

Leader and Pack: On Two Scenes Concealed from View in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* *

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1. Traditional, Reversed, and Alternative Models

In sixteenth-century European Caesar plays, Antony's role and that of the people are often shadowed by the Caesar-Brutus pair, as if to increase the sense of an irreducible political and personal polarisation around two antagonists. From the Neo-Latin *Iulius Caesar* by Marc-Antoine Muret (1552) to Jacques Grévin's *César* (1558), to the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* (c. 1592, but published in 1607), and Orlando Pescetti's *Il Cesare* (1594), we are presented with clear-cut binaries, even when political stances and reasons are not unequivocal (see, e.g., Lovascio 2014), and only rarely, as in the case

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of Muret, Brutus' position is problematised¹. Antony is absent from Muret's deeply Senecan *Iulius Caesar*, where the Divus Iulius is cast as a new Hercules, finally ascending to Heaven in an apotheosis of celestial glory. He appears in Grévin's *César*, a play derived from Muret's, as an addition underlining the avenging theme. And yet, in the "Brief Discours" prefacing the play, Grévin boasts about another novelty: his treatment of the chorus, which, from being made up of Roman citizens ("Civium Romanorum" [Hagmaier 2006]) in Muret, becomes a troop of Caesar's soldiers ("La troupe des soldats de César"). As Grévin vividly comments, in times of political overthrows "le simple peuple n'avoit pas grande occasion de chanter" (Grévin 1922, 7): they simply have no political voice. Albeit present in Cassius' address to them after Caesar's murder ("Citoyens, voyez cy ceste dague sanglante, / C'est elle, Citoeyens, c'est elle qui se vante / Avoir fait son devoir [...] / [...] Allez donc, Citoyens, / Reprendre maintenant tous vos droicts anciens" [Grévin 1922, 46]), the Roman citizens are in no way a political subject. In their place, Antony addresses Caesar's soldiers and the only voices we hear are when two of them answer Antony's call:

M. ANTOINE

J'invoque des Fureurs la plus grande fureur.
J'invoque le Chaos de l'éternelle horreur,
J'invoque l'Achéron, le Styx et le Cochyte,
Et si quelque aultre Dieu sous les enfers habite,
Juste vangeur des maux, je les invoque tous,
Homicides cruels, pour se vanger de vous.
[...]
Et vous, braves soldats, voyez, voyez quel tort
On vous a fait, voyez, ceste robbe sanglante
C'est celle de César qu'ores je vous présente :

¹ As Manfredi Piccolomini notices, "Despite Muret's monarchical inclinations, Brutus is in fact the main character of the play. His first speech, in which he expresses his doubts on what course of action he should take – whether to side with Caesar who saved his life or to join the conspiracy to kill Caesar because he abolished Roman freedom – contains whatever tragic element the play has to offer" (Piccolomini 1991, 102). See this volume for a fuller discussion of the Brutus myth within the European context from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance (Piccolomini 1991). On the early modern Caesar plays here mentioned, see also Ayres 1910.

C'est celle de César magnanime Empereur,
 Vray guerrier entre tous, César qui d'un grand coeur
 S'acquit avecque vous l'entière jouissance
 Du monde : maintenant a perdu sa puissance,
 Et gist mort estendu, massacre pauvrement
 Par l'homicide Brute.
 (Grévin 1922, 47)

His invocation of the Furies and exhortation to revenge can only elicit one reaction: the soldiers obviously respond as expected, and the play closes on their taking arms against the conspirators. This is not a political act, but a military coup against the rise of a new regime.

Pescetti's *Il Cesare* has up to four choruses equally divided between the two factions: a chorus of citizens supporting the conspirators, as opposed to the chorus of Caesar's soldiers, who eventually take arms with Antony; a chorus of Roman matrons, who invoke Romulus and Venus to appease Mars and secure peace in Rome (end of Act I), and a chorus of women of Calpurnia's court in favour of the Caesarist party. And yet, all of them remain fixed collective characters and no oratorical negotiation of power features in the play, which closes on the report of Lepidus' possibly joining Antony with his troops, and the second nuntius' tragic view of world history as one of perpetual war, at the same time immanent in and transcending human politics ("questo mondo è una perpetua guerra" [Pescetti 1594, 149]). Interestingly, only the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* focus more extensively on the Roman civil war. But like the other Caesar plays, *Caesar's Revenge* too shuns a real engagement with the people. Interestingly, the public ceremony for Caesar's funeral is turned into a semi-private one attended by "Calphurnia, Octavian, Antony, Cicero, Dolabella, two Romaynes, [a Lord not listed in the stage direction], mourners" (*The Tragedy of Caesar's Revenge* 1607). At that point we know that Caesar's hearse is brought onstage, although it is unclear where it is positioned, and incongruously Octavian is not only present, but also delivers a speech soon after Antony, contributing to rousing cries of revenge from the attendants to the ceremony. Antony calls them "Brave Lords" (IV.i.1888) and Octavian "my Lords" (IV.i.1893), betraying a

significant revision of the historical sources where Antony's interlocutors are a medley of "rakehells", as Plutarch calls them (Plutarch 1909, 1:135), and a confused multitude (*plethos*), as Appian depicts them: "now the people was mirt with strangers, & a libertyne was equal with a Citizen, & the fashion of a seruante, like to the maisters: for y^e Senate except, the rest was indifferent to the seruantes" (Appian 1578, 143). But in *Caesar's Revenge* politics clearly remains a matter for gentlemen, leaving "the fourth sort of men which doe not rule", as Thomas Smith called them, entirely out: "those which the olde Romans called *capite censij proletarij* or *operae*, day labourers, poore husbandmen, yea marcantes or retailers which haue no frée lande, copiholders, and all artificers, as Taylers, Shoemakers, Carpenters, Brickemakers, Bricklayers, Masons, &c." (Smith 1583, 33). As in Smith, in this play the people "haue no voice nor authoritie [...], and no account is made of them, but onelie to be ruled, not to rule other" (33). Thus, Antony's speech needs neither the elaborate oratory nor the refined theatrical performance beautifully presented in the ancient narratives:

ANTONY

Doe see this friend of Rome, this Countryes Father,
This Sonne of lasting fame and endless praise,
And in a mortall trunk, immortal virtue
Slaughtered, profan'd, and butcherd like a beast,
By trayterous hands, and damned Parricides:
[...]

Here lyes the dead to whome you owe your liues:
By you this slaughtered body bleedes again,
Which oft for you hath hath bled in fearfull fight.
Sweete woundes in which I see distressed Rome,
From her pearced sides to power forth streames of bloud,
Bee you witnesse of my sad Soule's grief:
And of my teares which wounded heart doth bleede,
Not such as vse from womanish eyes procede.
(*The Tragedy of Caesar's Revenge* 1607, IV.ii.1858-62, 1869-76)

Antony does not need to make much effort to convince the Lords, they are already on his side, and his speech evades complex forms of political mobilisation. For all its pathetic mention of blood and

butchery, this scene lacks the truly political dimension it has in the historical narratives, when Antony shows the swift political command of the leader. Like the other Caesar plays mentioned above, it lacks the presence of the people as a potentially political collective character.

It is no surprise that another episode foregrounded by both Plutarch and Appian about the relation between the mass and the leader, also famously mentioned by Cicero in his accusation of Antony in his second Philippic, likewise remains ignored: the Lupercalia. Interestingly, Shakespeare is the only playwright not only to make the funeral scene pivotal in the arousal of the people and the inception of the civil war right in the middle of the play, but also to sense the relevance of that previous episode involving the masses, and to valorise it at the outset. No other Caesar play, among the ones recalled above, dramatises or alludes to that episode. Antony's offer of the crown to Caesar in the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* comes short of anything even faintly related to the political implications contained in the ancient narratives. It occurs at an apparently private meeting, miles away from the public occasion of the Lupercalia, at the sole presence of "Dolabella, Lords, and others":

ANTHONY

This noble mind and princely modesty,
Which in contempt of honours brightens shines,
Makes us to with the more for such a Prince,
Whose virtue not ambition won that praise,
Nor shall we think it loss of liberty.
Or Roman liberty any impeached,
For to subject us to his Princely rule,
Whose thoughts fair virtue and true honour guides:
Vouchsafe then to accept this golden crown,
A gift not equal to thy dignity.

CAESAR

Content you Lordes for I will be no King,
An odious name unto the Roman ear.
Caesar I am, and will be Caesar still,
No other title shall my Fortunes grace.
(Shakespeare 1998, III.iv.1494-507)

Much has been written on the role of the inconstant mob in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and, more in general, in Shakespeare's Roman plays. What has not been fully explored, however, is how, compared to other plays on the same matter, Shakespeare's treatment of the ancient sources sets him apart from any other contemporary playwright in the construction of the people as a potentially political subject. Besides Antony's oration in the Forum, two scenes are especially interesting in this respect: the already mentioned Lupercalia, and the transitional moment occurring between Caesar's assassination and Brutus' arrival in the Forum.

Drakakis has recently raised the question whether we read Shakespeare's sources as he did (Drakakis 2018). But these two examples show him more at variance with his contemporaries than with us. All the historical narratives that Shakespeare could access were also potentially available in the Renaissance to anyone who wanted to write about Caesar. To mention the Latin editions only, Plutarch was first published in 1473, Appian in Candidus' translation in 1492 and in Gelen's in 1554, and editions of Suetonius and Cicero circulated widely since 1470 and 1488/1494 respectively². And yet, the only playwright who problematised the role of the mob in that Roman crisis remains Shakespeare. *Caesar's Revenge* and Pescetti's *Il Cesare*, in particular, have often been listed among Shakespeare's possible other sources (Boecker 1913; Schanzer 1954; Pearson 1981). But if they ever were, they hardly influenced him in this respect, as in no way do they contain anything resembling a crowd as the ancient narratives do; nor do they dramatise the performative processes through which taking a stand and becoming political in ancient Rome entailed a continuous transformation of performative stances closely connected with resignifying processes behind the mobile symbolism of Roman power. My contention is that Shakespeare sensed that potential in the ancient sources in ways that contemporary writers did not. In particular, he not only enhanced Antony's role, but he also hinted

² Plutarch was first published in Rome in 1473, followed by two more editions (Jenson's in Venice in 1478 and Guarino Veronese's translation in Brescia in 1488). Suetonius' 1470 edition was published in Rome by Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz, and Cicero's *Philippicae* dates from 1488 or, at the latest, 1494. All these editions circulated widely.

at Caesar's own power over the masses and Brutus' lack of it in peculiar ways that become apparent once we look at the play through the lenses of Plutarch and Appian.

Taking up Volumnia's anti-essentialist interpretation of power in *Coriolanus* based on a network of mutable relations³, I argued elsewhere that the very inception of *stasis*, or faction, may be better understood in the case of the civic conflict following Caesar's death once we look more closely not only at the fluid relation between oratory, theatre, and ritual in the political arena of the funeral ceremony, but also at how their uses may affect the formation of political stances and new unexpected power relations (Bigliuzzi 2019a). It is a fact that the conflict in Rome is between aristocrats (Rebhorn 2002), and that in the historical narratives the people are represented as instrumental in the power struggle. Both the ancient sources and Shakespeare's play show that the multitude can be politicised and depoliticised or pushed to different political sides as occasion requires. But one question that remains open is the actual relation between leader and masses. Compared to Plutarch and Suetonius, Appian is most interesting with regard to Antony's funeral oration, while Plutarch becomes especially relevant when we look at Caesar's relation to Antony, his supporters, and the people at the feast of Lupercal. Plutarch and Appian devote equal attention to the complex scenario of the conspirators' mobile relation with the people immediately after Caesar's murder – a part of the story which Shakespeare significantly excised with a strong impact on Brutus' arrival in the Forum and his address to the masses. Here I will concentrate on these last two scenes with a view to considering Shakespeare's construction of Brutus and Caesar in respect to the mob before Antony shows a superb control of it in III.ii – a question I will instead leave untouched.

According to René Girard, Caesar and Brutus are not opposite figures, as traditionally thought, and their rivalry should be viewed as the result of Brutus' desire to follow the example of Caesar's own leadership (Girard 2002). Girard's contention is that, in an

³ "For Coriolanus the world is seen in terms of the absolute and the determining essence; for Volumnia the absolute is displaced by a social network of relative interactions, one in which intervention not essence is determining" (Dollimore 2004, 219).

escalation of love and hatred, emulation brings about radical antagonism. Leaders, he claims, “want the same thing; they all copy each other; they all behave in the same way”, and what follows in this play is “no conflict of differences, but a plague of undifferentiation” (Girard 2002, 110) from which the populace itself is not exempt. In this light, rather than being a superman, Caesar becomes the embodiment of the people’s own murderous inclinations: a scapegoat confirming the repetition of the foundational murder on which societies, Girard argues, are built, iterating the original expulsion of the Tarquins at the cusp of a mimetic crisis. Whether we glimpse in this position an anti-humanist post-Holocaust attitude, indebted to Elias Canetti’s *Crowds and Power* (Canetti 1978), as Richard Wilson does, or not, the question remains whether the inversion of the traditional relation between leader and pack is the only alternative we can imagine. A comparison between *Julius Caesar* and the ancient sources suggests that the question may be even more complex, and that a nuanced, if contradictory, mobile reciprocal bond is what defines the political struggle between competitors, so that its lack can be the sign of a flawed leadership. Antony will not fail in the Forum precisely because he knows how to control the people, being aware of what they want from him; as Raffaello Piccoli noticed in 1925, he can do so “because he has first submitted to [the mob]” (Bigliuzzi 2019b, 335). Caesar does not fail with them either, but Brutus will, and this becomes apparent in III.ii when he allows Antony to eclipse his own political performance by binding himself to the pack and in turn binding them to the memory of the murdered leader.

In the following pages I will consider Shakespeare’s approach to Plutarch’s ambiguous narrative of Caesar’s double policy with his ‘friends’ and with the people in the scene of the Lupercalia by focusing on a single detail contained in Casca’s narrative. I will then look at how Shakespeare coped with Brutus’ complex relation with the people after the assassination in ways that suggest strategic erasure. My contention is that in either case Shakespeare’s choice was not neutral and was deeply connected with a subtle reflection upon the mutual relation between leader and mass in power games.

2. "[He] offered them his throat to cut": *Offstage Ambiguities*

Contrary to the widely shared opinion that the people in Shakespeare's Rome are fickle, Richard Halpern has intriguingly remarked that they are not as manipulable and mobile as they are often thought to be. Rather, they "display not 'fickleness' but a kind of materialism of the present", which, compared to the patricians' attachment to ethical abstractions, endows them with "a less mediated and indirect, more materially visible attachment to their own class interest" (Halpern 2002, 222). If they first applauded Pompey and now Caesar, Halpern contends, it is because after all, with Pompey dead, "Caesar serves the same function" in being "a source of national pride, material prosperity, and spectacular entertainment" (222). Little surprise, therefore, that when Antony appeals to their economic profit they do change their minds for their own benefit. After all, in the first exchange between the cobbler and the tribunes in I.i, the cobbler's reply "with a joke about his business interests" shows him to be "more at home in the 'civil society' of economic concerns than it is in vying for control of the Roman state" (225).

And yet, the crowd does change fairly quickly at that point, and if the materiality of the present is one side of the coin, the other side shows them prone to call Brutus a new Caesar for no immediate material interest. If we go back to that first scene where they are accused of ingratitude and forgetfulness, we find them willing to share in the sense of the festive brought along by Caesar's victory by celebrating the winner for the winner's sake. As Marullus remarks, Caesar brings neither conquests nor tributaries, but his triumph entails a sense of potency in which everybody shares by rejoicing in it. The first scene unveils precisely this subtle emotional connection between leader and crowd that will famously become central in Antony's funeral oration.

The historical narratives of Caesar's murder and the ensuing civil war beautifully encode the political processes of engagement of the people through manipulative oratorical strategies, blending various forms of ritual in view of their proximity to theatre. Shakespeare enhanced this complex blending by conflating in I.i Caesar's military and political triumph and the fertility rite of the

Lupercalia in the light of Caesar's own desire of fertility to secure a political heir. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the play eventually ends with Octavius' announcement of Brutus' funeral rite – the opposite of the propagation of Caesar's *gens* prefigured at the outset, but contiguous to it in terms of the preservation of the fame of Rome's noble son within civic memory.

This symmetrical frame encasing a series of other rituals at the centre of the play – from the blood ritual in III.i to the funeral ceremony in III.ii – calls attention to the inception of rituality as a political form in Rome. All the rituals preceding that ceremony resort to strategies of representation: Casca is clear about the theatrics organised to impress the people at the Lupercalia – a “mere foolery” (Shakespeare 1998, I.ii.235), he calls it, underlining more the sense of a political farce than that of a carnival show, as sometimes claimed⁴. This is a question that Appian does not mention, and Plutarch only indirectly suggests, saying that Caesar made “as though he refused” the diadem, “turn[ing] away his head” at its offer (Plutarch 1909, 2:19), and that only “a few appointed for the purpose” (Plutarch 1909, 1:93) gave a cry of joy – Caesar and Antony had evidently gathered a *claque*. In Appian's narrative, Brutus and Cassius will do the same shortly after the assassination. As part of this stage business, Casca also interprets Caesar's offer of his throat after his last refusal (Shakespeare 1998, I.ii.263-65), an episode that Shakespeare could find at this point of the narrative in *The Life of Marcus Antonius* (Plutarch 1909, 2:19), but not in *The Life of Julius Caesar*, where it precedes the Lupercalia and follows his rejection of the honours offered to him in the Forum by the consuls and praetors (Plutarch 1909, 1:91). Liebler has connected this episode, in Shakespeare's play, with Brutus' later offer of slaying himself during his own speech to the crowd, should that become necessary for Rome, as proof of the two leaders' common understanding of “the popular appeal of a displayed willingness to serve as *pharmakos*” (Liebler 1995, 95). But, as she further notices, “Caesar understands better than Brutus the pure

⁴ A few lines later he calls them “players in the theatre” (Shakespeare 1998, I.ii.259). For a carnivalesque reading of the opening scene of *Julius Caesar*, see Wilson 2002.

theatricality of such a gesture, and knows also how to work the crowd to 'clap and hiss him, according as he pleased and displeased them, as they used to do the players in the theater'". In other words, Caesar's "sacrificial gesture may be insincere, but it is nonetheless crucially important as a gesture" (95). And yet, if we go back to Plutarch and his *Life of Julius Caesar*, we find no clear hint of scapegoating implications.

In Plutarch Caesar's gesture is most ambiguous. Luciano Canfora, for instance, has interpreted it as a message of accusation directed to Antony for putting him in danger through his offer of the crown⁵. Indeed, earlier on in the same *Life of Marcus Antonius*, we are given an inkling of possibly traitorous behaviour on the part of Antony as well as of his unintentional responsibility in provoking enmity against Caesar during the Lupercalia:

For it is reported that Caesar answered one that did accuse Antonius and Dolabella unto him for some matter of conspiracy: "Tush", said he, "they be not those fat fellows and fine combed men that I fear, but I mistrust rather these pale and lean men", meaning by Brutus and Cassius, who afterwards conspired his death, and slew him. Antonius unwares afterwards gave Caesar's enemies just occasion and colour to do as they did: as you shall hear. (Plutarch 1909, 2:18)

But Caesar's gesture might also be evidence of his furious disappointment with the crowd's rejoicing for his refusal of the crown. Shakespeare's Casca seems to grasp this sense, suggesting a direct connection between the people's joy, Caesar baring his neck and offering his throat as in a challenge, soon followed by his falling down. As can be read in *The Life of Marcus Antonius*, "Caesar in a rage rose out of his seat, and plucking down the collar of his gown from his neck, he shewed it naked, bidding any man strike off his head that would" (Plutarch 1909, 2:19). The "rage" of Plutarch's Caesar is radicalised by Shakespeare into a fit, a detail which does not occur in any of the other historical sources, except that in *The Life of Caesar* Plutarch reports another peculiar detail:

⁵ "By this bitter, dramatic gesture Caesar can only have been making plain in public the risk attached to any such initiative. At the same time he was saying that anyone who attempted to push him towards monarchic rule wanted his death" (Canfora 2007, 283; see also 281-86).

[...] to excuse this folly [his failing to rise when he received the praetors and consuls on the rostra], he imputed it to his disease, saying, that their wits are not perfect which have his disease of the falling evil, when standing of their feet they speak to the common people, but are soon troubled with a trembling of their body, and a sudden dimness and giddiness. (Plutarch 1909, 1:91)

This passage becomes interesting when compared to the other episode mentioned in the *Life of Marcus Antonius*. The context is not the Lupercalia, but slightly before then, when in the Forum Caesar is presented with honours by the praetors and he offends both them and the people by not paying homage to the magistrates at their entry and declining their offer:

When they had decreed divers honours for him in the Senate, the Consuls and Praetors accompanied with the whole assembly of the Senate went unto him in the market place, where he was set by the pulpit for orations, to tell him what honours they had decreed for him in his absence. But he, sitting still in his majesty, disdainig to rise up unto them when they came in, as if they had been private men, answered them: that his honours had more need to be cut off than enlarged. This did not only offend the Senate, but the common people also, to see that he should so lightly esteem of the Magistrates of the commonwealth: insomuch as every man that might lawfully go his way departed thence very sorrowfully. (Plutarch 1909, 1:91)

The relevant bit is at the end of this passage, when he finally rises and gets ready to depart. At that point, "tearing open his doublet collar, making his neck bare, he cried out aloud to his friends [φίλοι], that his throat was ready to offer to any man that would come and cut it" (Plutarch 1909, 1:91). He then justifies his behaviour with the Senate by adducing his illness, "saying, that their wits are not perfect which have his disease of the falling evil, when standing of their feet they speak to the common people, but are soon troubled with a trembling of their body, and a sudden dimness and giddiness". But of course this was untrue, Plutarch remarks, because "he would have risen up to the Senate, but Cornelius Balbus one of his friends (but rather a flatterer) would

not let him, saying: ‘What, do you not remember that you are Caesar, and will you not let them reverence you, and do their duties?’” (1:91-92). This possibly unfriendly advice had evidently endangered him, precisely as Antony’s offer at the Lupercalia “had ‘sealed the fate’ of Caesar”⁶. In this passage, we sense this man’s sudden awareness either of the traitorous presence of friends or of their political naivety, but we also perceive his irascible egotism: he suddenly realises his mistake in following that advice, and insults both the senators and the people (*demos*). Then in a rage he offers his throat to his friends denouncing their intent to have him killed – after all they were putting his life at risk by paving the way to his kingship publicly. The excuse of his disease sounds more like a last-minute attempt to downplay their role even in the mistake he had made, and refer all decision, including that error, to himself alone. Shakespeare can hardly have failed to perceive the complex psychological and political dimension of this episode.

But the relevant question here is that, in conflating those two stories, Shakespeare focused on Caesar’s relation to the people, as in *The Life of Marcus Antonius*, rather than to his friends. Caesar’s excuse for his infirmity as recounted by Casca, derived from the other episode in *The Life of Caesar*, elicits the crowd’s forgiveness:

When he came to himself again, he said, if he had done or said anything amiss, he desired their worships to think it was his infirmity. Three or four wenches where I stood, cried ‘Alas, good soul’, and forgave him with all their hearts. But there’s no heed to be taken of them: if Caesar had stabbed their mothers, they would have done no less. (Shakespeare 1998, I.ii.267-74)

It is no surprise that Caesar might worry about his behaviour when he loses self-control, and then apologises for any wrongs he might have committed – this is a perfectly political gesture showing his understanding of the need to exchange place with the mass in the

⁶ “Cicero maintained then that, by his actions at the Lupercalia of 15 February 44, Antony ‘had sealed the fate’ of Caesar. This no doubt means that his actions brought the conspiracy forward, and clearly he does not exclude the possibility that Antony acted *deliberately*. However, this statement also contains an *item of information* (we do not know how truthful): that the conspiracy entered its operative phase *as from 15 February*. By these words Cicero reveals his familiarity with the hidden background to the plot” (Canfora 2007, 284).

hierarchy of power and temporarily submit to them. It is more surprising, instead, that Casca reports that “[t]hree or four wenches” indeed “forgave him”, implying that in fact he had committed some wrong he needed to be pardoned for: perhaps his offering his throat as in a challenge? Offering himself as a *pharmakos* would not have required forgiveness, nor his falling down, as this would be a sign of suffering demanding pity rather than clemency. Caesar needs the people’s support and this first narrative unveils how it may be gained and lost on the spur of the moment, arousing a sense of mutual dependency between leader and crowd as well as the mutability of their positions. Caesar’s sudden anger is followed by his prompt attempt to resume self-control. The “common herd” (I.ii.263) show political constancy in assuming a solid pro-republican position when Antony offers him the crown; but then they are easily moved by Caesar’s show of weakness, and what may be taken as an offence foregrounding tension is soon forgotten and superseded by a sense of compassion for the hurt leader. The public and the private are commingled, abstract concepts are replaced by emotional responses. And yet, Casca’s comment on the wenches’ total submission to him, whom they would have pardoned even if he “had stabbed their mothers”, foregrounds a level of fanaticism for the leader that at this stage, in Casca’s view, makes Caesar’s playing games with them irrelevant.

Thus, although located in the context of the celebration of a ritual of fertility traditionally involving the sacrifice of a goat, Caesar’s gesture seems hardly connected with scapegoating for the cleansing of a community. Reading Caesar’s gesture as an allusion to himself as a sacrificial goat means overlooking the pragmatics of Caesar’s political approach to the crowd in both the historical narratives and in Shakespeare’s play. This does not mean jettisoning ideas of rituality inscribed in the politics of Rome⁷, which are unquestionably immanent to the play. It means instead to suggest a more nuanced dialectic between leader and crowd, where neither of the two is entirely predominant, and the leader’s

⁷ Which Liebler also refers to to establish connections between the sacrifice of the goat, as described in Plutarch’s *Life of Romulus*, Caesar’s offer of his throat and Brutus’ blood ritual (Liebler 1995, 137). On rituality, see also Girard 2002.

knowledge of the crowd's psychology makes him prepared to exchange roles or tip the scales of power. The episode discussed above shows that neither Caesar and Antony nor the crowd are the winners in the political theatrics of Lupercalia, and that the achievement of power in the dispute between the two oligarchic sides in Rome depends on the highly mobile *demos*, which both separates and connects them as a very flexible, albeit amorphous, third party.

A radical change in the mutual relation between politics and ritual is marked only at a later stage by Brutus' blood ritual after the assassination, an episode not present in any source and that carries out symbolically the sacrificial sublimation of the murder Brutus presents in his speech to the conspirators as early as II.i.165 ("Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers"). It is from that point onward, until the end of Antony's oration, that politics and ritual start drastically to converge in the name of bloodshed and a regression towards tribal forms of communality. Antony will take advantage of these when the time comes to inflame the people.

3. *Brutus and the Crowd: Offstage Erasures*

After the blood ritual, Brutus and his confederates go from the Capitol straight to the Forum where Brutus and Cassius separate and Brutus ascends to the pulpit to deliver his speech. In the sources their movements are much more complex. Shakespeare may have found a reference to the Forum in Plutarch's *The Life of Caesar*, where North's translation wrongly mentions the market-place, following Amyot's "la place" (Plutarch 1911, 175), where the Greek clearly says that they went to the Capitol instead:

Brutus and his confederates, on the other side, being yet hot with the murder they had committed, having their swords drawn in their hands, came all in a troop together out of the Senate, and went into the market-place [et s'en allerent sur la place; ἐχώρουν εἰς τὸ Καπιτώλιον], not as men that made countenance to fly, but otherwise boldly holding up their heads like men of courage, and called to the people to defend their

liberty, and stayed to speak with every great personage whom they met in their way. (Plutarch 1909, 1:103)⁸

This mistake is rectified in *The Life of Marcus Brutus*, where Plutarch draws a more detailed map of Brutus' and his confederates' progress through Rome after the tyrannicide: from Pompey's Theatre, where it takes place in the *propylaea* at the front – the so-called *Curia Pompeii* – which was contiguous to the venue of games and spectacles and hosted the Senate's meetings, to the Capitol, then to the market-place, and finally back to the Capitol. This route is interesting for its symbolic connotations suggesting the mobility of power centres in the cityscape (from the Senate and Capitol to the Forum). After the murder, the conspirators take shelter in the Capitol, speak to the people and these invite them to go down into the Forum. Called on to descend from the Capitol, Brutus goes all the way down to the rostrum and delivers a second oration in defence of tyrannicide for the sake of Rome's liberty. But for all his assumed good reasons, the people do not show their discontent at the murder only out of respect of him. It is his *ethos* that keeps the mob calm, not his *logos*. Then, the praetor Lucius Cornelius Cinna speaks against Caesar, and an uproar follows, forcing Brutus and his friends to hurry away all the way back to take refuge once again inside the Capitol.

Now, this course through the city, overall confirmed by Appian, albeit with some significant variants (on which more soon), draws a map of the conspirators' movements that emphasises the functional hybridity of the loci they traverse, as well as the potential connotative fluidity of their own actions. Caesar is killed in a senatorial space contiguous to the theatre; the conspirators take shelter within the Capitol but use it also as a political pulpit; they eventually descend from it, the topmost hill of the city and its symbolic head, mingling with the people in the city's most intrinsically hybrid place, the Forum, but then they retreat to the Capitol for fear of the people. What is interesting here is that

⁸ However, the note in the margin of both the 1578 edition (795) and the 1595 one (789) reads: "The murtherers of Caesar doe goe to the Capitoll", thus contradicting what is being narrated in the text. For the Greek original, see Plutarch 1958, 67.2.

compared to Antony's ability to deal with the people in the Forum, which in the sources as well as in Shakespeare is entirely discursive and performative, Brutus' own is primarily related to the spaces he physically traverses. Plutarch does not tell us what he says to the people, but we understand that reverence to him is what keeps the crowd silent, while not fully approving of the murder. We understand that Brutus' real strength lies in his widely recognised character – his being an honourable man, an issue which Shakespeare takes up in his development of Brutus' oration and Antony's own deconstruction of it. As Garry Wills has noticed, "Brutus' speech was all an argument from *ethos* – trust my honorable character" (Wills 2011, 95), and was based on Aristotle's teaching that an orator was to move from *logos* to *ethos* in order to be persuasive (Aristotle 1926, 2.1.2-36)⁹.

Appian tells only a slightly different story, but with some significant extra details as to the movements in space and temporal inversion of a few actions: Brutus and Cassius go to the Capitol with the gladiators and bribe the people to get their support; in the Forum these cry for peace and amnesty; Cinna attacks Caesar and suggests that the "killers of a Tiranne" (Appian 1578, 144) be called from the Capitol, but the unbought people do not agree. Then Dolabella speaks and gains the crowd's favour, so that the hirelings feel more confident to demand that Cassius, Brutus, and their associates be summoned from the Capitol. It is only at that point that Cassius and Brutus descend to the Forum, Brutus "with his bloody hand", and with no show of humility, they praise each other and thank Decimus Brutus for serving "them with swordplayers" before exhorting the people to do the same as their ancestors had done with the kings. In Appian's account they are clearly afraid, as after their speech "they wente vppe againe to the Capitoll, for they dyd not truste verye muche in that multitude" (144). Only at a later stage, when they are informed that the Senate has decided to have Caesar's testament read in public and a public funeral for Caesar celebrated, do they invite the people to go up to the Capitol, and it is at that point that Brutus delivers his second oration. He first justifies his hurried return to the Capitol, "not as m[en] fleeing to the Temple that haue done amisse, nor as to a fort, hauing

⁹ For the Greek original, see Aristotle 1959, 2.1377b20-31.

committed all wée haue to you, but the sharpe & strange mishap of *Cinna*, haue compelled vs thus to do" (152). Then he attacks Caesar for his ambition, his anti-democratic politics and for bringing *polemos* (i.e. war against foreign enemies) into Rome by crossing the Rubicon river with his army. Finally, he pictures himself and his confederates as the defenders of liberty and the common weal, promising that they will not take away the properties Caesar had distributed to the soldiers for their military service, but will recompense the Italian people who had lost their properties for that purpose. The people approve.

Plutarch's and Appian's stories diverge insofar as Appian's sequence of events is in the exact reverse order of Plutarch's: Brutus delivers the first oration at the Forum and the second one at the Capitol; the first oration is not successful, but with the second one he wins the people's favour – the opposite of Plutarch's account. In either case, though, he does not win in the Forum, but when he speaks at the Capitol. Also, Appian depicts a more complex scenario in which Decimus Brutus supports the conspirators with the aid of the gladiators who "had bene in armour from the morning, for the shewe of certaine playes" (141), near the place where Caesar was killed in the Theatre of Pompey. The murderers fear the people and in his second oration Brutus must pretend familiarity and confidence in them to gain their support. He is aware that calling the people to the Capitol means behaving as if in need of taking refuge into a sanctuary or in a citadel; so, by denying that the Capitol is either, he both pleads innocent, because in no need of taking refuge, and claims a bond with the mob, whom he now calls citizens and to whom he declares to entrust himself:

Nowe O Citizens [*politai*], we be héere with you, that yesterday were in the common court, not as m[en] fleeyng to the Temple that haue done amisse, nor as to a fort, hauing committed all wée haue to you, but the sharpe & strange mishap of *Cinna*, haue compelled vs thus to do. We haue herd what hath bin obiected against vs of oure enimies, touching the oth, and touching cause of doubt, y* in peace can be no suretie. What we haue to say herein with you O Citizens [*politai*], we will conferre, with whome we haue to do concerning other common matters. (152)

Brutus suggests communality with them here; and yet, his commitment to republicanism and his willingness to secure peace are not uttered by one of them, but by a patrician who speaks in a place of oligarchic power¹⁰. He is not on the people's level, but remains above them, and precisely as somebody separate from them he is revered at this point. One is led to wonder who these people are and if they are the same as those he had met in the market-place. Undoubtedly, his audience is not of anybody, but of those gone to the Capitol for the purpose of listening to him. Perhaps it is not coincidental that Plutarch is keen to remark that immediately after the assassination the murderers, "boldly holding up their heads like men of courage, [...] called to the people to defend their liberty", but also "stayed to speak" not with anyone, but "with every great personage whom they met in their way" (Plutarch 1909, 1:103); presumably not with the mixed and cold rabble he will later meet in the Forum.

Interestingly, Shakespeare keeps only one of Brutus' speeches and does not present him as at the same time bold and fearful of the people. His Brutus does not rely on the help of Decius (Decimus Brutus) for the support of the army of gladiators, nor does he use the Capitol as his main pulpit. The Capitol, as already recalled, is where Caesar is killed, and both Brutus and Cassius go straight to the market-place. Brutus' speech retains the forensic quality it also has in Appian, moving from his self-defence to Caesar's indictment, but it relies on the apodictic evidence of Caesar's ambition and anti-republicanism in ways that Appian's shrewder Brutus does not. Famously, Antony will take advantage of his flawed argument and lack of factual proofs. The market-place is where the oratorical competition occurs in Shakespeare, and where in the historical sources Brutus is received coldly. Shakespeare does not dramatize the conspirators' symbolic movement through the city, with their descent and ascent from one city pole to the other. Even their race through the streets significantly remains unshown.

¹⁰ In passing, Brutus is not unaware of the material interests behind the soldiers' gratefulness to Caesar. It is not coincidental that in his oration Brutus confirms the properties they had been given for their military service, but also promises to pay back the people from whom Caesar had taken those lands, so as to make peace between soldiers and people. Brutus' response to a political question is by leveraging the economic interests of both.

Timothy Hampton has noticed that “[t]heir only gesture toward the conquest of the city and its inhabitants is the mock triumph of blood-spattered patricians whom Brutus leads through the streets following the assassination” (Hampton 1990, 212). But this is truer with regard to Plutarch’s account, and, to a lesser degree, to Appian’s, as in Shakespeare that triumph is undramatised and unreported; once in the Forum, their being blood-spattered remains unremarked by the plebeians, who show neither amazement nor horror at their looks, as instead they will in front of Caesar’s mangled body. They only ask for satisfaction. If the conspirators are still covered in blood, no one seems to notice it.

Thus, Shakespeare erodes the potentially fluid symbolism of space and transfers Brutus’ essential separateness from the people to his brief appearance in the market-place, where the pulpit becomes for him what the Capitol is in the narratives. It does not offer him shelter, but an elevated, detached vantage point from which to address the masses. The sense of oligarchic power conveyed by the spatial symbolism of the Capitol is transferred to that of the high pulpit in the Forum, from which Brutus does not descend, as Antony will, crystallising his own attitude towards the people in his own spatial fixity. Antony will significantly reach down to the crowd, and will ask their permission to do so, as Caesar before him, when at the Lupercalia he had asked them for pardon. This kind of pretended familiarity and complicity with the mob is a performative trait that Shakespeare’s Brutus lacks, and is enhanced precisely by the single-scene proxemics in the course of his performance in the Forum, which erases the politics of space-racing present in the sources.

But Shakespeare also disposes of the political theatrics Appian tells us about with mention of the hired claque in the market-place – a strategy symmetrical to the one at work at the Lupercalia and whose omission emphasises the contrast between Brutus’ and Caesar’s/Antony’s different ideas of leadership and its negotiation. Shakespeare passes under silence Antony’s own political tactics after the murder, when Appian tells us that for fear of the conspirators he calls the Senate into the Tellus temple at daybreak,

far away from the Curia below the Capitol¹¹. There he skilfully manages to keep the people quiet outside, and to convince the senators inside that the best course is to grant Caesar a funeral, confirm his decrees, bestow amnesty on the conspirators and in this way assure peace. He thus succeeds in containing the people's violence before provoking it in the Forum when he gets full command of the pack. It is precisely this gaining command of the people that constitutes Shakespeare's focus. Between the two orators, and the aristocratic factions, the people are a potentially powerful and shifting border. Brutus is aware of it in the ancient sources, as his fear of them shows, and yet he proves not fully capable of controlling them, even when in Appian we read that he invokes communality with the crowd. Shakespeare downplays Brutus' political acuity and shows him obtusely self-confident about the good reasons justifying their deed. Cassius intuits that the "people may be moved / By that which [Antony] will utter" (Shakespeare 1998, III.i.234-35), but Brutus believes that giving Antony permission to speak "shall advantage more than do [them] wrong" (III.i.242). He does not understand that giving him permission only confirms the aloofness of a leader who has not yet stabilised his mutual bond with the people, which in fact he will soon lose.

4. Conclusion

As the rapid transition from III.i to III.ii suggests, when he ascends the pulpit Brutus is still covered in blood. This spectacle of the bloodied assassins has suggested to René Girard that it may have a powerful effect on the populace and their emulative murderous desire. "Needless to say", he points out, "our blood-spattered conspirators do not make a favourable impression, but they make a very strong one and they provide the already unstable populace with a potent mimetic model, a model which many citizens will imitate even and especially if they reject it most violently" (Girard 2002, 117). We have no hint that they reject it violently, but we know that their violence is unleashed only at a later stage by Antony, after

¹¹ In fact, it was quite distant from the Forum, beyond the Suburra area, near the place where the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore is now.

the spectacle of the torn mantle and the butchered body of Caesar. It is hard to tell the actual role that at that point the memory of the blood-smeared conspirators may have on them compared to Antony's narrative and oratorical dexterity in evoking the scene of the murder, which is what prompts them to revolt. But doubtless the sense of a chain-reaction is conveyed by Shakespeare soon after the assassination, when he has Cassius warn Publius to go home for fear of the people's reaction: "lest that the people / Rushing on us, should do your age some mischief" (Shakespeare 1998, III.i.92-93). The transition from the murder to the arrival of Antony in the Capitol and then to Brutus' address to the people in the market-place is quick. Shakespeare might have found a suggestion for cutting the conspirators' moves between the Capitol and the Forum in the erroneous mention of the market-place in *The Life of Caesar*, as we have seen. But his overall relocation of the whole action in two places has broader implications in terms of space and symbolic polarisation which did not need North's erroneous translation. What is certainly his own choice is the replacement of Brutus' two separate approaches to the people, his second descent to the Forum the next day, as Appian reports, and his reconciliation with the consuls, before the funeral takes place and Antony incenses the crowd, with two short episodes in III.i: the blood ritual and the negotiations with Antony. Erasure of Brutus' complex movements from the Temple of Pompey, where Caesar is killed, to the Capitol, then to the Forum, the Capitol, and the Forum again implies a less meditated approach to the mob on the part of Brutus and the need to condense dramatically, in a single oration, the sense of his shortcomings as a political leader. His failing to talk to the plebeians as one of them, differently from Antony, is how Shakespeare underlines his fundamental lack of communality with the people, which we also sense in his entrenching himself in the Capitol in the ancient narratives. In Shakespeare he does not take refuge but positions himself in the pulpit, distant from the pack: he will be called a new Caesar, but he is still in the process of negotiating a mutual bond with the mass – and this, as Casca reminds us in his report of Caesar's earlier theatrics, also includes the leader's inclination to ask for pardon. Brutus does not apologise but gives his reasons for justifying himself. We do not see Caesar's

performance in the Forum at the Lupercalia, and this increases the sense of uncertainty pervading the whole episode mediated for us by the narrative of a soon-to-become conspirator. But we understand that his bond with the masses needs flexible relations attuned to emotional mobility, and this in turn implies the leader's knowledge of the masses' own changeable moods, and, to some extent, his own submission to them. Singling out that particular detail of the episode of the Lupercalia and displacing it offstage before showing a blood-spattered Brutus on stage addressing the mob as a new Caesar – a title he does not object to when he hears it – was Shakespeare's way of contrasting two radically different models of leaderships. The former is not overthrown by the people, who want to be 'satisfied' after his death; the latter is soon to be eclipsed by Antony, Caesar's real heir as a leader who can command the mass because he too knows how to 'submit to them'.

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