INTRODUCTION

Date

There is little doubt among scholars today that *Julius Caesar* was written in 1599. Although the play appeared in print for the first time in the First Folio (1623) – see the Textual Analysis, p. 172 below – there is no entry for it in the Stationers' Register, and the earliest estimates (starting with those of Edward Capell and Edmond Malone in the late eighteenth century and continuing for about a hundred years) placed it among the later plays, about 1607.[1] The evidence for the precise earlier dating is considerable and varied. Direct and indirect, external and internal, it reflects many of the facets of the procedure for determining the chronology of Shakespeare's plays.

The *terminus a quo*, it must be admitted, has been established on the basis of rather scant, even negative, evidence. The play is not mentioned in Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* (1598) among the comedies and tragedies for which '*Shakespeare* among the English is the most excellent', a fact which many find revealing, considering how popular a play *Julius Caesar* evidently was.[2] But Meres also fails to mention other plays which had preceded the publication of his work: the *Henry VI* trilogy, *The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor*, perhaps even *2 Henry IV*. And there is little reason to believe that Meres purported to be exhaustive or even accurate: his choice of six comedies and six tragedies, for example, seems to suggest rhetorical balance rather than an attempt to list Shakespeare's complete works.

Attempts to find clues in contemporary works that Shakespeare may have echoed have been frequent but not wholly accepted. Most often cited are lines from Samuel Daniel's *Musophilus*, published in 1599:

> And who in time knowes whither we may vent
> The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores
> This gaine of our best glorie shal be sent,
> T'inrich vnknowing Nations with our stores?
> What worlds in th'yet vnformed Occident
> May come refin'd with th'accents that are ours? –

which are thought to resemble Cassius's

> How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown! (3.1.111–13)

[1] A convenient recapitulation of opinions up to 1910 is to be found in Furness, p. 292.

[2] Evidence of its popularity is most often deduced from the commendatory verses by Leonard Digges, which are believed to have been intended for inclusion in the Folio but appeared later in the 1640 edition of Shakespeare's *Poems*.

And from John Davies's *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), especially the comparison of

> Mine *Eyes*, which view all obiects, nigh and farre,
> Looke not into this litle world of mine,
> Nor see my face, wherein they fixed are

with Shakespeare's 1.2.51–8. If this 'parallel' were not already questionable, Dover Wilson's (p. 109) adding of further examples of the same idea in the same poem strains the credibility of the attempt:

> All things without, which round about we see,
> We seeke to know, and how therewith to do:
> But that whereby we *reason, liue, and be*,
> Within our selues, we strangers are thereto . . .
>
> Is it because the minde is like the eye,
> (Through which it gathers knowledge by degrees,)
> Whose rayes reflect not, but spread outwardly,
> Not seeing it selfe, when other things it sees?

These examples only help establish the sentiment as a commonplace, one not unsurprisingly found in Tilley and Dent (see Commentary, 1.2.52–3). Recent additions to Wilson's list are perforce likewise highly speculative.[1] Finally, even while suggesting parallels between lines 1995–6 of the anonymous *A Warning for Faire Women* (1599) and the wounds that will speak (3.1.259–61, 3.2.215–16), Humphreys sensibly admits that the 'simile was not uncommon and its occurrence in both plays may be mere coincidence' (p. 2).

Stylistic or internal evidence, by nature less conclusive than hard facts or other external evidence, is of slight help. In analysing Shakespeare's vocabulary, for example, Alfred Hart notes many peculiarities: '*Julius Caesar* has a smaller vocabulary than any other play of Shakespeare except *Two Gentlemen* and *Comedy of Errors*, which is seven hundred lines shorter. It has the lowest number of both peculiar and compound words and makes a contribution to the vocabulary of the poet smaller than that made by any other play except *Pericles* and *Henry VIII*; both of these plays are only Shakespeare's in part.' However, he sees no connection with the chronology of the plays, except somewhat indirectly in attributing the spareness to Shakespeare's coming 'about 1598–9 . . . for a time under the influence of Jonson and his theories of dramatic art and literary composition'.[2] A study of line length is equally unrewarding. 'In that singular tragedy, *Julius Caesar*, the upwelling spring of the poet's plenty seems to have dried up, but the drought may have been intentional',[3] Hart concludes, but although he does not hesitate to alter Chambers's chronology – for example, placing *The Merry Wives* after *Henry V* and before *Julius Caesar* – he accepts the position of *Julius Caesar*. Given the nature of this kind of evidence, it is not surprising that the play may be considered 'very early' because some passages are very 'stiff',[4] somewhat later because of the just-mentioned influence

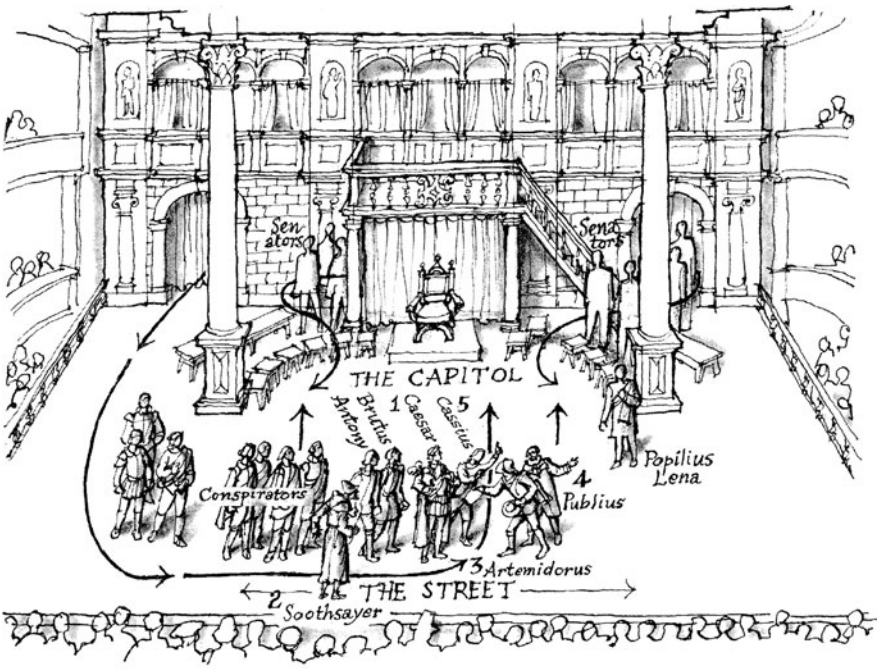
[1] See, for example, Gary Taylor, '*Musophilus*, *Nosce Teipsum*, and *Julius Caesar*', *N&Q* 229 (1984), 191–5.
[2] Alfred Hart, 'Vocabularies of Shakespeare's plays', *RES* 19 (1943), 135.
[3] Alfred Hart, 'The growth of Shakespeare's vocabulary', *RES* 19 (1943), 254.
[4] E. H. C. Oliphant, 'Shakspere's plays: an examination. III', *MLR* 4 (1908–9), 191.

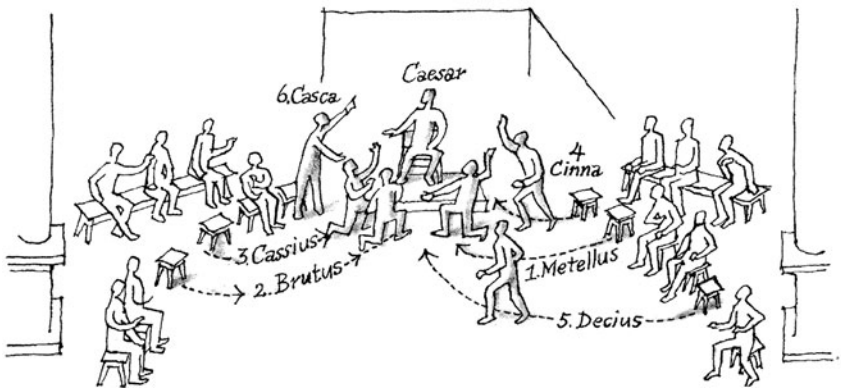
of Jonson, or even as late as 1607 because of its resemblance to the other Roman plays (a view first advocated by Capell) or its similarity to (or confusion with) other plays of the time, like Malone's mentioning of William Alexander's *Julius Caesar* or the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge*.

Metrical analyses have also been inconclusive or noncommittal. Kerrl places the first act of *Julius Caesar* after *The Merchant of Venice* and perhaps at the same time as *2 Henry IV*, but Acts 2–5 between *Henry V* and *Hamlet*;[1] according to the criteria of Ingram, however, *Julius Caesar* belongs between *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*.[2] In the most recent detailed study, Dorothy Sipe summarises stylistic, phonological, and lexical implications, but makes no assertions at all about chronology (even, for the sake of coherence with the *OED*, being obliged to accept its now questionable chronological order).[3] Likewise, although *Julius Caesar* has fewer lines of rhyme (24) than any other play in the canon, no convincing attempt has been made to apply the data to the chronology: Ness's conclusion is that 'Shakespeare came to reserve rhyme for particular effects. Where the play seemed to require these effects, there the rhyme was used, whether the play was written in 1600 or in 1610.'[4] Finally, imagery studies deal but slightly with *Julius Caesar* since it is generally agreed that it contains relatively few images or image patterns or clusters: Spurgeon devotes little more than a page to the entire piay; Armstrong cites it but five times.[5] As a rule, the recurrence of the content and structure of imagery throughout Shakespeare's career is studied rather than its use as a marker for a particular period.

A stronger case has been made for the *terminus ad quem*, for the external evidence is considerable, even if not totally verifiable. The main document is the report of the Swiss traveller Thomas Platter, who visited England from 18 September to 20 October 1599: 'On the 21st of September, after dinner, at about two o'clock, I went with my party across the water; in the straw-thatched house we saw the tragedy of the first Emperor Julius Caesar, very pleasingly performed, with approximately fifteen characters.'[6] Chambers's evaluation of this information as 'fairly definitely' fixing the date of production has been accepted by almost all scholars in this century: 'He [Platter] does not name the Globe, but the theatre was south of the river, and the Swan was probably not in regular use. The Rose no doubt was, but as the Admiral's had new Caesar plays in 1594–5 and again in 1602, they are not very likely to have been staging one in 1599. Platter's "at least fifteen characters" agrees fairly with *Julius Caesar*, on the assumption that he disregarded a number of inconspicuous parts.'[7] Ernest Schanzer's 'word of caution about the use of

[1] Anna Kerrl, *Die metrischen Unterschiede von Shakespeares King John und Julius Caesar: Eine chronologische Untersuchung*, 1913, p. 152.
[2] John K. Ingram, 'On the "weak endings" of Shakspere, with some account of the history of the verse-tests in general', *New Shakspere Society Transactions* 1 (1874), 450.
[3] Dorothy L. Sipe, *Shakespeare's Metrics*, 1968.
[4] Frederic W. Ness, *The Use of Rhyme in Shakespeare's Plays*, 1941, p. 109.
[5] Edward A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Imagination*, 1946.
[6] The literal translation appears in Ernest Schanzer, 'Thomas Platter's observations on the Elizabethan stage', *N&Q* 201 (1956), 466. The German text, reprinted by E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 2 vols., 1930, II, 322, is first discussed by Gustav Binz, 'Londoner Theater und Schauspiele im Jahre 1599', *Anglia* 22 (1899), 462.
[7] Chambers, *Shakespeare*, I, 397.





1 A likely Elizabethan staging of Act 3, Scene 1, drawn by C. Walter Hodges
a Caesar's way towards the Capitol: (1) The Ides of March are come. (2) Ay, Caesar, but not gone. (3) Hail, Caesar! Read this schedule. (4) Sirrah, give place. (5) What, urge you your petitions in the street? Come to the Capitol. (6) I wish your enterprise today may thrive
b The Senate being seated, the conspirators approach Caesar from their places one by one

Platter's evidence in attempting to date the composition and first performances' (p. 466) – based on his view that the Rose might also fit the description, that the Admiral's might well have had Caesar plays if they were so popular, and that Shakespeare's play has over forty speaking parts – has led at best to a certain qualification rather than a challenging of Chambers's conclusion.

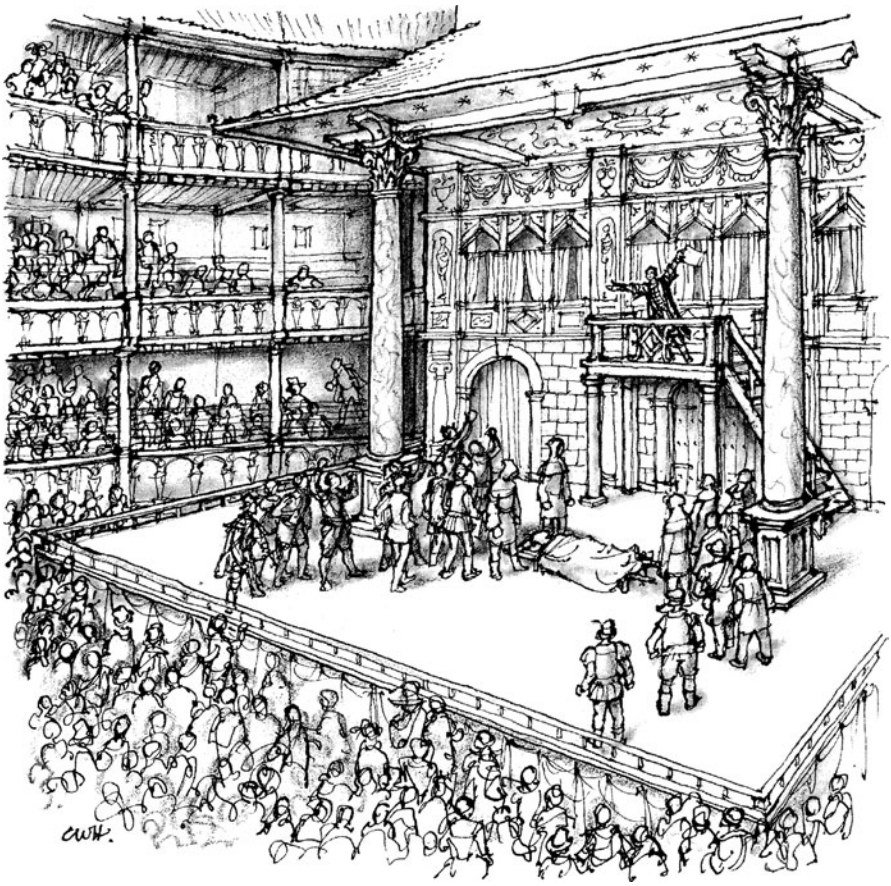
All agree with Chambers that the 'date of 1599 fits in well with other evidence',[1] which consists in the main of an ever-increasing number of possible allusions – called rather indiscriminately 'echoes', 'quotations', 'paraphrases', 'reminiscences', 'parallels', and the like – to *Julius Caesar* found in contemporary works. Halliwell (p. 374) was the first to mention lines from John Weever's *Mirror of Martyrs*, published in 1601 but which, as its dedication avers, was 'some two yeares agoe . . . made fit for the Print':

> The many-headed multitude were drawne
> By *Brutus* speach, that *Caesar* was ambitious,
> When eloquent *Mark Antonie* had showne
> His vertues, who but *Brutus* then was vicious?

A bit later, F. G. Fleay, arguing unconvincingly that Ben Jonson altered and abridged Shakespeare's play,[2] may have inadvertently instigated what is considered by many as telling confirmation: in a mocking context in *Every Man Out of His Humour* (5.6.79) Jonson seems to be repeating Shakespeare's unhistorical '*Et tu, Brute*' (3.1.77). A second reference from the same play of 1599, '*Reason long since is fled to animals*' (3.4.33), is now almost unhesitatingly accepted as an 'obvious quotation' if not a parody of Shakespeare's 'O judgement, thou art fled to brutish beasts, / And men have lost their reason' (3.2.96–7). Dorsch (pp. viii–x) summarises the host of further allusions from works written within a few years after *Julius Caesar*: among them are Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, *Timber*, and *A Staple of News*, as well as the anonymous *The Wisdom of Dr Dodypoll* (1600), Samuel Nicholson's poem *Acolastus his Afterwitte* (1600), Michael Drayton's *The Barons' Wars* (1603), Philip Massinger and John Fletcher's *T*[*ragedy*] *of Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt*. Among numerous others, Wilson (NS, p. x) adds lines 26–8 of the prologue of Act 5 of *Henry V*, to suggest that Shakespeare was 'studying' Plutarch in 1599.

Ironically, the more allusions offered, the less convincing the attempt to fix the date. For one thing, there is little agreement on the exact nature of the illustrations: Chambers, for example, calls the second Jonson reference a 'quotation',[3] Dorsch an 'echo' (p. viii), Evans a 'paraphrase' (p. 53). For another, there is not always agreement on the evaluation of the allusions: in one of many instances, Simpson considers the second Jonson reference 'less certain',[4] whereas Chambers finds it 'obvious'.[5] Finally, the content of the allusions tends to be general, almost proverbial or axiomatic. The widespread appearance of such passages may be attributable to Shakespeare's

[1] Chambers, *Shakespeare*, I, 397.
[2] F. G. Fleay, 'On two plays of Shakspere's: Part II. *Julius Caesar*', *New Shakspere Society Transactions* I (1874), 357–66.
[3] Chambers, *Shakespeare*, I, 245.
[4] Percy Simpson, 'The date of Shakspeare's "Julius Caesar"', *N&Q* 54 (1899), 106.
[5] Chambers, *Shakespeare*, I, 397.



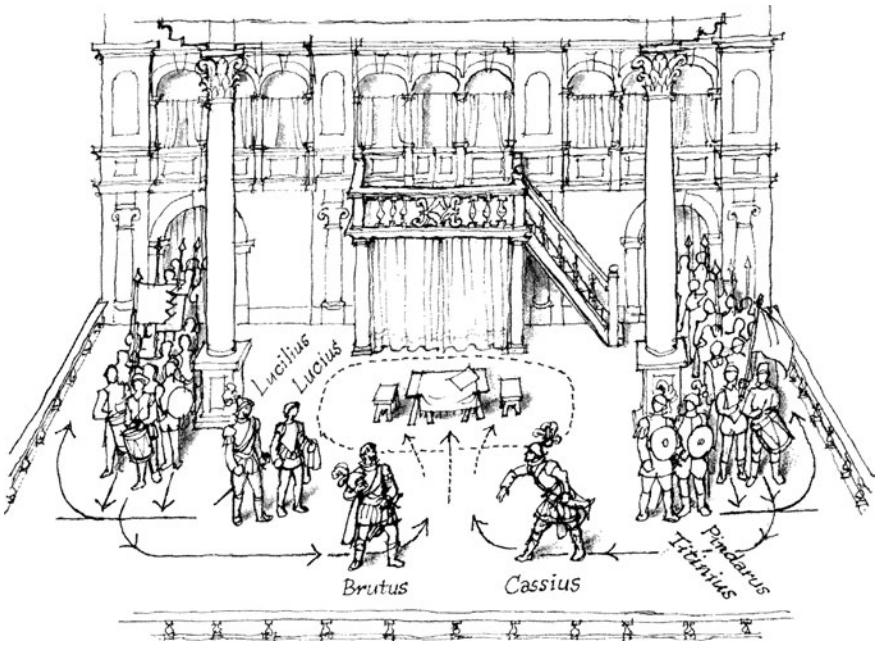
2 'You will compel me then to read the will? Antony's funeral oration, Act 3, Scene 2: a suggested Elizabethan staging, by C. Walter Hodges

popularity, but it may just as well be the result of the Elizabethan fondness for commonplaces and *sententiae*.

Though abundant and various, the direct evidence for the precise dating of *Julius Caesar* is not completely conclusive. The weight of the evidence is, however, undeniable. The necessary caveat, 'in all probability', having been supplied or not, scholars seem determined to have 1599 as the year in which *Julius Caesar* was written. There is no reason to disagree.

Sources

Dealing with Shakespeare's sources calls to mind Diogenes' stroll across the market-place: he was pleasantly surprised, it is said, that there were so many articles he had no need of. That Shakespeare employed sources is indisputable; that he employed or was



3 'Most noble brother, you have done me wrong.' The meeting of Brutus and Cassius, Act 4, Scenes 2 and 3: a possible Elizabethan staging, by C. Walter Hodges

influenced by as many as have been proposed is, however, another matter. Or, to put it another way, distinctions are necessary if the contours of Shakespeare's craft are to be sharply defined and the contributions of the prodigious industry of Shakespearean scholarship fairly evaluated. As with many other concerns, less may in the long run be more.

The indisputable main source of *Julius Caesar* is Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (1579), more specifically, the lives of Caesar and Brutus (large sections of which are reproduced in the Appendix, pp. 178–207 below) and to a much slighter extent of Antony and perhaps Cicero. That they were directly and consciously used by Shakespeare, that they may be called 'sources', is clear not merely from the events portrayed but especially from the structuring, phrasing, vocabulary, and other stylistic characteristics which Shakespeare seems to have consciously adopted or modified. The distinction between sheer content and particular style must be stressed because, obviously, historical information of the kind that Shakespeare most frequently uses – the 'story', as it were – was part of the common heritage; in the unlikely event that Shakespeare did not know the broad outlines of the assassination of Caesar and its consequences, if he had been asleep on the school benches of Stratford, he could have had recourse to the 'story' in any number of contemporary histories or dramas.

Unfortunately, simplicity is not always in favour. The scholarship dealing with

Shakespeare's possible 'sources' is voluminous: W. C. Hazlitt's modestly sized six-volume *Shakespeare's Library* (1875) has given way in this century to Geoffrey Bullough's generous eight-volume *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957–75); whole volumes have been devoted to single influences, like *Shakespeare's Holinshed, Shakespeare's Ovid, Shakespeare's Plutarch, Shakespeare's Appian*, and to particular subjects, like *Shakespeare and the Classics, Shakespeare and the Greek Romance, Classical Mythology in Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge*. There are book-length studies dealing, each in its own way, with Shakespeare's treatment of 'sources': T. W. Baldwin's *William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (1944), Virgil Whitaker's *Shakespeare's Use of Learning* (1953), Kenneth Muir's *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (1977; supplanting his *Shakespeare's Sources*, 1957), relevant sections of Reuben A. Brower's *Hero & Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (1971), Emrys Jones's *The Origins of Shakespeare* (1977), Robert S. Miola's *Shakespeare's Rome* (1983).

The matter is a difficult one. Who can decide what books Shakespeare actually had in his hand, what pages he turned, and what he made direct use of? Who can estimate what he actually read, retained, and assimilated, copying it out or drawing it up when needed from the recesses of memory? Who can say what was just 'in the air', what conversations, events, acquaintances, experiences contributed to his work? Who can say with certainty what were simply commonplaces, clichés, locutions of the trade if not of the time? Who can draw the line between 'foreground' and 'background'? What is a 'source', what is an 'influence'? What is fact, what is speculation? Those seminal questions cannot be answered here,[1] but they reflect the directions which Shakespeare scholarship has taken and must preface a discussion of the 'sources' of *Julius Caesar*, or any other Shakespeare play for that matter.

The heaviest concentration of research has, naturally, been on Shakespeare's use of North's translation of Plutarch's lives of Caesar and Brutus. More than a hundred years of almost microscopic comparison – Stapfer (1880), Delius (1882), MacCallum (1910), Honigmann (1959), Schanzer (1963), Bullough (1964), Maguin (1973), Homan (1976),[2] among many others, as well as extensive treatment in numerous editions, like Macmillan (1902), Wilson (1949), Dorsch (1955), Humphreys (1984) –has shown such detailed and convincing overlapping that it is easy to understand Muir's frank 'there is little new to be said on the subject'.[3] Indeed, all the nooks and crannies have been

[1] They have been discussed by various critics. See, for example, G. K. Hunter, 'Shakespeare's reading', in *A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Kenneth Muir and S. Schoenbaum, 1971, pp. 55–66. F. P. Wilson, 'Shakespeare's reading', *S.Sur.* 3 (1950), 14–21, gives an instructive example of the commonplace that is Hamlet's 'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so' (p. 19). The most recent and probing treatment is Robert S. Miola, 'Shakespeare and his sources: observations on the critical history of *Julius Caesar*', *S.Sur.* 40 (1987), 69–76.

[2] Paul Stapfer, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, trans. Emily J. Carey, 1880; Nicolaus Delius, 'Shakespeare's Julius Caesar und seine Quellen im Plutarch', *SJ* 17 (1882), 67–81; M. W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and their Background*, 1910; E. A. J. Honigmann, 'Shakespeare's Plutarch', *SQ* 10 (1959), 25–33; Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, 1963; Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols., 1957–75; Jean-Marie Maguin, 'Preface to a critical approach to *Julius Caesar*', *CahiersE* 4 (1973), 15–49; Sidney Homan, 'Dion, Alexander and Demetrius – Plutarch's forgotten *Parallel Lives* – as mirrors for *Julius Caesar*', *S.St.* 8 (1976), 195–210.

[3] Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, 1957, p. 187. In the 1977 version, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, Muir omits the assertion.

searched and illuminated. And the long selections reprinted in the Appendix (pp. 178–207 below) should make Shakespeare's debt immediately obvious and also illuminate the special talents and insights of both the popular dramatist and the moral historian, for it is natural that many treatments of Shakespeare and Plutarch tend to highlight differences, showing Shakespeare at work, the artist absorbing, adapting, modifying, departing within the inescapable frame of historical precedent. For Shakespeare's task (like Plutarch's) was not mainly to reconstruct the past but to superimpose the past upon the present, to make it a contemporary event, a kind of play-within-the-play, a piece of theatre within the *theatrum mundi*.

It is agreed that North's translation of Plutarch was Shakespeare's most carefully almost pedantically, followed source. History is history – at least in its general outlines. Thus Shakespeare had no choice but to follow the general outlines of the well-known story (a story found in other easily available works as well, like Appian and Suetonius) from the triumph of Munda in October 45 BC to the suicide of Brutus in October 42 BC. But story is not identical with plot: whereas Plutarch is chronological, Shakespeare is causal. Shakespeare creates and shapes *his* plot by selection, expansion, and dramatic spotlighting. He makes direct use of roughly the last quarter of Plutarch's life of Caesar, the last days of Caesar. Omitted are the events which made Caesar the 'foremost man of all this world', the 'noblest man / That ever livèd in the tide of times': the great military campaigns in Gaul, in England, in Asia, in Africa; the intrigues and discord in Rome with Cicero and Cato and Pompey and others; the adventures with pirates, the disguises, the romances, the feasts and fasts – in short, the cinemascope Caesar in Technicolor.

Shakespeare makes more extensive use of the life of Brutus, which is itself more concentrated than that of Caesar, focussing on the conspiracy after devoting only about half a dozen pages to the events of Brutus's life up to the point of Cassius's 'temptation'. But closer analysis reveals that a good part of the detail is likewise to be found in the life of Caesar. The overlapping signals Shakespearean (as well as Plutarchan) highlights, like the 'temptation' scene between Brutus and Cassius in 1.2, the scene between Caesar and Calpurnia on the eve of the assassination (2.2), the assassination itself (3.1), the mob's treatment of Cinna the Poet (3.3), and the appearance of the ghost of Caesar to Brutus in 4.3, among others. The focus is sharpened in a number of ways. It is usually said that Shakespeare compresses the action from three years to five or six days. But compression is a misleading word. Granted, certain events are telescoped: the triumph of Munda, which took place in October 45 BC, is moved to 15 February 44 BC, whereas in Plutarch intervening events, like Caesar's being named 'perpetual Dictator', the dedication of the Temple of Clemency for Caesar's 'courtesy', his plans for enlarging the Roman empire, his reform of the calendar, etc., are related; the proscriptions of November 43 BC seem to follow immediately after the Cinna the Poet episode, whereas in Plutarch the account of the rivalry between Antony and Octavius separates the events; Shakespeare's brief fifth act – a bare 354 lines covering the two pitched battles at Philippi and the suicides of Cassius and Brutus – contrasts sharply with Plutarch's two dozen pages of military and other detail.

This kind of treatment is not so much a matter of compression as of concentration. For it is concentration, combined with repetition, which gives the real contours of the plot. A

few examples will suffice. The action of the play consists of uninterrupted conflict situations, personal and political, or personal-political: the presentation of violence, ranging from the serio-comic altercation between the tribunes and the plebeians to the bloody assassination, the burning of Rome, civil war, two majestic battles, and two significant suicides. When there is no actual fighting, there are quarrels; when there are no public meetings, there is conspiracy or precaution. The violence is physical and verbal. And it is extended beyond the level of the activity of the public figures. Shakespeare focusses the plot by, on the one hand, giving greater and more continuous prominence to the plebeians than Plutarch does, thereby stressing a socio-political polarisation and underlining the disastrous consequences of self-interest, if not the unreliability and uncontrollability of all human desires; and, on the other hand, by complementing the public and private levels with the portentous inscrutability of the supernatural both in and outside of Rome. Thus Shakespeare achieves greater concentration by anticipation and repetition, not so much by reordering the events of the narrative as by stressing certain of them, if need be by inventing them (as is the case with the plebeians, especially the expansion of their encounter with Cinna the Poet), by conflating them (as in the two episodes in Plutarch before and after Lupercalia, which in Shakespeare take place in the Forum), and by repeating them (as in the stringing out of the portents over the course of the play).

One kind of Shakespearean spotlighting is attributable, of course, to the very nature of the genres. Plutarch's prose narrative is laced with dialogue, an obvious technique for actualising and stressing certain events. But in the material Shakespeare worked from, Plutarch uses direct discourse only rarely and in the main briefly, in one-line utterances or single-line exchanges. These bits of dialogue, many coming at the end of a little scene, are part of Plutarch's system, a way of enlivening and indeed punctuating dramatic moments. As such, they indicate certain priorities, situations and sentiments which Plutarch deemed important. It is interesting, therefore, to see, for one thing, which are taken over or ignored by Shakespeare and, for another, which bare statements are developed into dramatic units by Shakespeare. Surprisingly, perhaps, Plutarch's little scenes tend to highlight private and personal conflicts and tribulations, the most developed being Portia's desire to share her husband's plans and fate (p. 190 below), and surprising too is Plutarch's use of dialogue in what are for Shakespeare relatively unimportant situations (like the concern of uneasy conspirators) or characters (like Lucius Pella or Lucilius). Shakespeare, for his part, not only dramatises personal situations as well as mainly political scenes lightly sketched in Plutarch, as in Cassius's 'temptation' in 1.2.25–177 (compare pp. 181, 188 below), and in the opening encounter of Murellus and Flavius with the plebeians, but also combines the personal and the political in scenes not found in Plutarch – among the most famous being Brutus's soliloquy at the beginning of the second act.

Perhaps the greatest area of dramatic concentration is the treatment of character, the feature which has received the most critical attention. The difference of genre, as well as of intent, makes comparisons difficult. Since the Shakespearean characters will be discussed below within the total context of the play, perhaps a few distinctions will suffice here. Shakespeare's expansion of the 'temptation' by Cassius from bare outlines in