Cinna episode (3. 3) serves as the watershed of the action in terms of its cultural and psychical implications.

A warning to this doomed culture and political modus operandi is issued as early as when the Conspirators convene at Brutus’ house (2. 1). While the hero is engaged in serious discussion with Cassius, Casca, Decius and Cinna fall to conversing about where east lies. A question immediately arises: what is the dialogue meant for? A cursory glance may find it only loosely connected with, if not totally irrelevant to, the plot. Norman Sanders holds that it embraces such varied stage functions as to cover the whispered discussion between Brutus and Cassius, to remind the audience of the dawning of the Ides of March, to let Casca point his sword at the Capitol where he is to stab Caesar first, etc. It also aims, perhaps, at stirring up the subtle image of Brutus as the rising sun and the rest of the Conspirators as ‘messengers of the day’ (2. 1. 104), though the hero’s earlier association of conspiracy with darkness (77–85) is incongruous with the image. It is noteworthy that Brutus’ salutary address to his guests which precedes the dialogue includes ‘What worshipful cares do interpose themselves / Betwixt your eyes and night?’ (98–9). The italicized words align the seemingly wayward episode of geographical directions with the motif of seeing and ascribe its primary function, as Sidney Homan rightly contends, to accentuating ‘optical distortion’ (p. 90), to foreshadowing the unreliability of eyesight. In this play, human reality is so elusive for the eye, so fleeting for the tongue, that nothing can be seen and described as real, let alone true. Cicero’s earlier re-

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3 Sidney Homan, op. cit., p. 90.
mark that ‘... men may construe things, after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves’ (1. 3. 34-5) leaves its cynical echo not in this specific scene alone but also in other parts of the action and even in any attempt to interpret the tragedy.

Act IV provides a glimpse of the two camps in the aftermath of the political upheaval. The Proscription scene portrays Antony and Octavius trading the lives of their friends and relatives nonchalantly for their political gains. Antony is depicted as a cold-blood schemer, especially through his flinty treatment of Lepidus, and Octavius as an ever cool, eerily matured young man. Unlike his uncle, Octavius possesses an eye sharp enough to read the tide of times and discern dangers that lurk in specious demeanour: ‘...some that smile have in their hearts, I fear, / Millions of mischiefs’ (4. 1. 50-1). The sham, strategical alliance formed between Antony and Octavius presents a striking contrast to a shift that takes place in the partnership of Brutus and Cassius. When the hero’s intractable rectitude clashes once again with Cassius’ down-to-earth policy, honour is recapitulated as the subject of their vehement argument. Neither of them hesitates to pawn his life on his moral probity and personal integrity. It is Cassius’ candidness that eventually enables them to patch up their discord and thereby to consolidate their comradeship, while a chasm remains unbridgeable in the other camp. Cassius in the Wrangle scene is a far cry from the Cassius of Act 1, and the change is predicted by Pindar at the beginning of the scene: ‘I do not doubt / But that my noble master will appear / Such as he is, full of regard and honour’ (4. 2. 10-12). Cassius’ bombastic gesture of baring his chest to a naked dagger might imply that he is unknowingly in the act of casting off his social persona and stripping himself down to his pristine self. The drastic modification in the characterization of Cassius paves the way for reinstatement of the fallen hero in the Denouement.²

Anticipation of an ending mounts in Brutus’ camp. Cassius, the architect of illusion and mastermind of Brutus’ misguided quest of self-knowledge, falls into the trap he set for Brutus: the perpetrator becomes a victim of his own trade. When he lets Titinius jockey his horse for a mission of reconnaissance, Cassius in a sense sanctions

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appropriation by his friend of part of his dramatic role. His identity, at least as a soldier, departs from him in the form of horse, which is one of the few things he can be identified by on a battlefield. Then he orders Pindarus to go up a hill and see what happens to Titinius, because ‘[his] sight was ever thick’ (5. 3. 21). It is finally revealed that the visionary cannot see well: the audience are reminded that, in *Julius Caesar*, what is seen is not always what is actual. Time has come when Cassius has to reap what he sowed, and now it is he who is in need of a mirror to see his circumstances by reflection. Pindarus turns out a disastrously faulty mirror which leads Cassius’ life to be sealed with the embarrassing misunderstanding of victory for defeat, friends for enemies. Titinius mournfully utters later, ‘Alas, thou hast misconstrued every thing’ (84), but there is a lingering impression that Cassius is an overreacher who has misconstrued himself most grossly of all things. Cato says with a smack of pathos, ‘Look where he (i.e. Titinius) have not crown’d dead Cassius’ (96). The man who was unable to become Caesar is ‘crowned’ only posthumously. Execution of Caesar’s revenge upon Cassius is hinted by a bizarre affinity in their manners of death: Cassius dies by the same dagger that he used to slay Caesar while covering his face exactly like Caesar. Both Romans refuse to see the last phase of their lives.

Cassius’ death arouses an acute sense of circularity or cyclicality. He is released from the bond of life on the day of his birth:

This day I breathed first. Time is come round,
And where I did begin, there shall I end.
My life is run his compass. (5. 3. 23–5)

Pindarus, who assisted Cassius’ suicide, is himself emancipated from the bond of thralldom upon his master’s death. As the action hurries to its close, things start to return to where they originally were. The task which was commenced at the dawn of the Ides of March is about to be concluded as the day of the decisive battle wanes into twilight. Nighttime, which spawned and sheltered the conspiracy, comes around to bid adieu to it. The trajectory of the action is also cyclical with the rises and falls of Pompey, Caesar, and Cassius.\(^1\) What remains to

be staged is the cathartic ritual of a tragedy, the death of a hero and the chanting of a eulogy and valedictory.

What has befallen Cassius repeats itself on Brutus in the final scene. The Plains of Philippi, embroiled in the clamours of battle, become an arena for contestation between identity and eyesight. Names, titles, epithets and pedigrees are declared to provoke attention, but self-declaration is employed here for both purposes of persuasion and deception, revelation and camouflage. There is no sure and immediate way to ascertain who is who when an identity is traded or swapped in secret between its owner and its claimant. The eye, unable to see through the confounded situation, falls a prey to misidentification. Young Cato proclaims himself as ‘... the son of Marcus Cato, ho! / A foe to tyrants, and my country’s friend’ (5. 4. 4–5). Then follows Lucilius with the yell, ‘And I am Brutus, Marcus Brutus, I! / Brutus, my country’s friend; know me for Brutus!’ (7–8). The former’s genuine self-proclamation helps to heighten the verisimilitude of the latter’s pretense of being Brutus. Lucilius volunteers to impersonate the hero to distract the enemy, and his amateurish acting achieves its aim. Brutus runs away unscathed, abandoning his dramatic identity to his friend, who prophetically announces to Antony after being taken prisoner: ‘When you do find him, or alive or dead, / He will be found like Brutus, like himself’ (24–5). Now bereft of his looking-glass self and social persona, Brutus readies himself for ‘a deed in fashion’ (5. 5. 5). His request for assistance in killing himself is turned down by three of his friends, but he finds an agent of Death in Strato when he wakes the servant up from death-like sleep.

The moments of anagnorisis that visit most heroes of Shakespearean tragedies elude Brutus.1 The cultural and spiritual climate of Rome, in collaboration with his personal limitations, never allows him to awaken to his tragic experience, to his own flaws and errors. His words in retrospect—‘My heart doth joy that yet in all my life / I found no man but he was true to me’ (5. 5. 34–5)—hark back to the Temptation scene and underscore his gullibility, although they secure some

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dramatic plausibility through the presence of the poignantly reclaimed Cassius. Given the social and moral degradation of Rome, Brutus' lack of recognition seems more a blessing than a blight, and he continues to savour the grace of nearsightedness to the end. The imminent embrace of Death casts light upon another type of illusion that mesmerizes the hero, an illusion of grander scale and deadlier charm whose victims end up as either a hero or a fool. It originates, as a matter of fact, in the Temptation scene, in Cassius' manipulative moves. Cassius, by blinding Brutus' eyes to the inner landscape of his being, actually opens them to a new vista of life. He mentions to the hero that 'Men at some time are masters of their fates' (1.2.137). Suprisingly, this stereotyped idea leaves an indelible mark on Brutus' mind and contributes to his motivation toward action. It constitutes the metaphysical undercurrent of his political commitment. He chooses, at Cassius' instigation, to be a maker rather than a chronicler of his life's history, an actor and director rather than a spectator of a political pageant. In other words, Cassius does to Brutus what the Witches do to Macbeth. Involvement in the affairs of men catapults Brutus into a determined chase after the affairs of immortals. Notice what he cries out amid the mayhem in the wake of Caesar's 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)

The gauntlet is thrown down against the unseen adversary. Not indulging in the culmination of his career, Brutus looks to the time when he can unfold the ultimate design of his destiny. He recognizes that, by spilling blood, he himself has stepped into the shadow of death.

A pivotal point in Brutus' metaphysical (and typically Renaissance) undertaking arrives in the Wrangle scene, in which he learns to come to terms with death by virtue of Cassius' readiness to die and the news of the deaths of senators and Portia. Prior to the battle, Brutus defies the oppression of the thickening mood of uncertainty and, as if guided by Caesar's fatalistic view of death as 'a necessary end' (2.2.36),

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braces himself for a final confrontation with fate:

O, that a man might know
The end of this day’s business ere it come!
But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known. (5. 1. 123–6)

Now the end is known. Brutus’ pursuit of fate, though far short of Macbeth’s monomaniac one, has been arduous and single-minded in its own right, as manifested in ‘... my bones would rest, / That have but labour’d to attain this hour’ (5. 5. 41–2), and has brought him to the point where no mortal can go any further, to the end of his life’s history. When ‘Night hangs upon [his] eyes’ (41), he rivets his sights upon death and, without covering his face, dashes triumphantly, almost rapturously, against the dagger which once went into Caesar’s body. Brutus has acted out his untainted self-image as one that has never been an ‘underling,’ as ‘master of his own fate.’ Indeed, ‘... Brutus only overcame himself’ (56). The tale of a grand illusion closes, without even a touch of disillusionment on the part of the hero.

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