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Orson Welles's *Caesars*

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This essay examines Welles's multiple, unstable versions of *Julius Caesar*: a work in progress in which the director-illustrator-actor-designer never ceased returning to and rethinking Shakespeare's play and his own earlier conceptions, adaptations, research and creations, remediating them for new contexts, channels and audiences. Welles's drawings integrate the words of the *Everybody's Shakespeare* adaptations (1934), telling the Caesar story differently and gesturing towards possible future realizations. In New York, in 1937, his Mercury Theatre *Caesar* plays on associations with contemporary events through its casting, set design, music and lighting (inspired by the scenography and 'cathedrals of light' of the Nuremberg rallies). The orchestration of sound effects and voices in phonograph recordings and of music, narrative and acting in radio broadcasts translates the visual and kinetic vocabulary of his previous engagements into a choreography of sound. Juxtaposing the radio actors' voices and the narration of Plutarch by a CBS news reporter brings different styles, tones and temporalities into uneasy contact. Placing Welles's work in the context of earlier U.S. reception of *Julius Caesar*, I examine its dialectical relation with Shakespeare's words and imagery and focus on the metatheatrical – or metacommunicative – aspects of his creations: spectacles of power for American audiences of the 1930s and early 1940s.

Keywords: Orson Welles, *Julius Caesar*, *Everybody's Shakespeare*, Death of a Dictator, *Mercury Theatre on the Air*, Spectacles of power

> Writing about the theatre […] is like writing an obituary. I don't mean that the theatre is dead. It simply doesn't exist except when the curtain is up and the show is on. […] In between there are nothing but old programs, yellowing reviews, and notes and hopes for new plays.
>
> Orson Welles, "The Self-Conscious Theatre"

1. Introduction

Any study of Orson Welles will necessarily cross the borders of a number of disciplines, requiring multiple methodological tools and theories. This is no less the case with Welles's *Caesars*, whose restricted time scope (1929-44) is compensated by the variety of fields touched on or implicated by his creations: performance, illustration, adaptation and remediation, stage design, music and lighting, education, journalism, lecturing, together with the reception of Shakespeare and of the historical figure of Caesar in American history and politics, schools and theatrical productions. Analysis is complicated by the many conflicting versions of Welles's activities and experiences and the recycling and augmenting of errors and inaccuracies in accounts of his life and work even in some of the most accredited examples of Welles criticism and biography[1].

Information on Welles's early years is scanty and often unreliable, on his later years plentiful and almost equally unreliable, based largely on the myth that Welles himself contributed to creating, feeding the fantasy of interviewers and biographers with constantly differing versions of his story/ies.

Storytelling is also at the centre of his variegated visitations of *Julius Caesar*, their multiple, unstable texts supplemented – both in print and on stage – by other media. Welles's drawings illustrate and integrate the words of the *Everybody's Shakespeare/Mercury Shakespeare* adaptations (1934/1939), telling the Caesar story differently and gesturing towards possible future realizations as they free the readers' imagination from the constraints of print. Lighting, music and sound effects, set design, management of actors' movement and placing, all in constant evolution, intensify

[1] Given the unreliability of many of the studies of Welles's *Caesars*, I give precedence, where possible, to photographs, descriptions by Welles's colleagues and actors, and contemporary accounts – the "yellowing reviews" Welles refers to in his warning about the necrological nature of this kind of endeavour (Welles 1941, 12) – supplemented by the attentive archive research conducted in several doctoral dissertations. Working under the pandemic, the range of material I have been able to consult directly is limited. I am grateful to members of my family (Luisa, Fabio and Sarah) and friends and colleagues (Marta Izzi, Alessandra Grego and Maria DiBattista) for their aid.

and expand the significance of the scripts for his 1937 stage production. The orchestration of voices and sound effects in his phonograph recordings and of music, narrative and acting in some of his radio broadcasts translates the visual and kinetic vocabulary of his printed and theatrical revisitations of the play into a choreography of sound.

Together, Welles's *Caesars* form an unending work in progress in which the director-illustrator-actor-designer never ceased returning to and rethinking Shakespeare's play and his own earlier conceptions, adaptations, research and creations, supplementing them with new ideas, remediating them differently for new contexts, channels and audiences and recycling them in other, non-Shakespearean productions[2].

Behind all his *Caesars* is his desire "to revitalize the classics" by stimulating his audiences "into wakefulness. An audience stimulated into imaginative awareness […] becomes the true theatre audience – that mysterious community of spirits that is the most important part of any show", as he announced in an interview shortly after the 1937 Mercury production, later incorporated in a lecture delivered to the Theatre Education League (quoted in Weiss 1994, 196). Gherardo Casale's study of Welles's Shakespeares quotes other passages from the address that are also relevant to the present study[3]. As well as insisting on the need to stimulate audience awareness, Welles emphasized the importance of maintaining loyalty to Shakespeare's imagery and of establishing an "aesthetic relation" between what is seen on the stage and "the words which are spoken" (Casale 2001, 98). A relation that could work through similarity, but also by way of contrast, offering contrapuntal variations.

2. The Mercury Theatre Caesar*: Set, Lighting and a Red Brick Wall*

I have decided to begin my study of Welles's *Caesars* with the scene that greeted the audience on the evening of 11 November 1937, as

[2] See, for example, his use of the "Nuremberg light effect" in *Citizen Kane* (Naremore 2004, 144).

[3] See also Pierini 2005, 82-101.

they took their seats in the Mercury Theatre in New York. Instead of a curtain, a bare stage in front of a red brick wall. Beneath it, a series of platforms.

The public already knew, at least in part, what kind of production awaited them. A Mercury Theatre manifesto had appeared in September in the *Daily Worker* under the title "Again – A People's Theatre: The Mercury Takes a Bow". The play "might well be subtitled 'Death of a Dictator'. […]. In our production the stress will be on the social implications inherent in the history of Caesar and on the atmosphere of personal greed, fear and hysteria that surround a dictatorial regime" (Houseman 1937, 7, quoted in Denning 1997, 376)[4]. This was followed by a wider publicity campaign, with a quarter of a million handbills, announcing "JULIUS CAESAR / !! DEATH OF A DICTATOR !! / with an opening date of November 11th", distributed conscientiously all over town by volunteers "in schools, colleges, cafeterias, drugstores and bookshops all over the five boroughs" (Houseman 1972, 294).

But how would the wall impact on the Mercury Theatre production? How does it relate to Welles's previous stage, print and illustrated versions of Shakespeare's play? And to his more general vision of the "aesthetic relation" between performance, stage business and text and his organization of theatrical and artistic space? What spatial strategies – topographic and, especially, symbolic – did it imply? How was it renarrated by critics and reviewers? And what stories did the wall produce as it interrelated with Shakespeare's words and images in Welles's adaptation, and with the lighting, music, sound and movement that activated the theatre space? Or as its bounded 2D space, metonymically reflecting the 3D bounded but potentially limitless frame space of the stage, engaged with the infinite space evoked by the scenography of the Nuremberg Nazi rallies and their enactment of imperium, which the Mercury Theatre staging was in part inspired by? Or with the marble maps of empire attached to the previously

[4] Press releases issued by the Mercury Theatre pointed more directly to the play's topicality. See note 33 below. See also Yezbick 2004, 250-54, for an overview, with ample quotations, of the Mercury publicity material, press releases and letters prepared by Harry Senber to promote the production (Yezbick 2004, 253).

bare red brick wall of the Roman forum, spectacularly inaugurated by Mussolini in April 1934[5]?

The stage or set design for the 1929 Todd School production of *Julius Caesar*[6], directed and acted in by fourteen-year-old Welles, seems to have consisted simply of boxes to be shifted around during the performance, its costumes togas made of sheets stripped from the schoolboys' beds (Callow 1995, 54). Instead, Welles's sketches in black and white for *Everybody's Shakespeare* (Hill and Welles 1934 [henceforth *ES*]) suggest a variety of possible sets, props and backcloths for his readers to choose between in their own stagings of the play[7]. Several show some similarity to the set Samuel Leve elaborated for the Mercury from Welles's original project, partly inspired by the platforms in the Nuremberg rallies, and to its final version after overcoming numerous construction hitches recounted by Houseman (Houseman 1972, 296-303). A few hint at the presence of a wall by including doors, windows and shadows. Only four of the wall sketches are clearly depicted as such: the illustration of the "Public place" in Act I, scene i, with

[5] This is pure conjecture on my part, a spin-off from reflections on Joseph Holland-Caesar's Duce-like appearance and photographs of the performance. Mussolini was a constant presence in American newsreels, newspapers and magazines as is evidenced by the enormous popularity of the 1933 seventy-minute Columbia documentary, *Mussolini Speaks*. See in particular Minervini 2019, for a detailed description and photographs of reports on the documentary in newspapers of the time. See also Maria Wyke's account of how, adding "sound, vision, and action" to newsprint versions of Mussolini's identification with Caesar, Hearst Corporation newsreels enabled American cinema audiences to "witness with their own eyes Mussolini's spectacular performance of his Caesarean rituals surrounded by Rome's ancient monuments and applauded by swarming crowds of supporters" (Wyke 2012, 109-10). The popularity of Mussolini and his Caesarean rhetoric was countered by George Seldes's *Sawdust Caesar: The Untold History of Mussolini and Fascism* (1935), alerting American readers to the danger of gaining their "own homegrown *Duce*". Seldes's focus on Fascism's invention of history through its creation of "a false epic about a romantic hero", with Mussolini "step[ping] into the role of a monumental Caesar 'as an actor into his makeup'" (quoted in Wyke 2012, 111-12), seems in many ways to anticipate the reflections on Fascist theatricality in Welles's *Caesar*.

[6] The date attributed to the production varies from 1928 to 1929 to 1930 and with it the age of its director-actor.

[7] Page references indicated by *MS* relate to the later *Mercury Shakespeare* edition (Welles and Hill 1939). I use *ES* to refer specifically to the original version.

pillared 'walls' created by curtains opening onto a low wall-like structure with arches rearing up behind it (*MS* 10); the first of five sketches of "Brutus' Orchard", enclosed here by walls containing both a gate and a door and open to the sky (the description of the setting specifies that "*the back, usually, is a wall over which, when the sun rises, we can make out the skyline of the city. The gate may be in evidence, and a part of the house*" [*MS* 23]); the wall of Caesar's house, recognizable as such due to a horizontal line marking its separation from the floor, to the presence of an open, fairly elaborate door, and to the towering shadow rearing up against it, behind a frightened human figure (*MS* 30); finally, the charcoal sketch of a wall with a narrow, horizontal upper window, backing the table at which the Triumvirate are "prick[ing]" their future victims (*MS* 50). None of these sketches in any way resembles the bare brick wall that framed and reflected the play enacted beneath it at the Mercury Theatre, providing what was perhaps the stage design's most striking element.

"I wanted to present *Julius Caesar* against a texture of brick, not of stone, and I wanted a color of red that had certain vibrations of blue. In front of this red brick wall I wanted levels and places to act: that was my conception of the production". This is how Welles himself explained his choice a year later in his address to the Theatre Education League (quoted in Callow 1995, 325)[8]. His mention of texture, vibrating colour and the "acting" of "levels and places" is indicative of the multisensory, interrelational function of his wall. At the same time, his specification that its redness should possess "vibrations of blue" echoes Antony's description of the conspirators' "purpled hands", still "reek[ing] and smok[ing]" with Caesar's blood (Welles 2001, 136)[9].

According to Frank Brady, "Welles wanted the bricks of the wall to show, as a modern symbol, an urban milieu of the twentieth century instead of the usual scenery of stones connected with ancient Rome". But his intention was to "give [his] audience" only

[8] See also Casale 2001, 130-31. For other quotes from the lecture, see Callow 1995, 314-19, and Pierini 2005, 82-101.

[9] Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from *Julius Caesar* come from Richard France's reproduction of Welles's adaptation for the Mercury Theatre (Welles 2001, 108-68).

"a *hint* of a scene", as he told his stage designer, Samuel Leve, adding: "No more than that. Give them too much and they won't contribute anything themselves. Give them just a suggestion and you get them working for you. That's what gives the theatre meaning: when it becomes a social act" (Brady 1989, 121).

John Mason Brown, one of the first reviewers, describes the effect in the *New York Post* (12 November 1937):

> [Welles] places it upon a bare stage, the brick walls of which are crimson and naked. A few steps and a platform and an abyss beyond, from which the actors can emerge, are the setting. A few steps – and the miracle of spotlights which stab the darkness with as sinister an effect as the daggers of the assassins which penetrate Caesar's body. That is all. And it is all that is needed. […] It is a setting spacious enough for both the winds and victims of demagoguery to sweep across it like a hurricane. (Brown 2000, 221-22)

Similar words return in Sidney B. Whipple's review published, the same day, in the *New York World-Telegram*. Describing how Welles and the Mercury Theatre team "work with words and lights rather than with costumes and scenery", he focuses on the interaction between wall and lighting in structuring the action taking place on stage:

> No scenic embellishment exists whatsoever, and none is needed. The red brick wall at the rear […] can be 'painted' out at will by the use of lights. Frequently spot lights illuminate the speaker who holds the center of the stage and the little knot of people around him. Actors do not disappear into wings or through doors. They are merely blotted out by darkness. (Whipple 2014a, 443)

But it is Burns Mantle's comment in the *New York Daily News* (13 November 1937) that shows most clearly how the wall contributed to the achievement of Welles's desire to stimulate his audience "into imaginative awareness":

> Whether you face a street in Rome or the plains of Phillipi or the Roman Forum or Brutus' gardens or the marketplace or a general's tent, you still face no more than a red brick wall that is at the rear of the

> Mercury's stage. Now you see it, now you don't, thanks to the darkness and your imagination. But it is always there and it crowds the mind. (Quoted in France 1975, 55)

More interested in the cost of executing Welles's plan than in its creative metaphorical potential, Houseman describes the wall and its colour in less enthusiastic terms:

> What could be simpler and more economical than a few platforms and bare brick walls daubed with standard barn-red? Precisely because they *were* bare, it meant that hundreds of gallons of paint must be sloshed and sprayed from ladders and scaffolds over an acreage of more than five thousand square feet, including dressing-room stairs, stage door, steam pipes and fire extinguishers. (Houseman 1972, 297)

Yet the colour of the walls inevitably came to be associated not with barns but blood. Richard France describes the "dried blood" colour of the stage wall as "itself a striking image in the production" (France 1977, 108). For the audience listening to Shakespeare's words and watching the actions of the players, it must – at least in retrospect – have suggested a materialization of the blood vocabulary and imagery of Shakespeare's text. In one of the later performances, the materialization became all too real. "Sloshing", the word used by Houseman to describe how the wall was painted, returns in France's version of one of the most widely repeated anecdotes regarding the play, when Welles inadvertently stabbed the actor playing the part of Caesar and the stage floor was invaded by blood: "One night he severed an artery, and in the blackout Joseph Holland had to be carried off stage and rushed to hospital. When the lights came up again for the Poet scene, Norman Lloyd found himself *sloshing* around in blood" (France 1975, 61, emphasis mine).

Surprisingly, France's playscript eliminates one of the most famous of the bloody passages in Shakespeare's text – the gesture, invoked by Brutus, to "[s]toop, Romans, stoop, / And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood / Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords", waving their "red weapons" over their "heads" as they "cry, 'Peace, freedom and liberty!'" – although the rest of Brutus' and Cassius' words on the endless re-enactments of their deed in

centuries to come remain[10]. The passage was however present in the 1934 *Everybody's Shakespeare* text (*MS* 37) and in the 1939 Mercury Text Recording that accompanied the new edition.

The elimination of the invitation to perform a blood bathing ceremony robbed the conspirators of an act that would have fulfilled a ritual function, confirming the ennobling, sacrificial nature Brutus sought to attribute to the killing of Caesar. Why then should these particular lines have been removed from the version to be performed on stage? Both Caesar's account of Calpurnia's dream, predicting a similar scene, followed by Decius' interpretation, and Antony's suggestion "the commons" too would "kiss dead Caesar's wounds / And dip their napkins in his sacred blood" were they to hear the contents of Caesar's will, are quoted in full (*MS* 32 and 45; Welles 2001, 129-30 and 144). The elimination could perhaps be due to the differing nature of the three occurrences. Calpurnia's dream and Antony's suggestion are descriptions or even scripts of ritual actions to be performed in a hypothetical future; the theatrical gesture proposed by Brutus consists instead of directions for a performance to take place in the present. The elimination of the lines deprives him of the theatrical power role as director, stage manager or playwright assumed by Antony[11] and before him Caesar, both in the opening scene of the play when Welles's Caesar (not Shakespeare's Casca) orders silence on stage and later in his narration of a dream that Calpurnia herself did not describe. When, on the contrary, the reference is to the playing of the act in a potentially eternal future – "How many ages hence" – Welles has no hesitation in attributing to Brutus the lines Shakespeare had given to Cassius (as, too, had Welles, three years earlier, in *MS* 37), suggesting a possible identification of Brutus –

[10] A textual surgery that is the opposite of that performed by the Italian censor in 1935 (Bigliazzi 2019, 32 and 173).

[11] Alessandro Serpieri's comments on Shakespeare's theatricalization of Antony's rhetoric and on Antony's ability both as actor and as stage director in organizing his own performance and that of his audience, arranging them "in a circle around [Caesar's] body" and turning them "into actors of *his* scene", are illuminating also for Welles's representations of the forum scene both in his drawings and in the Mercury Theatre performance (Serpieri 2010, 230-31).

and of Welles himself as actor and director, but also as the author of the adapted script – with Shakespeare.

Returning to the blood imagery present in Welles's playscript, Decius' reference to Caesar's "statue spouting blood in many pipes" (Welles 2001, 130) must have assumed added relevance on a stage where audiences were faced not only by blood-coloured bricks, but by "clearly visible" steam pipes (France 1977, 108), which had also been painted red. Other visions of blood that add to and are in turn enhanced by the wall's evocative power include Antony's later attribution of movement and even anthropomorphic agency and emotion to Caesar's blood as it followed Brutus' "cursed steel […] / […], / As rushing out of doors, to be resolved / If Brutus so unkindly knocked, or no". Or, again, to Pompey's statue, "[w]hich all the while ran blood" as Caesar fell below it (*MS* 46, Welles 2001, 148), an image Welles had already foregrounded impressively in black and white in one of his finest *Everybody's Shakespeare* illustrations[12].

In at least one case Shakespeare's blood imagery is actually expanded in Welles's script. In the scene where Caesar's bloody, wounded body is exhibited to his audience by Antony, the single reference to blood by the citizens in Shakespeare's text is multiplied. Although the playscript eliminates the First Citizen's "O most bloody sight!" exclamation, the word "bloody" is uttered not once but seven times. Foregrounded by the removal of the rest of the phrase, it reverberates in a multiple echo, voiced not by a single actor but by four of the ten actors who make up the crowd of Antony's listeners (Welles 2001, 149).

The redness of the wall – and its association with blood – was supplemented by coloured lighting on at least two occasions: "[T]he murders of Caesar and Cinna the Poet, played out in red,

[12] I discuss this image in my analysis of the *ES*/*MS* illustrations in the next section of this study. Both Hill's introduction to the *ES* play and the final recording of Welles's 1938 radio rehearsal include Plutarch's description of Pompey's statue "wetted with [Caesar's] blood". Hill's quotation also includes Plutarch's comment: "So that Pompey himself seemed to have presided, as it were, over the revenge done upon his adversary, who lay here at his feet, and breathed out his soul through his multitude of wounds, for they say he received three and twenty" (*MS* 6).

intense lights, were terrible, bloody moments, suggesting the unleashing of perverse human pleasures in the act of killing" (Postlewait 1999, 120). Norman Lloyd, who played the part of Cinna the Poet, adds further details on the staging of his scene: "the lighting was fantastic – blood red – the set was red too. […] Orson's direction: the last thing I scream is THE POET. Rush down the ramp – I just disappeared – just this hand, bathed in red light" (quoted in Callow 1995, 335). The blackout and silence with which the scene closed – before Cinna's last words – must have made both the poet's cry and the presence of his hand (the only remaining trace of his disappearing body) all the more striking, incorporating and replacing the suddenly invisible redness of the wall: "Blackout. Silence. Then, a last frenzied cry – 'BUT I'M CINNA THE POET!' […] followed by the peal of a Hammond organ struck full volume on all the bass keys and pedals for what seems like minutes (but is actually forty-five seconds)" (France 1977, 116).

While Cinna's hand, raised in his last visible gesture, recalls that of Caesar as he dies, his "one hand stretched out to [Brutus] in appeal" in the *ES* stage direction (Courtney 2006, 205), the red lighting produces a new, live version of Shakespeare's images of blood-drenched hands, no longer narrated as part of a potential future ritual but brought on stage in an unholy re-enactment of Caesar's assassination. In inviting his audience to "kiss dead Caesar's wounds / And dip their napkins in his sacred blood", while he sought to give voice to the wounded "ruby lips" (Welles 2001, 138), Antony had laid the foundations for the blood-splattering flood of slaughter that would ensue, engulfing Cinna as the first, pathetic victim of a potentially unending cycle of bloodshed.

According to Brady, the poems Cinna tried to give his assailants were "written on pink paper, a gentler contrast to the blood red violence of the wall" (Brady 1989, 125). This adds a further dimension to Welles's use of varied tonalities of redness, foregrounding the pathos of the poet's gesture in trying to demonstrate his identity and innocence by giving copies of his poems to his assailants. Instead of protection, they serve only to shift the justification for his lynching from involvement in Caesar's assassination to literary inadequacy: "Tear him for his bad verses"

(Welles 2001, 154). "To Normal Lloyd, who played Cinna, his character 'symbolized what was happening in the world, if your name was Greenburg – and even if you weren't Jewish'" (France 2001b, 105-6). But the treatment of the street poet could also be seen as a symbol of the dangers facing artists and intellectuals in a totalitarian regime. For Daniel Francis Yezbick, Cinna symbolizes "the plight of intelligent individuals trapped between the governing elite and the roiling masses". In 1937, "in a culture obsessed with issues of social commitment and the collective potential of 'the people', Cinna's disappearance into the throng represented the death knell of democratic freedom" (Yezbick 2004, 291).

In his discussion of the scene in his second review for the *New York World-Telegram*, Whipple adds a monstrous, cannibalistic twist to the body metaphors that were widely adopted in comments on the production. "In the half-light of the stage the slender figure of the poet is picked out against the red background of the brick wall" while the mob itself, coming more and more densely together, is transformed into the mouth of a "human juggernaut": "Around him is a small ring of light, and in the shadows an ever-tightening, pincer-like mass movement. Then in one awful moment of madness the jaws of the mob come together on him and he is swallowed up and rushed into black oblivion" (Whipple 2014b, 445)[13].

The corporeal images associating the set with Caesar's bleeding corpse are also applied to Welles's interventions on the *textual* body of Shakespeare's play, expressed through anthropomorphic metaphors. While John Anderson announced in the *New York Journal and American* that Welles's "ruthlessly reassembled version" of the play had "gone to the *heart* of it and *kept it beating* with the ever-gathering momentum of his scheme" (quoted in Weiss 1994, 209, emphasis mine), Brown's review in the *New York Post* went further, translating Welles's textual interventions into a vocabulary

[13] Whipple's refiguring of the scene appears in a second discussion of the play, in which he includes the community of his readers in a shared experience of viewing and reviewing: "and *your* mind's eye reviews, again and again, those scenes which have so captured *your* imagination", a confirmation of the effectiveness of Welles's mind-awakening aim (Whipple 2014b, 444, emphasis mine).

of bodily violence, more akin to butchery than surgery despite their positive results:

> Mr. Welles has not hesitated to take liberties with the script. […] He has not stabbed it through the heart, he has only chopped away at its body. You may miss a few fingers, even an arm and leg, in the *Julius Caesar* you thought you knew. But the heart of the drama beats more vigorously in this production than it has in years. (Quoted in O'Connor 1980, 346)

John O'Connor glosses Brown's image with details of the surgical operation – "The arm, leg, and fingers Welles chopped off were the ghost, Octavius, the personal rivalries, and most of the last two acts" (346) – but fails to note its echo of the passage in *Julius Caesar* where Brutus rejects Cassius' proposal to kill not only Caesar but Antony:

> Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
> To cut the head off and then hack the limbs;
> For Antony is but a limb of Caesar.
> Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.
> […]
> Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
> Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds.
> And for Marc Antony, think not of him;
> For he can do no more than Caesar's arm
> When Caesar's head is off.
> (Welles 2001, 125-26)

In Anderson's review, the shouting of the crowds morphs into the shouting of the play itself, crossing the centuries to make itself heard in the turbulent world of the 1930s. In the "sharp design" of his production, Welles had "found the tip-toe melodrama of conspiracy, moved it to its deadly work, and in the racing mobs […] howling for their dead tyrant, lifted an Elizabethan voice into the modern world of dictators to make a lusty shout of protest" (quoted in Weiss 1994, 209). For Brooks Atkinson, on the contrary, "[w]ith nothing but men and lights for materials", Welles had created "scenes that are almost tongue-tied with stealth and terror, crowd

scenes that overflow with savagery, columns of soldiers marching through the dim light in the distance" (Atkinson 1937a, quoted in Weiss 1994, 210) – an alternation between muteness and shouting that reflects the use both of silence and intensity of sound in Blitzstein's musical score and the orchestration of whispering and shouting in the voices of the crowd.

Before returning to the Mercury stage production to examine the opening scene and discuss how the visual impact of the red stage wall was integrated by the orchestration of light and shade and the visual and kinetic management of the actors, it is necessary to go back in time to some of Welles's earlier engagements with the play, most particularly his stage directions, drawings and essay on staging in *Everybody's Shakespeare*, co-authored with his former schoolmaster, Roger Hill.

3. Julius Caesar *in Black and White: The Multiple* Caesars *of* Everybody's Shakespeare

Welles's engagements with Shakespeare were also engagements with the recipients of his creations. What kind or rather kinds of Shakespeare and of Caesar (text and character) would his theatre, reading and listening publics be acquainted with? How was he to mediate with their knowledge and expectations? How did his work fit into the tradition of Shakespeare reception in America and elsewhere?

3.1. American Reception of Julius Caesar

An indication of Welles's perception of the problem comes from his work on *Everybody's Shakespeare*, a publication intended for use in schools which included *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice* as well as *Julius Caesar*. A folder of "*Julius Caesar* Research" is preserved in the Welles Mss. collection at the Lilly Library of Indiana University, containing Welles's notes on the play and the history of its performance, including a reproduction of the programme of Edwin Booth and Lawrence Barrett's 1871

production[14]. Although the folder is located in a box of documents relating to the Mercury Theatre production of 1937, some of the material referred to in Welles's notes may have been accumulated years before. His essay "On Staging Shakespeare and On Shakespeare's Stage" in *Everybody's Shakespeare* (1934) includes a brief but colourful history of Shakespeare performance, illustrated by drawings of playhouses, costumes and different forms of staging. The book itself is connected explicitly not with Shakespeare scholarship, but with the "vast tradition of stage business":

> This book is a popular presentation of Shakespeare from the players' and the producer's viewpoint. We have adapted it from the prompt-books of the great actors and from other sources, and arranged it into a sort of simplified composite of that whole unpublished literature. Those zero hours of Shakespeare's history on the stage when the plays were "reformed", and "made fit", […] have not concerned us. Our business has been with the more respectful actors' versions and our reverence for the original has helped us in again adapting them, this time to star Shakespeare. (Welles 1939a, 28)

[14] Box 5, folder 34. "The Mercury's research files and press releases are filled with voluminous timelines and preliminary historical summaries of *Julius Caesar*'s exploitation on stage and in school. Welles and his collaborators were not only immersed in Julius Caesar's American history, it seems that they wanted the general public to become more aware of it as well" (Yezbick 2004, 250). For quotations (in Italian translation) from Welles's notes on the stage history and criticism of *Julius Caesar*, see Casale 2001, 126-30, 135. The presence of the Booth and Barrett production programme in the Research file is particularly interesting in this context. John Wilkes Booth, who had appeared as Antony together with his brothers Edwin Booth as Brutus and Junius Brutus Booth Jr. as Cassius in 1864, a few months before his assassination of Abraham Lincoln, is famed for shouting "*Sic semper tyrannis*. The South is avenged" after shooting the President in a Washington theatre, and for numbers of references to *Julius Caesar* in letters and diary entries written after the assassination. See, for example, his complaint at being pursued "[f]or doing what Brutus was honored for. What made [William] Tell a hero? And yet I, for striking down a greater tyrant than they ever knew, am looked upon as a common cutthroat. […] I struck for my country and that alone". For further details and quotations, see in particular Teague 2006, 72-73.

Finally, a collage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century production posters (including a presentation of William Macready's *Julius Caesar*) forms the back cover of the volume. One of the intentions behind both Roger Hill and Welles's work on *Everybody's Shakespeare* and all of Welles's *Caesars* was to react against the elaborate, 'historical' sets and costumes of most previous performances.

The authors of *Everybody's Shakespeare* could count on their school public's acquaintance less with the plays themselves than with set pieces, which, from the time of William Enfield's elocutionary textbook, *The Speaker* (1776), reprinted in America in 1798, continued to be included in other texts throughout most of the nineteenth century. The most frequently quoted speeches and scenes from *Julius Caesar* were: "'The Speech of Brutus on the Death of Caesar', 'Antony's Soliloquy over Caesar's Body', 'Antony's Funeral Oration over Caesar's Body', 'The Quarrel of Brutus and Cassius', as well as a piece titled simply 'Brutus and Cassius', which includes most of Act I, scene ii, where Cassius performs the bulk of his rhetorical seduction of Brutus". The latter, Schupak adds, "includes […] Cassius' speech, 'I had as lief not be, as live to be / In awe of such a thing as I myself', recounting Caesar's human flaws, as well as Cassius' oration, 'Why man he doth bestride the narrow world / like a Colossus" (Schupak 2017, 164). Of the speeches, "Antony's Funeral Oration" was undoubtedly the most popular, often the only passage from the play to be included, in a carefully edited version.

A double tradition of American *Caesars* existed in the field of readers. On the one hand, "the extracts used in textbooks constructed the play as far more strongly republican than Shakespeare's full-length drama" (Schupak 2017, 162), a tendency also to be found in the prose version Harrison S. Morris included in his sequel to the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* (1893-94). Although "Morris makes no explicit reference to the American Revolution or the War of Independence", Maria Wyke observes,

> it is notable that the title character is introduced as a man who would be king, and as a danger to the liberties of Rome […]. Cassius and Brutus are figured as honourable patriots, sad at heart, who cannot

> countenance the dictator's ambition. […]. The tragedy's original staging of ethical unease about conspiracy and assassination vanishes, and the American prose synopsis replaces it with a heroic camaraderie that better matches the idealized national history of colonial revolution. (Wyke 2012, 49)

On the other, in one of the most widely diffused and appreciated collections of readers, the McGuffey series, a more conservative interpretation dominates. Due partly to their costliness, they had considerable cultural impact and "were passed down in families, becoming a 'book of reference' and assuming significant cultural status" (Schupak 2017, 167).

In McGuffey's *Eclectic Fourth Reader* (1837), "Antony's Oration over Caesar's Dead Body", the only passage from the play to be included[15] comes immediately after "The Fall of Babylon" (Revelation 18 and 19:1-8). As Philip Christensen notes, "there is little doubt that the editors intend its readers to link the two selections. From the editors' perspective, all pagan achievement, even that of great Caesar, is bound ultimately to fail". At the same time, Antony's words, "almost moving stones to rise and mutiny, link mighty Caesar's fall to the betrayal of the Son of Man". Among its annotations to the speech, the *Sixth Reader* (1879) includes a tribute to "the most remarkable genius of the ancient world" placing Caesar "among the precursors of the young America's great patriot heroes": "Under his rule Rome was probably at her best, and his murder at once produced a state of anarchy". Throughout the McGuffey readers, "heroic deeds, performed by men, are identified with the stability of the commonwealth; villainy with anarchy and a consequent tyranny" (Christensen 2009, 108).

3.2. Preparing the "Shakespeare book"

The *Everybody's Shakespeare* project began in 1932, when Hill suggested they should "[w]rite a Shakespeare book. Tell other teachers some of the tricks we used at Todd to make the Elizabethan popular in the classroom as well as on the stage" (quoted in

[15] Both in this edition and its sequels, with the exception of the 1844 edition, which also contained the "Quarrel of Brutus and Cassius" (Christensen 2009, 109).

Courtney 2006, 197). The idea was to capitalize on Todd's theatrical successes, providing Shakespeare adaptations for schools, partly as an outlet for Welles's creativity. The book was published two years later by the Todd School printing press[16]. Welles began by working on sketches, after which Hill charged him with writing stage directions and one of the introductory essays. In one of his letters, written in 1933 after leaving for Morocco to work on the project, Welles refers specifically to *Julius Caesar* and the problems raised by inventing appropriate stage directions for the play:

> The mere presence of Shakespeare's scrip (sic) worries me. What right have I to give credulous and believing innocents an inflection for his mighty lines? Who am I to say that this one is "tender" and this one is said "angrily" and this "with a smile?" There are as many interpretations for characters in CAESAR as there are in God's spacious firmament. What nerve I have to pick out one of them and cram it down any child's throat, coloring, perhaps permanently, his whole conception of the play. (Quoted in Courtney 2006, 198)

Welles extends his idea of multiple possible interpretations of *Caesar* characters to those of other Shakespeare plays in his essay on staging, viewing them as a source for creativity. After opening with a celebrated appreciation of Shakespeare's poetical and emotional genius – "Shakespeare said everything. Brain to belly; every mood and minute of a man's season. His language is starlight and fireflies and the sun and the moon. He wrote it with tears and

[16] "Intended for the textbook market and sold in bookstores in Chicago or directly from the Todd Press, *Everybody's Shakespeare* went through several editions quickly. First published in 1934 by the Todd School's own press (known primarily for printing Todd School promotional materials and Roger Hill's book on basketball), editing and arranging credits went to 'Roger Hill and Orson Welles'. The Todd Press reprinted the books in 1938; this time Orson Welles's name came first, capitalizing on the successes of Harlem's WPA productions of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. The texts were published in 1939 by Harper with some minor changes, as *The Mercury Shakespeare*, and were released at the same time as the Mercury Text Recordings. *Macbeth*, published in 1941, was the only new play to be added to *The Mercury Shakespeare*" (Courtney 2006, 197). The later *Mercury Shakespeare* edition is viewable at https://hdl.handle.net/2027/miun.afw2961.0001.001.

blood and beer, and his words march like heart-beats" (Welles 1939a, 22) – he provides a brief account of the Elizabethan stage and of the history of Shakespeare performances, going on to describe how the multiple possible interpretations of Shakespeare's characters can be translated into drawings, scene designs and stage directions:

> In illustrating I have drawn a variety of character interpretations but not nearly enough. There are, for instance, a thousand Shylocks: grim patriarchs, loving fathers, cunning orientals, and even comics with big noses[17]. And this goes for Malvolio and Marc Antony, Brutus and Sir Toby Belch, Viola and the two Portias, and all the rest of the characters in these plays down to Lucius and Launcelot Gobbo. You can draw them, and what's more important, play them, exactly as you wish. […]. But it's up to you. This is equally true of the scene designs. […]
> About the stage directions: Shakespeare went to the rehearsals of his plays so he didn't write stage directions. Anyway playwrights didn't write comprehensive ones until long after his time. Pick up any edition of Shakespeare and you'll find stage directions economically confined to *Enter So-and-So*, *Exit So-and-So*, and an occasional *Dies*. (Welles 1939a, 27-28)

3.3. Multiple Caesars *in Welles's Drawings and Stage Directions*

Welles's drawings add further stories to those emerging from the adaptation, expressed through the size, posture and placing of the protagonists and the use of line or shadow, with varying intensity of contrast. The deliberately unfinished, provisional appearance of the drawings dynamizes the scenes with their suggestion of movement. My analysis is based on the text of the *Mercury Shakespeare*, the 1939 version of *Everybody's Shakespeare*, in which Welles's drawings and stage directions underwent a number of

[17] Illustrated on the same page by a magnificent sketch of a procession of "a thousand shylocks" (27), variegated in costume and appearance, getting smaller and smaller as they circle away into the distance. Also viewable at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/g/genpub/afw2961.0001.001/32.

changes, both in length and placing[18]. This is unfortunately the only edition available on line. Where possible, I integrate my study with descriptions and stage directions from the earlier version quoted in Callow 1995, 184, and Courtney 2006, 205.

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar opens in *MS* with a sketch of an imposing, laurel-wreathed Caesar, imperiously dominating the cast list that follows. Callow quotes from a lengthy *ES* stage direction describing the character as "richly robed; a majestic figure, kingly and dignified". Welles's illustration shows little similarity however to "[h]is handsome, almost feminine face [which] is oldish and cut with wrinkles, but the eyes are clear and steady and the mouth is firm" (*ES*, quoted in Callow 1995, 184). In the later version the description is eliminated. All that remains is a heavily weighted definition of the character in the *MS* cast list: "Julius Caesar, *dictator of Rome*".

Welles's illustrations and stage directions for the assassination scene are closely related to its rendering in the 1937 Mercury Theatre production. In the *MS* text, a tableau of the assassination anticipates in a static, visual version the sequence of sound, movement and fury narrated two pages later in the stage direction (*MS* 34 and 36), brought to life immediately afterwards by the impressive, almost abstract image of Casca's violent attack on Caesar from behind, placed in the left margin at the bottom of the page (*MS* 36). Its "simple lines", as Angela Courtney observes, "convey the speed and surprise with which the murder began" (Courtney 2006, 206). Welles's *ES* stage direction, quoted by Courtney, shows the sequence followed in acting out the murder (parts omitted in the *MS* version are in italics[19]):

> While in Shakespeare's text, the directions for one of the most famous stage murders in theatre history are simply, "They stab Caesar", Welles

[18] Published in 1939 by Harper & Brothers and accompanied by a phonographic recording. Text and images of the whole book, including *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice* as well as *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, are available at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=genpub;idno=AFW2961.0001.001.

[19] In the shorter *MS* version, the punctuation is corrected and the *ES* use of block capitals for names removed.

> takes on the difficult task of adding intricate fight choreography for students of Shakespeare […]. Welles reveals his composition for the readers: Casca first raises a sword from behind Caesar, followed by: "*Shrieking, the people draw back in fear*. CASCA brings down the sword *fiercely and swiftly* stabbing *the unsuspecting* Caesar in the back. Caesar wheels about and Decius stabs him. A few of the braver citizens start up the steps in defense but by this time all the conspirators have brought out swords. They menace the others with them and most of the people fly out of the room. CAESAR, roaring furiously, throws himself at CASSIUS. Who triumphantly runs him through. One by one the conspirators all thrust at him. Caesar, scarcely able to move, staggers down the steps and drags himself painfully by superhuman effort up to BRUTUS, one hand stretched out to him in appeal. Averting his face, BRUTUS stabs him. *Dazed, shocked, CAESAR stares at his friend*". (Courtney 2006, 205)

Several of the aspects of Welles's images and writing noted by Courtney are central also in his work for the Mercury Theatre: in particular "his attention to the logistics of creating a complex and multicharacter scene" (Courtney 2006, 206). France's description of the 1937 staging of the assassination scene, probably based on Welles's *Julius Caesar* Research notes[20], shows how the initial outline developed in performance:

> The conspirators are positioned in a diagonal line across the stage. Caesar, rolling from one to another in a kind of broken-field run, is, in turn, stabbed by each of them. Finally, he reaches downstage. There is only one person left to run to – Brutus, standing like a column against the proscenium wall. His knees buckling, Caesar turns to him as his final haven of safety. Without a word Brutus' hand comes out of his overcoat pocket, and he stands there clutching a knife while Caesar hangs on to his lapels. The enormous figure of Brutus gives no ground to the cringing Caesar, whose face registers the question – will he save me? Caesar's own answer, barely audible, is one of absolute resignation: 'Et tu Brute? Then fall Caesar'. The knife goes in and Caesar slumps to the ground. It was more climactic than the most piercing scream, for when Caesar finally spoke it was simply to verbalize the statement that the entire scene had already made. (France 1977, 110-11)

[20] See Casale 2001, 134-35 and 171, note 60.

Antony's arrival shortly after the assassination is signalled by two sketches (*MS* 38). The first is dominated by a pillar whose disorderly Corinthian capital seems to reflect the unruliness of a group of black figures, surrounding others clad in white, that move away below it, their arms raised, whether threateningly or in salutation is hard to ascertain. The second, at the bottom of the page, shows Antony as a small figure kneeling behind Caesar's corpse. Stretched out horizontally under its mantle, the large, black shape of Caesar's body is only recognizable as such in its tiny hands protruding as if in an embrace. Four white clad conspirators, daggers still in hand, stand watching them at a distance, looking down on what could also be a pool of blood – the "bleeding piece of earth" (*MS* 40) Antony will soon address himself to[21]. In *MS* 40, the scene ends with his prophetic soliloquy, uttered when he is alone with Caesar's body, promising "[w]oe to the hand that shed this costly blood!" and to the whole of the country. Underneath the "CURTAIN" that follows his last line ("Cry 'Havoc' – and let slip the dogs of war!") is a final sketch, showing an upright, powerful and determined figure, fists clenched, no longer "meek and gentle", but ready to avenge the man lying beneath him. In the Mercury production, Antony's prophecy of Caesar's spirit crying "Havoc" was underlined by the beginning of one of the most violent parts of Blitzstein's musical accompaniment: "After the murder, beginning with Antony's line, 'Cry "Havoc", and let slip the dogs of war', music is played fortissimo by cymbal, thunder drums, and organ" (Burton 1956, 345).

Welles's illustrations of the Forum scene represent a novelty in America. Although Antony's funeral orations were widely represented in American readers and textbooks, they appeared in isolation, unaccompanied by the reactions of the crowd. Here, on the contrary, the crowd plays a central part both in the text and in

[21] Interestingly, the representation of Caesar's body shows some similarity to the figure filmed in the 1908 Vitagraph silent film, *Julius Caesar*, directed by James Stuart Blackton, William V. Ranous. Some of the props in Welles's drawings also resemble those presented in the film: the tripod burner in Caesar's house and beside one of the Antony images in the Forum scene is almost identical to one that is visible in the early part of the Vitagraph assassination scene.

the drawings. Readers of the *ES* play could see themselves reflected in the heads of the anonymous listener-viewers, placed below the elevated figure of the speaker. Welles's illustrations of actors and audiences in stages and performances of the past in his essay on staging are regenerated and actualized in his sketches of the funeral orations, both in the posture he attributes to the actors and, especially, in his portrayal of actor-audience relations. Seen in this context, the drawings become plays within the play, mirroring some of the metatheatrical elements of Shakespeare's text and anticipating similar elements in Welles's own staging of the play in November 1937.

The Forum scene illustrations open with the representation of an empty stage set labelled "permanent stage for *Julius Caesar*", based on platforms, steps leading up at the sides to a rostrum or "*raised pulpit*" (*MS* 41)[22]. The next illustration (*MS* 42) shows a peopled tableau, with Brutus standing on top of a flight of steps, his arms slightly open at his side (a typical Wellesian speaker pose), his listeners standing below. At the bottom of the page the figure of Brutus returns in a close-up of the upper part of his body, surrounded by a narrow black shadow. Although there is no visual representation of his listeners within the sketch itself, the image is placed beside the citizens' celebrations of him as the new Caesar, suggesting a dialogue between drawing and text, between the figure speaking in the drawing and the audience listening and responding to him in the text.

Comparison with the drawings of Antony that follow reveals an evident contrast between the static, relatively isolated figure of Brutus and the dynamic, constantly moving figure of Antony, relating directly to an audience that also moves and changes its attitudes and postures. The first image of Antony to appear at the funeral appears on the page facing the sketches of Brutus (*MS* 43). Placed alongside part of his "Friends, Romans, countrymen" speech, it shows him standing in a Christ- or even Madonna-like pose, his arms extended outwards in an eloquent, ostensive gesture, above the heads of an attentive crowd of listeners. In the

[22] This has been seen as an anticipation of the Mercury Theatre set's link to the scenography of the Nazi party rallies in Nuremberg.

next group of illustrations (*MS* 44 and 45, 46 and 47), the interaction between the speaker and his listeners begins to acquire more details. Flanking Antony's words of mourning and his pause as he waits for his heart "in the coffin there with Caesar" to return to him, the image in the upper margin of *MS* 44 shows a sideview of the speaker, his hand resting on the pulpit, while the heads of the public below him exchange comments. At the bottom of the page is a line drawing showing the composition of the scene and the location of the characters, a variation of the *MS* 42 group tableau, but with Antony occupying a more elevated position than that previously occupied by Brutus. On the facing page (*MS* 45) are two close-up representations of details of speaker and listeners, with, at the bottom of the right hand margin, Antony standing beside a small, cross-legged, smoking ritual burner, holding out Caesar's will in one hand while he indicates it to the crowd with the other. A more orderly, institutional version of the pillar from *MS* 38, where it appeared in front of the crowd, returns on the upper left margin of *MS* 46 to frame a sideview of Antony as he harangues the attentive crowd, telling the story of Caesar's assassination through the cuts and blood stains of his mantle and of his fall "[e]ven at the base of Pompey's statua, / Which all the while ran blood". A black ribbon-like line reflects his words, suggesting a down-flow of liquid from behind the left side of the column, echoed in the even clearer representation of streaming ribbons of blood in the sketch that follows at the bottom of the page, one of the most complex and effective of Welles's drawings.

Here the liquid pours down from the frontal right side of the black, fractured shape of the statue onto what might be Caesar's body, covered by its black mantle. Facing both is an upsurge of black, chaotic movement. Placed alongside Antony's litotic plea to his "sweet friends" not to let him "stir you up / to such a *sudden flood of mutiny*" (*MS* 46, emphasis mine), the sketch provides a visual rendering both of Antony's words, the persuasive, performative power of his rhetoric, and a materialization of Calpurnia's dream recounted by Caesar, in which not Pompey's but "my" (Caesar's) statue, "like a fountain with an hundred spouts, / Did run pure blood" (*MS* 32).

The "sudden flood" stirred up by Antony, dramatizing as pure, inhuman frenzy the citizens' reactions to the bloody sight revealed on lifting the covering from Caesar's body, contains the only representation of a statue among the *MS* drawings. Since it is presented in the same position as the column in the previous illustration, it is worth considering its possible symbolic connection – by way both of similarity and contrast – to the latter. Several other *Caesar* illustrations include a pillar, functioning metonymically both as an allusion to the reproductions of monumental architectural forms in the supposedly realistic historical theatrical sceneries that dominated nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stagings of the play and as a representation of Roman power and solidity. Pillars and statues are a "metaphor for identity", as Ralph Berry observes. "[T]he statue is the characteristic expressive form of Rome. It is hard, marble, an unrelenting assertion of self that one has to accept or overturn. […] Caesar dies at the foot of Pompey's statue, not a shallow irony of personality but an antithesis of stage expression: the statue and the man, the marble and the flesh" (Berry 2016, 78).

Not only has he fallen at the foot of the statue of the enemy he had displaced in life, but also of a statue he had appropriated and discursively constructed as a symbol of his own constancy and power and then, in his description of Calpurnia's dream, as the site of his future reversal. Whether or not Welles was aware of the impressive three-metre height of Pompey's statue (later to be removed by Caesar's successor), it seems significant that his drawing should represent it not only as streaming blood but as a damaged structure that is not much higher than the upsurging crowd. Moreover, since Caesar had eliminated any mention of Pompey's name in his narration of the dream, its broken appearance could be interpreted as a reflection of the breaking of his own "true-fixed and resting quality" (*MS* 36), a shadow projected by his fallen body. Certainly, the sketch that follows on the facing page presents a far more powerful, unfractured image of human energy in the depiction of Antony's shadow appearing alongside his next reference to mutiny.

Here, torches illuminate Antony's body, his arms stretched out above him, projecting a giant moving shadow on the wall behind

him that multiplies his size and power[23]. The image flanks and contradicts his litotically metarhetorical self-presentation – "I am no orator, as Brutus is" (*MS* 47) – as one unable "[t]o stir men's blood" (Welles 2001, 150). Able only to bid the "poor, poor, dumb mouths" of "Caesar's wounds" to speak in his place, he resorts to a complicated rhetorical cross-casting aimed at producing in a hypothetical future the performance that is already taking place:

> but were I Brutus,
> 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*! (*MS* 47)

Through his projection of the small-scale, self-negating, white-clad figure into a towering black shadow with moving, triple heads and bat-like flapping wings as arms, Welles provides a visual rewriting of Antony's oratory. By translating the 'figures' of his speech and gestures into a pictorial hyperbole in motion, he shows the working of a rhetoric able to animate riotous upheaval not only in the crowd of human listeners, but even in the stones of Rome[24].

Returning to more normal size in the final image on the page as Antony announces the contents of Caesar's will, it is now the crowd that seems to be growing as it agitates below him, preparing to leave on its mission of revenge. The chaos of the unindividuated, frenzied mob we saw in the image facing it on the previous page is replaced here by clearly distinguishable individual figures as they announce their plan to "burn [Caesar's] body in the holy place / And with the brands fire the traitors' houses!" (*MS* 47). In the last images of the scene (*MS* 48), the depiction quietens down, showing purpose rather than mischief as the mob departs, following the course indicated by Antony's arm. A further toning down of the

[23] This is not the only *ES* sketch based on the projection of a huge shadow (see in particular Cassius and Cinna plotting to win Brutus to their cause [*MS* 22] and Caesar's fearful night-gowned figure heading the scene set in Caesar's house in II.ii [*MS* 30]), but it is certainly the most significant.

[24] For an illuminating discussion of Antony's rhetorical and gestural moves in his orchestration of the Forum, see Serpieri 1988, 102-5.

drama is even more evident in the final image, with Antony standing, alone, on an oval three-tiered platform, before his servant brings him the news of Octavius's arrival and the flight of Brutus and Cassius.

It may be worth comparing the images of Antony to contemporary descriptions of the staging of his oration in the 1937 theatre production. Different reviewers concentrate on different moments. Mantle's account of the lighting used for the speakers during the funeral orations closely resembles Welles's image and suggests how the same effect may have been used for both the orations: "And then to the market place where, in the most effective scene of the evening, a kind of scaffold has been built from which Brutus and Antony speak their orations over the corpse of Caesar in a modern casket. With a light in front that throws their shadows huge upon the back wall" (quoted in France 1975, 61). Other descriptions include an anonymous review in *Time* magazine (22 November 1937):

> Lighting sets the mood and changes the scene. Notable effects: the giant backwall shadow of Antony, speaking over Caesar's body; a cross-hatching of light and shadow high up in the loft, unintentionally giving the impression of crossed fasces: the climax, patterned after LIFE's pictures of last summer's Nazi Congress at Nürnberg, vertical shafts of light stabbing up through the darkness as background for the eulogy to the noblest Roman of them all. (*Time* 1937)

A photograph confirms the reviewers' accounts. Alfredo Valente's portrayal of George Coulouris as Marc Antony, published in 1938 in *The Stage*, brings both speaker and public into focus. A flood light located presumably at the centre forefront of the stage illuminates Antony, in military uniform, and the hats and upper bodies of some of the members of the crowd looking up at him from below the rostrum. A giant shadow replicates the form of the rostrum and the body of the speaker, his arms raised skywards in a halo of light. Wyke's comment on the representation of the funeral orations on stage and in Valente's photograph (Wyke 2012, 118, Fig. 21) draws attention to their metatheatrical component:

> A ten-foot-high pulpit covered in black velour had been wheeled up the back ramp in the dark. From it, first Brutus and then Antony orated directly outward above the crowds who had assembled below them and around Caesar's open coffin. Disconcertingly, therefore, they were also speaking directly to the theater audience. (Wyke 2012, 117)

4. Caesar *on Stage: "Death of a Dictator" at the Mercury Theatre*

4.1. A Work in Progress: Preparation and Rehearsals

> When Welles returned from his ten-day retreat in New Hampshire, he brought with him a completely reedited text of *Julius Caesar*, including music and light cues, and a suitcase full of notes, sketches and a Plasticine model of his production. We had four weeks in which to adapt them to the Mercury stage. (Houseman 1972, 296)

Throughout the weeks and days that followed, Welles made continual changes in the script, set, lighting and other stage business. "A new ending was tried out every night […] right up to the opening. As a result there was never an opportunity to rehearse the play from start to finish" (France 1977, 120). Callow describes how he "struggled for weeks with scenes which resisted his best efforts; this process continued up to the very opening". The lynching of Cinna the Poet posed a particularly arduous problem: how to stage a musical but also "choreographic conception […] to show a mob destroying an innocent man" (Callow 1995, 328). The "choreographic conception" regarded not only movement and sound, but also the interrelationship of lighting and movement, leading again to endless experimentation in rehearsal:

> Every rehearsal was a technical rehearsal. Once the lights started to appear, Welles would move actors into their most effective groupings; he and Jeannie Rosenthal would spend hours moving the actors or the lights to achieve the images they were striving for. They were in a state of constant experiment, Welles improvising as more and more lamps appeared, Rosenthal trying to make possible what he wanted. […] "The idea, the actor and a pool of light to focus interest on the performing area were used to convey the essence of meaning as never before. These pools of light" wrote Jean Rosenthal, "alone could create theatricality. Varied as directed, downward or angled from back to front, left or

> right, high or low each position produced its own plasticity and pattern". (330-31)

France gives a useful account of how Welles's adaptations impacted on the concept of the play and the presentation of its characters as he "shaped both the play and its characters into a story of action". This he achieved not only by way of cutting but by a "practice of 'borrowing'", giving one character's lines to someone else, or transposing blocks of dialogue from one point or scene to another (France 1977, 107). Stark Young adds further details on his editing technique in his *New Republic* review (1 December 1937): "longer scenes, especially the celebrated forum scene with Antony's funeral oration and the incitement of the mob, are broken up into parts, interrupted, varied, to escape the formality and design on which they are constructed (by Shakespeare)" (quoted in France 1975, 62). Welles's compression of the early scenes between Cassius and Brutus, his shifting to "*after* the formulation of the conspiracy" of Antony's reassurance that Caesar has no need to fear Cassius, and his treatment of the scene with Calpurnia and Decius in Caesar's home, contribute to "develop[ing] the sense that the very people Caesar took to be his allies were the ones who were actually trying to kill him. Thereafter", France concludes, "every moment was charged with that special irony, so that by the time Caesar confronts Brutus the tension had risen to an electrifying peak" (France 1975, 60).

Frank Brady describes the visual effect of Welles's interventions on one of the scripts: "So many deletions, additions, cross-outs, doodles, red, blue, and black pencil marks, scribbles and lines eventually permeated Welles's working script that the dog-eared pages seemed to take on a life of their own" (Brady 1989, 122)[25]. His metaphor of the autonomous life of the text as a body recalls some of the contemporary press comments on Welles's cuts and transplants, seen almost as surgical operations on the limbs and organs of Shakespeare's play, a point I discuss earlier in relation to

[25] See also France 2001a, 5, for a detailed description of how Welles worked on his compilation of *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* for a 1930 Todd School production (*Winter of Our Discontent*), presented as "the paradigm for all of his future adaptations of Shakespeare, whether for radio, film, or the stage".

the blood and body imagery associated with the production. But even such tiny details as the use of single words show the state of flux in which the texts existed.

The manipulations Welles performed directly on the text of *Julius Caesar* were supplemented by the impact of his theatrical interventions and "stage business". On stage, the playscript is reinvigorated. Different aspects of Shakespeare's characters and their relationships are brought to the fore and recontextualized, while his imagery is drawn into transmedial patterns and clusters.

4.2. From Bare Stage to Sound and Light: The Opening Scene

The opening of the performance was signalled by a sudden blackout, accompanied by sound. Brady provides a detailed account of how "moments before the play began […] Welles gave the order to extinguish the red lights of the EXIT signs. […] '[…] I want *complete darkness*. […]'" (Brady 1989, 123)[26]. After this,

> the fixture lamps at the sides and back of the theater were slowly dimmed to blackness and everything was plunged into a frightening, dark void, a Stygian hue that all at once created the mood of death and fear and bewilderment. It seemed longer in time than it actually was for most of the audience, sitting there like silent and obedient souls in a darkened tunnel, unable to see even their hands before their faces. Finally, a lone, ghostly ancient voice coming from somewhere in the darkness cried out: "*Caesar!*"
>
> As the lights then came up, one could easily imagine the shock and drama and poetry of hearing that scream. That one word was among the most memorable moments ever experienced in a Broadway production of a Shakespearean play. (123)

[26] Yezbick notes that Welles began not only *Caesar*, but other dramas, like *Faustus*, "in totally overwhelming darkness. […] Throughout his various media projects, Welles used silence and blackness as startling devices that would differentiate the disturbing start of his texts from the more sedate beginnings of others" (Yezbick 2004, 289). Later, discussing the CBS March 1938 recording, he describes how, using "a sonic version of his pitch-black opening, Welles commences the production in total silence without any introductions, musical curtains, or credits" (296).

What seems to have struck Brady most was the sensory experience of disembodiment the frightened members of the audience were forced to undergo. Suddenly deprived of sight and thus of spatial and temporal coordinates, unable to anchor their identity on bodily awareness, their sense of disorientation was uncannily amplified and echoed in the field of sound by the "ghostly", unidentifiable and unlocatable voice arriving from the dark[27].

Only later does Brady mention the "Fascist March" overture, composed by Marc Blitzstein to accompany Caesar's entry into the Forum for the Lupercal celebrations, which must have played an important part in the shock effect of the opening. Houseman describes how its "blaring brass and deep, massive, rhythmic beat […] instantly evoked the pounding march of Hitler's storm troopers that we were hearing with increasing frequency over the radio and in the newsreels". Even more disturbing "was the ominous rumble of the electric organ on certain base stops which set the whole theatre trembling" (Houseman 1972, 307). Blitzstein himself refers to the march in "Music for the Theatre", an article published three months after the performance:

> Music isn't always background. Sometimes it comes down front for a close-up and takes over and gets written into the plot. The Fascist March which opens […] *Julius Caesar* is a case in point. Less an overture than an initial statement of theme. I had to cut it off abruptly at Caesar's first words "Bid every noise be still!" and one thinks immediately back to it as the theatrical pivot up to that point. (Blitzstein 1938, quoted in France 1975, 58)

From the start, the score created a "mood of unrest" (Burton 1956, 345):

[27] In retrospect, the anonymous soothsayer's "ghostly" cry could be seen as a substitute for the physical presence of Caesar's ghost later in the play, eliminated in the stage performance, although initially intended to be represented: "As his early script shows, Welles originally planned the death of Cinna and the arrival of Caesar's ghost as intermittent narrative segments where characters' voices dictate the flow of the action" (Yezbick 2004, 284).

> Blitzstein begins the score for *Julius Caesar* with a tympani roll and nine measures of music which changes tempo four times from 4/4 to 2/4 to 5/4 and back to 4/4. Horn and trumpet play four measures written in parallel fourths and with a heavy pulsating accent. When the organ enters, […] the introductory fragment ends with an eighth note and *a tension of expectancy*. (239, emphasis mine)

Blitzstein's biographer describes "the overture" as "evocative of the sort of marches popular in fascist Italy and Germany, but distorted through bitonal harmonies and robotic rhythms" (Pollack 2012, 213). Although it was performed in "Allegro Maestoso", the Mercury march was in fact very different from the more obviously allegro sound of contemporary Italian and German march music. Accompanied from the start by the ominous sound of marching feet, the effect it had on the audience is synthesized in more general terms by Atkinson in one of his reviews for *The New York Times*: "The grim march of military feet through the ominous shadows of the stage is the doom song heard around the world today" (quoted in Houseman 1972, 317).

While Brady emphasizes the uncannily disturbing sound of the soothsayer's "Caesar!", "the ominous disembodied cry" John Anderson was most struck by in his *New York Journal and American* review was the warning to "[b]eware the Ides of March" (quoted in Sawyer 2019, 173). Among the issues raised by the opening is Welles's characterization of Caesar, for the disembodied cry was ominously disorienting also for Caesar. Able only to "hear a tongue shriller than all the music", unable to identify him – "What man is that?" – all Caesar can do is give directions for him to be called from the throng and set before him, so that he can "see his face" (Welles 2001, 109)[28]. Only then, after a lengthy pause to study the man's appearance, can he reassert his authority and dismiss him as a dreamer. Yet, at the same time, controverting his initial disorientation, Caesar's first words in Welles's playscript show him

[28] A need that is echoed in the exchange between Cassius and Brutus that follows shortly afterwards in the playtext – "Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?", "No Cassius; for the eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things" – leading to Cassius' taking on the part of Brutus' "glass" in order to "discover to yourself / That of yourself which you yet know not of" (Welles 2001, 111-12).

in the role of leader, both in the state of Rome and in the microcosmic state of the Mercury Theatre.

Already, the very start of the production shows the mixture of strength and weakness in the figure of Caesar that was already present in Welles's earlier adaptation of *Julius Caesar*. Comparison of the ambiguously gendered description of the leader in the *ES* stage direction, quoted earlier, with his monolithic presentation in the *MS* cast list as "Julius Caesar, *dictator of Rome*" highlights the contradictions in Welles's presentation. Caesar's vulnerability is focused on in the depiction of a frightened, back-slanted night-gowned figure heading the scene set in Caesar's home (*MS* 30), one of the few images of Caesar to appear in *Everybody's Shakespeare*. In France's playscript, his self-presentations as a figure of power are outweighed and undermined by passages relating to his weakness. His fear when swimming or his swooning – authored, admittedly, by his adversaries – is amplified by the paradox of his presentation of himself as a fearless, inflexible leader, "constant as the Northern Star" (Welles 2001, 134), almost immediately forced to give way under the stabs of his assailants, 'rolling' from one to another. The diagonal line produced by the positioning of the conspirators is replicated in Caesar's fall from the verticality of power to the horizontality of death, transforming the classic closure and completeness of his body into a bleeding, grotesquely 'open' tragic corpse[29]. France's description of the scene adds a further detail to the picture in his presentation of Brutus "standing like a column against the proscenium wall" (France 1977, 111), as if to show the new model of constancy the murder was intended to produce. His posture and placing anticipate Brutus' attempt to present himself as the defender of the good of Rome in the Forum scene and his assumption of the role of intransigent moralist during his quarrel with Cassius at Philippi.

[29] Gail Kern Paster's use of Bakhtin's distinction between "classic" and "grotesque" bodies in her study of blood as a gendered metaphor in *Julius Caesar* is at least partly applicable to Welles's *Caesars* (Paster 1989, 285-86, 291, 294 and 298).

In performance, Joseph Holland's appearance, gestures and costume underline the power of Caesar. For France, citing Whipple's review in *The New York Sun*[30]:

> The production opened with Caesar, dressed in a green uniform, scowling behind the mask-like face of a modern dictator, his first gesture the fascist salute which the others returned. From the outset, therefore, it was clear that this Caesar was meant to be more of a symbol than a man. There was in Joseph Holland's performance "the reckless, swaggering self-confidence of dictatorship, the brutality of speech, the thunderous stride of importance". His costume was the type of uniform affected by a Hitler or Mussolini, but it was Holland's uncanny resemblance to Il Duce, both in manner and appearance, which defined him so exactly. His was a Caesar who could be found scowling at you in the weekly newsreels. (France 1975, 58)

Other descriptions suggest a more subtle performance. According to Esther Weiss "Joseph Holland played the title role with a concentrated economy of movement calculated to convey the greatest possible degree of inner strength", while Holland himself, speaking of his part in a *New York Herald Tribune* interview (19 December 1937), describes Caesar as "such a great man that he needs no wild gestures. He knows that the slightest motion of his finger is quite sufficient to make things happen" (quoted in Weiss 1994, 201-2).

Caesar's call for silence is the cue for changes not only in the sound but also the lighting of the play, with the piercing of the blackout by a forceful shaft of light reminiscent of the light effects of the Nazi rallies at Nuremberg that had been widely visualized and reported on in popular magazines and newsreels all over America[31]. Wyke summarizes the scene that greeted the audience after the end of the blackout, the previously empty stage suddenly filled with actors hailing their leader:

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30 Whipple's reviews were also published in the *New York World-Telegram* (the newspapers merged into one in 1950).

31 According to one of Welles's actor friends, Hiram (Chubby) Sherman, the "seed" of the Mercury lighting was planted by "Orson seeing pictures of a rally in Nuremberg in some illustrated magazine" (quoted in France 1975, 58).

> [T]he utter darkness and the marching throb of an overture were abruptly interrupted by a voice crying "Caesar", a shaft of light, and the sudden presence on the New York stage of the Roman dictator dressed in military attire, head arrogantly thrown back, surrounded by uniformed subordinates, saluting an admiring crowd of civilians. Poaching Casca's line from *Julius Caesar* 1.2.14, this Caesar shouts "Bid every noise be still!" only to hear from offstage the soothsayer's sinister warning. He disappears back into the dark accompanied by Fascist salutes and cries of "Hail, Caesar!" from the crowd on stage. (Wyke 2012, 116)

Borrowing – or "poaching" – the command from the words of another character, Welles's decision to attribute the injunction not to Casca, as in Shakespeare's text (and in the *Everybody's Shakespeare* adaptation), but to Caesar himself, confirms his intention to use the opening line to establish from the start the theatrical element in Caesar's casting as a man of power. Issuing what amounts to a stage direction for the management of the Lupercal celebrations, but also, implicitly, for the performance of Welles's *Caesar*, it appears as the first of the many metatheatrical elements of a production centred round the histrionic aspects of dictatorship. These were of course already present both in Shakespeare's play and its sources, and also, notoriously, in the management and exhibition of power in the Fascist and Nazi regimes[32]. There is no evidence that Welles was aware of recent Italian productions of the play, including the 1935 production at the Basilica of Maxentius, but comparison of his *Caesars* with those examined by Silvia Bigliazzi in her analysis of Fascism's refashioning of *Julius Caesar* for purposes of propaganda reveals similarities and differences that deserve further study (Bigliazzi 2019).

[32] For Fascist showmanship and the sacralisation of power, see Emilio Gentile on the theatricalization of politics under Fascism, "in the creation of a Fascist liturgy for the masses, in the theatre of political rites at meetings, celebrations and festivals" and in the "*sacralisation of politics*" as "an essential ingredient of the political theatricality of Fascism, whether in the form of performances of political theatre or mass spectacles", aimed at "moulding the masses" and turning Italians into "actor-spectators in a succession of 'sacred' and 'secular' mass spectacles" (Gentile 1996, 73-74 and 80). See also Minervini 2019, Wyke 2012 and Seldes 1935, on the fortune of Mussolini in America, mentioned in note 5.

A few years later, Welles himself described the spectacular nature of fascism, highlighting the importance to it of showmanship and defining its essence as "the celebration of power for its own sake" (quoted in Denning 1997, 376) in "The Nature of the Enemy", a lecture he delivered on 22 January 1945:

> Showmanship is fundamental to the fascist strategy, and the chief fascist argument is the parade. Inspiration for the showmanship of fascism comes from the military, the old dumb-show of monarchy and mostly from the theater. In Germany, the decor, the spectacular use of great masses of people – the central myth itself was borrowed from grand opera. In Italy, the public show, the lavish props, the picturesque processions were taken from the movies. (Quoted in Denning 1997, 380)

The rhetoric of fascism is a rhetoric of identification, intended to weaken and if possible eliminate the public's ability to criticize and rationalize the object of its gaze. Welles's consideration, in the same lecture, that "Fascism […] sells itself by making its appeal to *the emotions* rather than to *reason*, to *the senses* rather than to *the mind*" (quoted in Denning 1997, 365, emphasis mine), seems almost to be a comment on the different kinds of rhetoric marshalled in the Forum by Antony and Brutus, actualizing Shakespeare's lines in a contemporary context.

The shock effect produced by the opening blackout, pierced through by the equally shocking sound of the soothsayer's cry and by the Nuremberg shafts of light, which revealed the presence of a Mussolini-like Caesar, returns in the impact of physical violence in later scenes. Underlined and intensified by lighting, blackouts, movements, words and silence, it shows how Welles used theatre to study and expose the spellbinding dangers both of politics and of theatrical art itself. The shafts of light are examples of Welles's theatrical weaponry: "swords to cut through the wads and wads of cotton" that "wrapped" contemporary "audiences" (quoted in Weiss 1994, 196). His task was to stimulate and if necessary shock his spectators "into wakefulness": an "imaginative awareness" that would enable them to go beyond even the over facile reduction of the play into a dramatization merely of what was happening in Europe. Although his article on "Theatre and the People's Front"

for the *Daily Worker* (15 April 1938) contained a bracketed definition of "such things as reported in this evening's newspapers" as "Hitler's invasion of Austria", this was apparently an editorial insertion (Sawyer 2019, 173-74):

> When our art has some temporary connection, some valid and live relationship with such things as reported in this evening's newspapers (Hitler's invasion of Austria), then it is worth making plays and writing songs for them and acting in these plays and designing productions for them. The minute we lose sight of this, we are necromancers, spellbinders: and, as spellbinders always find out, the amount of magic we can dispense in a single town is always limited and we discover ourselves beating it across the county line before the moon is full again. (Denning 1997, 362)

On the topicality of the *Caesar* costumes, "Mr. Welles does not dress his conspirators and his Storm Troopers in Black Shirts or in Brown", Brown observes in his *New York Post* review. "He does not have to. The antique Rome, which we had thought was securely Roman in Shakespeare's tragedy, he shows us to be a dateless state of mind" (Brown 2000, 221). The "military uniforms" of Welles's power figures, including most of the conspirators, "suggested but did not exactly reproduce the current fashion of the Fascist ruling class; our crowd wore the dark, nondescript street clothes of the big-city proletariat" (Houseman 1972, 298-99), while Brutus was distinguished from both by his blue serge suit. Welles described the crowd as "the hoodlum element you find in any big city after a war, a mob that is without the stuff that makes them intelligently alive, a lynching mob, the kind of mob that gives you a Hitler or a Mussolini" (quoted in Wyke 2012, 124). But both the conspirators and the crowd, all too readily swayed by populist leaders, also recalled more specifically local figures:

> According to the trade journal *Variety* (17 November 1937), the conspirators were portrayed as modern racketeers and affected "the turned-up collar" and "hand-in-the-pocket-on-the-trigger" look. They met as if they were in an alley beside the Mercury Theater and looked like a strike committee from a taxi-drivers' union, according to the *New York Daily News* (13 November 1937). And, in the words of a reporter

> from the *Washington Times*, with their pulled-down hats and assorted overcoats, the rabble appeared more like "'Little Caesar's' henchmen than Romans". Racketeers, labor unionists, and gangsters on the prowl in America's city streets – these analogies demonstrate that Welles's *Julius Caesar* also addressed contemporary anxieties about the rise of Fascism within (as well as outside) the United States of America. (117-19)[33]

In many ways, Welles's *Caesar* could be seen as a rethinking, via Shakespeare, of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), which had been adapted and performed on stage in 1936 (122-23)[34]. The intention of both works was to wake the American public to the danger of dictatorial tendencies taking hold in America[35], an aim similar to that expressed by George Seldes in the foreword to his *Sawdust Caesar*. By revealing Fascism's "suppressed history and the mind and actions of its spiritual father", Seldes wanted to urge his readers to "compare the origins of Fascism in Italy with the present situation in our own country, the Duce to our own demagogues, the hidden forces which subsidized the Italian movement to those just emerging in the United States" (Seldes 1935, xiii).

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[33] See also Denning 1997, 376-77, for examples of how "[t]he tale of the 'great dictator' haunted the Popular Front imagination" with "narratives" that "drew not only on the fascist dictators Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini, but on the flamboyance and popular notoriety of the 'robber barons' like J. P. Morgan, the Du Pont's Liberty League, and William Randolph Hearst; the fear and loathing of radio demagogues like Father Charles Coughlin and Huey Long; and the fascination with the giant protagonists of the Soviet Revolution and its aftermath".

[34] Wyke quotes from Welles's reference to the figure addressed in Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, Senator Huey Long, in one of his publicity releases: "Our Julius Caesar gives a picture of the same kind of hysteria that exists in certain dictator-ruled countries of today. We see the bitter resentment of free-born men against the imposition of a dictatorship. We see a political assassination, such as that of Huey Long. We see the hope on the part of Brutus for a more democratic government vanish with the rise of a demagogue (Antony) who succeeds the dictator. Our moral, if you will, is that not assassination, but education of the masses, permanently removes dictatorships" (Wyke 2012, 123).

[35] Yezbick quotes Senber's *Julius Caesar* publicity, which, with an evident reference to Lewis, "reminds us that in a land where the masses are war-weary, confused, and economic conditions are undergoing periodical crises, […] that which happened in Rome in the Second Century and in the Rome of the Twentieth Century, can happen here" (Yezbick 2004, 253).

5. Spectacles of Sound

Like the text, scenic elements and other features of the Mercury Theatre staging, its soundscape also underwent changes in rehearsal. Not only Blitzstein's score, but the orchestration of the actors' voices and of their feet walking, marching or stamping, or of the sound of thunder, whether real or metaphorical, were subjected to constant, even drastic revision:

> Between the personal scenes, which [Welles] continued to rehearse long after they seemed to be ready, the crowd scenes which he drilled and repeated endlessly, the setting of lights and the balancing of Marc's musical background, he was spending between sixteen and twenty hours a day in the theatre […]. These technical elements of the production took up hours of our time, but it was on the human performances that Welles concentrated his main effort during that last week, dividing his time between the crowd scenes and the personal confrontations – particularly the relationship of Brutus and Cassius, which, in his version, formed the emotional spine of the tragedy. (Houseman 1972, 306-7)

Houseman goes on to give a detailed account of how Welles went about organizing the "fluctuating mass reactions of pity, indignation and unbridled fury with a crowd of two dozen boys in secondhand overcoats and dark felt hats" (actors, extras, stage hands and stage managers), "orchestrating their individual and collective reactions" (308). He supplements his information by quoting the recollections of an unnamed participant:

> [Welles] recorded the speeches of Antony and Brutus on disks and had us speak back specific lines in reaction to the main speeches. It wasn't just a matter of babbling words. We had definite lines to say and definite moments at which to speak. When Antony spoke the first words of the eulogy over Caesar's body, one of us said "Aw, shut up!" and others of the mob came in quickly with "Let him talk!" and so on. It was by no means a matter of walking on and off the stage and making noises. (308)

The "ad libs", Houseman adds, were later "replaced by appropriate exclamations collected from other Elizabethan plays, notably *Coriolanus*" (309). For a slightly different version by another of the crowd scene actors, see Hiram Sherman's statement in a personal interview with France: "We spent endless hours doing nothing but ad-libs for the funeral scene. We all had to write out specific lines. You'd say three, four, nine words of your speech; then somebody'd stop you. And it worked, too, much better than in the twosome scenes" (France 1975, 61-62). The final orchestration interwove the actors' voices with other sounds: "[Crowd] reactions during their climactic scenes were not merely verbal: Orson kept them in continuous, fluid movement which, on our hollow, unpadded platforms, gave out a constantly changing and highly dramatic sound which he exploited to the full" (Houseman 1972, 309).

The scene of Cinna the Poet posed even greater problems. After being abandoned several times,

> [Welles] turned it over to Marc Blitzstein, who rehearsed it for several days with a metronome: the rising menace was to be achieved through a crescendo in volume and an accelerating tempo with each move and speech related to a percussive beat. That didn't work either. Lloyd, as the dreamy, oblivious victim was unable or unwilling to adjust his highly personal style of playing to these arbitrarily imposed, external rhythms[36]. […]. For our first three dress rehearsals it was missing from the show […].
> […]
> [T]he absence of the Cinna scene left a gaping hole in the structure of the play. […]
> […]
> Orson gave the company forty-five minutes for supper. Then he called them back and rehearsed the crowd scenes until morning, repeating the mob's violently changing reactions to Brutus and Antony and going on from there, time after time, into the deceptively quiet opening of the Cinna scene […].
> […]
> They did it a dozen times till Lloyd and the exhausted mob were on the edge of madness. Orson used some of Blitzstein's rhythmic patterns,

[36] In an interview with Simon Callow, Norman Lloyd described them as "this goddam chanting and boom boom boom" (Callow 1995, 328).

> some of his own original staging and some of the things Norman Lloyd had patiently and obstinately worked out for himself. […] [A]t two in the morning, on their seventh try, the scene began to work, getting tauter and more dangerous as the night wore on. (Houseman 1972, 310-12)

"Suddenly", at the matinee preview, "everything was right: individual performances, transitions, silences, progressions and climaxes – they all seemed to come together in a devastating whole" (313).

Other work on the soundscape of the play included an unsuccessful attempt to insert a sequence of "big-city montage" of sound through a recording of police sirens and air-raid warnings against a background of traffic noises (310-11). After this failure, the production returned to Blitzstein's music, the thunder drum and the pounding feet of the forty cast-members to accompany the variegated pitch and tone of the actors' voices.

In his analysis of the Cinna scene, Yezbick describes the effect created by the combination of total darkness, silence and an apparently disembodied shout in words that recall the shock of *Caesar*'s opening scene:

> Welles' Mercury show emphasizes the tragedy by describing the scene purely through sound. After Cinna is taken, Welles' blackout becomes a politicized transition - another narrative focal point that makes audiences more fully aware of Cinna's annihilation. The aural and visual fields of meaning are wiped blank, placing the spectator in a confused state of inductive inquiry. Optically and sonically, we wonder and we search for new signs and contexts. Perceptually, we have become Cinna, and Welles has inflicted on us what the mob has done to the poet. Our unanticipated sensory blindness adds to the horror of our previous empathetic alignment with Cinna, we are even more like him; aesthetically and politically neutralized by total darkness. Wellesian darkness becomes an allegorical erasure of commercially driven, democratically comforting entertainment: a critical rupture in the pleasure and convenience of American culture […]
>
> When Cinna screams his last line, we are trapped in a close-up oral representation of a murder perpetrated by nameless crowds. […] Cinna's dying scream becomes a distressing sound spike that assaults our already floundering sensory orientation. The added 45 seconds of

> Hammond organ punctuates Cinna's painful death with the conventional transitional cue of a radio drama. At first the organ's sonic field answers the human scream, but chronologically the "music" continues for almost a minute, drowning our last suggestion of Cinna's humanity in a monophonic blast of dreary sound. The prolonged bass note works as a counterpoint to Cinna's high-pitched yell, but its duration eventually obliterates any index of human life and forces us to sit, cognitively paralyzed for a second time. Sonically, the organ kills off Cinna and leaves us stranded between scenes, suggesting another uncomfortable experience of the theatrical mechanisms of control. (Yezbick 2004, 291-92).

The effect of the Mercury Theatre soundscape and the interest shown in it by contemporary press reviews led to a major shift in theatrical criticism. As Robert Sawyer observes in a recent analysis of the reception of Shakespeare in America and Britain between the two world wars: "While earlier dramatic reviewers covered the three basic elements of acting, staging, and costumes, the fourth element of sound now demanded critical attention as well" (Sawyer 2019, 173).

6. Acts IV and V: Endings in Progress

"A new ending was tried out every night for *Julius Caesar* – right up to the opening" (France 1977, 120). France notes that the major alterations and abbreviations in the Mercury Theatre playscript concern Acts IV and V:

> After the Cinna the Poet scene […], Welles turned his hand to a more radical alteration of the text. He elected to show the aftermath of the assassination solely from the conspirators' vantage. He has Cassius and Brutus quarrelling about their plans, but upon learning of their enemies' advance, agreeing to meet at Phillipi. Act 4 is thus compressed greatly – but not nearly so much as act 5, which consists of a single page in Welles's version. Brutus receives news of Antony's victory (actually, Pindar's faulty report in act 5, scene 3), gazes down on upon Cassius' body (slain by enemies in Welles's text), and mourns his death. The lights dim momentarily for his own suicide, and rise again for Antony to speak his brief regrets over him, the noblest Roman, as the play ends. (108)

6.1. How to End: Roger Hill's Suggestions

This, however, was only one of the possible endings envisaged by Welles for the performance on stage. The question of how to end a production of *Julius Caesar* had already been raised by Roger Hill in his introduction to *Everybody's Shakespeare* adaptation of the play[37]. As against the tendency to see Brutus as the true protagonist of the play, Hill points out that "'Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge'" dominates "up to the final moment" (*MS* 9). An initial indication of how the play might end appears in his observation that "'O Julius Caesar thou art mighty yet' is almost the last line in the play" (*MS* 9), a suggestion taken up by Welles in one of his radio rehearsals, which ends with Brutus standing over Cassius' body and reflecting on Caesar's power. In his "Staging" section, Hill discusses an even more drastic abbreviation, ending the play in Act III, scene ii:

> If you stage *Caesar*, a shortened version may very well end with the stirring climax on page 48 [*MS* 48]; Antony's triumph and his gloating in the line:
> "Mischief, thou art afoot. Take thou what course thou wilt".
> To all intents and purposes Antony is now the victor and the story is ended. In stopping here you will be avoiding the difficulties and the pitfalls of the last act with its battle scenes and suicides. On the other hand you will be throwing away the tremendous possibilities of the celebrated "Tent Scene". (*MS* 9)[38]

Hill fails to mention the scenes of Cinna's lynching or of the Triumvirate's "pricking" of their adversaries among those that would be sacrificed by his proposal for an ending. But while Welles eventually kept the Cinna scene in his production, and never

[37] Callow erroneously attributes the introduction to the play to Welles instead of Hill.

[38] A version similar to that of the anonymous author of a reportage in *Life* magazine, discussed in the next section of this essay. The last photograph of the reportage shows Antony exhibiting Caesar's wounds, with a caption that summarizes the rest of the play in a single sentence: "He arouses the mob to fury, destroys the 'liberals', paves the way for a new Caesar to march triumphantly into the city with fascist banners and floodlights".

showed any inclination to "thro[w] away the tremendous possibilities of the celebrated 'Tent scene'", the pricking scene was to be one of his major and perhaps most questionable cuts.

6.2. Defocusing Antony as Master Orator and Politician

Present in *Everybody's Shakespeare* (*MS* 50-51) and in an early, discarded version of the Mercury Theatre script, the scene of the Triumvirate's proscriptions disappears from the final version on stage and is relegated to Plutarch's narrative in the radio versions for the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. The result is a shift of focus *away* from Antony and the consequences of his rhetoric. In his review of the theatrical production in *The New Republic* (1 December 1937), Young describes how, after the "gripping sarcasm and horror" of Cinna the Poet's lynching, "[w]e jump then to the quarrel scene of Brutus and Cassius. For the rest of the play is Brutus' – Brutus realizing his disaster, Brutus in a brief scene with his page, Brutus running on his sword, and over Brutus' body Antony's epilogue of praise" (quoted in France 2001b, 105).

This becomes even clearer in the versions for radio, where, like the proscriptions, the scene of Cinna the Poet is no longer enacted. While we hear directly from the actors the build-up of emotion in their reactions to Antony's oration in the Forum scene, the violence that then ensues is entrusted to the voice of H. V. Kaltenborn, reading the words of Plutarch. The only remaining trace of Cinna's fate is in Plutarch's generical allusion to "*others [who] ran up and down the streets, to find out the men who had killed Caesar and tear them to pieces*"[39].

Yezbick describes an early, discarded version of the staging, the "Mock-up script", in which the two scenes are brought together, showing at one and the same time two aspects of Antony as the new wielder of power. On one side of the stage is Cinna's lynching: the result of Antony's oratory and its *emotional impact* on the crowd. On the other is the pricking scene, showing Antony himself taking on the role of *a rational*, *unemotional* dictator, chillingly indifferent to

[39] All quotations from radio rehearsals and the 1938 phonographic recording are from my transcriptions.

the suffering of others. Beside the mob's rowdily physical, immediately lethal violence is the equally lethal violence-at-a-distance of the Triumvirate's leisurely speech acts:

> Welles first conceived of Cinna the Poet's murder as a kaleidoscopic sequence of cross-cut scenes that depict several actions occurring simultaneously. As the Roman mob begins to interrogate Cinna, Welles also begins Marc Antony and Octavius' name-pricking discussion on another part of the stage. As Cinna's predicament becomes dire, Antony and Octavius inject their leisurely discussion of their political purge over the mob's growing resentment of the poet. When Cinna finally cries out "I AM NOT CINNA THE CONSPIRATOR!" the crowd carries him off in plain sight and the two Roman generals remain oblivious to the chaos that their revolution has created. (Yezbick 2004, 283-84)

The simultaneous staging of the scenes would have acted as an estranging device, a study, rather than a spectacle, of the variegated tools of power. Instead, the final stage version captivated the audience, inducing them to identify with the victim of the mob by working on their emotions: "The Mercury audience made Cinna's experience their own, representing as it did their worst fears for themselves and for those dearest to them" (France 2001b, 106). The difference could hardly be more complete.

The synchronous version would undoubtedly have been difficult to stage in the small space of the Mercury Theatre, as also in terms of sound and lighting management. It would however have added considerably both to the characterization of Antony and to the complexity of Welles's study of the power theme. The elimination not only of this version but of the whole of the pricking scene in the version performed on stage produces a downscaling of Antony's mastery in the arts of oratory and politics, confirming Young's conclusion that "the rest of the play is Brutus'".

In France's playscript, the so-called "quarrel scene" between Brutus and Cassius in Brutus' tent in Philippi is separated from Cinna's lynching only by a continuation of the blackout, accompanied by the deafening sound of "[a] Hammond organ […] struck full volume on all its base keys for forty-five seconds" (Welles 2001, 168, note 101) and a brief, dimly lit vision of a column

of soldiers, to cover the two years' distance between the violence of the mob and the lengthy confrontation between the former friends:

> *(The lights dim. There is a series of drum and organ roars. On the third, a column of helmeted soldiers can be seen in the half-light* […]. *The beating of a snare drum is heard. It grows in intensity, accompanied by the plaintive sound of a bugle and a french horn. The lights come up to reveal Brutus in uniform. Trebonius enters stage right as the music fades out).* (Welles 2001, 155)

6.3. Brutus and Cassius, Brutus vs. Cassius

With the elimination of the pricking scene, the spotlight shifts directly onto Brutus and his relationship with Cassius, which Houseman had already indicated as "the emotional spine of the tragedy". During the last week of rehearsals, he recalls, Welles "divid[ed] his time between the crowd scenes and the personal confrontations – particularly the relationship of Brutus and Cassius" (Houseman 1972, 307).

The figure of Cassius had interested Welles from the start. The first existing photograph of his *Julius Caesars* shows him in an early scene of the production he directed for his school, in which he chose the role of Cassius, although he also stood in for the boy who was playing the part of Antony. Heavily made up for the part, he stands behind one of the stage setting boxes, leaning over a skinny, meditative Brutus[40]. Although in the Mercury Theatre production in 1937 he chose the part of Brutus and continued to cast himself as Brutus in the 1938 radio and phonographic recordings, in the recording marketed together with the *Mercury Shakespeare* re-edition of the *ES* play in 1939, he took on the roles of Cassius, Antony and the narrator (reading his own abbreviated stage directions from the *MS* printed text). And despite his acting the part of Brutus in the extracts inserted at the end of two CBS variety show performances in the early 1940s, Cassius remained a central concern.

In his thesis on Orson Welles and the remediation of American Shakespeare, Yezbick speaks of Welles's "empathy" for Brutus and

[40] Labelled "*Julius Caesar* (1928). Brutus and Cassius (Welles)". Available in the Holloway Pages (https://www.hollowaypages.com/welles.htm).

Cassius, describing how his initial focus on Brutus shifted in the course of his reworking of the play for radio and phonographic recordings. In his comment on the March 1938 recording, he shows how vigorous textual pruning and slight modifications in the tone of Gabel's acting produced a very different Cassius from that of the Mercury Theatre performance:

> Played with quiet almost shrinking reserve, Martin Gabel's vocalic Cassius might be the most disarming and likeable in Shakespearean history. Instead of the conniving, practiced soldier who loathes the aging Caesar and deceives Brutus with false petitions, Gabel's character more closely resembles Norman Lloyd's doomed liberal poet. Throughout the phonograph production, Cassius does more good than harm. He never lies to Brutus, never plots with Cinna to circulate false rumors, and seems genuinely sympathetic when he describes rescuing Caesar from "the waves of Tiber". After Caesar's murder, Gabel's Cassius never questions Antony's request to give his eulogy. Even in the famous tent scene with Brutus, Cassius takes on a less arrogant, more confused and conciliatory role. […] In most scenes, Gabel's vocalic Cassius appears to be exactly what he seems to Brutus – a concerned citizen whose sense of civic responsibility forces him into a rash and tragic act. […] In the Columbia recording, Cassius never mentions his disgust at Caesar's "girlish" behavior in Spain, nor does he rail that the "age is shamed" and that "Rome has lost the breed of noble bloods". Instead, Cassius merely insinuates that Caesar's power and age are limiting his authority and effectiveness as a leader. This Cassius is more a genuine reformer than an egotistical schemer. (Yezbick 2004, 301-2)

Welles's interest in the tent scene and the Cassius-Brutus relationship does not seem to have been shared by contemporary reviewers of the Mercury Theatre production. Quoting Mantle's review in the *New York Daily News*, Weiss points out that after the emotional climax of the Cinna the Poet scene,

> some degree of anti-climax was inevitable. The Quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius, which had long been viewed as the high point of tension in the play, became in Welles' production the beginning of the *dénouement*. Burns Mantle complained that Welles and Gabel played

> the scene "as citizen soldiers met in a field and a little fearful of awakening nearby sleepers". (Weiss 1994, 207-8)

The reviewers also paid limited attention to the follow-up to the quarrel scene: the fate of Cassius and the scene between Brutus and his page. The early mock-up script version placed the two scenes alongside, with the revelation of Cassius' corpse made during a second example of synchronous staging showing Brutus admiring Lucius' song (Yezbick 2004, 303). As, previously, in the simultaneous presentation of Cinna's lynching and the Triumvirate's "pricking" of its adversaries – the implications differ considerably from those of the presentation of the scenes in sequence in the final staging.

In the version produced on stage, the brief interval of Lucius' song is followed by a blackout and a crescendo of bugle, snare drum and French horn music, after which: "*the lights come up to reveal the body of Cassius surrounded by his men. Brutus enters, sword in hand, and stands over Cassius. The snare drum continues to be heard underneath the following scene*" (Welles 2001, 164). Not only is the whole of the scene of Cassius' suicide eliminated, but his death receives little attention.

What effect would have been produced by the synchronous staging of the brutal evidence of Cassius' corpse alongside the poetic beauty of Lucius' song?

Before considering the implications of staging Lucius' song alongside the discovery of Cassius' corpse, it is worth focusing on the scene as it actually appeared in performance. Young's dismissal of the scene of Lucius' song as "Brutus in a brief scene with his page" – the only mention of the episode I have found among the reviews – is a curiously succinct, neutral mention of what one imagines must have been a very moving moment. The scene is portrayed in at least two production photographs, which show some similarity to the rendering of the scene in the twelve-minute 1908 silent film of *Julius Caesar* referred to earlier[41]. By showing

[41] See note 21 above. The photographs show Welles reclining against a step, with Anderson on the step above him playing what the actor called his "lutelele". Not only the posture and instrument but even the face and backward tilt of the head

Brutus reading and listening to music, it adds further dimensions to Welles's vision of his character, as well as offering a moment of relief after the lynching of Cinna and the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius: "a lovely lyric interlude – a last moment of peace before the final, inevitable catastrophe" (Houseman 1972, 345). A relief created both by Blitzstein's music, the tender image of the boy, and the words of the "Orpheus song" Welles borrowed from *Henry VIII*, a hymn to the pacifying, restorative power of music, offering consolation for grief of heart. Burton describes its contrast to the music of the rest of the play:

> A vigorous, driving rhythmic figure […] dominates many of the cues for *Julius Caesar*. For some of the scenes in Caesar's chamber, the music is quieter and is played in a slow lento tempo. After the murder, beginning with Antony's line, "Cry 'Havoc', and let slip the dogs of war", music is played fortissimo by cymbal, thunder drums, and organ. Later in the play, in response to the script's request for property music, Blitzstein has written a pleasant song to be played by ukulele on stage. (Burton 1956, 345)[42]

Arthur Anderson, who played the part of Lucius, returns to the scene in his memoir, offering a personal angle:

> My most memorable lines were the lyrics of a song which Lucius sings to Brutus in his tent the night before the Battle of Philippi. Shakespeare's direction reads only, "Music and a song". It was Orson's idea to borrow the lyrics from *Henry VIII* […]:
> "Orpheus with his lute, made trees and the mountain tops that freeze
> Bow their heads while he did sing, da dum dee dee dum…"
> Shakespeare, of course, never wrote "Da dum dee dee dum". That was supplied by Marc Blitzstein, who wrote the melody and all the incidental music for *Caesar* […].

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of the film's Lucius suggest it may be among the sources for Welles's rendering. In the film, Lucius is seated on a step below his master, who is reading at a table, and the scene lasts only a few seconds (9:14-30), before the arrival of Caesar's ghost. Despite the time gap separating the productions, Welles may well have seen the film at Todd School or later, while conducting his research for the Mercury Theatre.

42 Burton reproduces the score of the composition as "Marc Blitzstein, manuscript score for 'Julius Caesar', cue 10" (Burton 1956, 346, Fig. 45).

> I accompanied myself on a ukulele. It had a semi-circular mask attached, making it look like a lute. I called it my "lutelele". It was a Martin concert uke, with fuller tone than the ones young men used to serenade their girlfriends in the '20s. And since the song was a ballad it was played legato, not "plinkety-plink". (Anderson 2010, 35-36)

Viewed as a musical interlude, isolated from the events that follow, it suggests a mood in keeping with the peaceful settlement of the rupture between Brutus and Cassius in the quarrel scene, sealed by their final exchange: Cassius, "O my dear brother! / This was an ill beginning of the night! / Never come such division 'tween our souls; / Let it not, Brutus"; Brutus, "Everything is well", followed by their reciprocal "good nights" (Welles 2001, 163). Yet it also in some ways undermines the settlement, drawing attention to subtle indications of a lasting opposition between the two. The playscript preserves the hierarchical marking of their words on separating, with Cassius moving from "O my dear brother" to his subsequent "Good night, my lord" (163), as if to underline a flaw in their assertions of fraternity[43].

From the start of the play, Brutus, "the bourgeois intellectual"[44], has been presented in opposition to his more intransigently revolutionary partner, defined by Caesar as one who "loves no plays" and "hears no music" in opposition to Antony (Welles 2001, 117). Placed alongside Cassius' dead body in a theatrical diptych, the focus would be on Brutus' unawareness of Cassius' fate, distanced not only physically but by his absorption in the song, as if to confirm Cassius' accusations of his lack of true affection in the

[43] The playscript version is similar to that of *Everybody's Shakespeare*, the March 1938 recording and the 1944 broadcast, with Charles Laughton in the part of Cassius, which ends with the original exchange. In two of the three radio rehearsals the characters' "good nights" contain no reference to either brotherhood or lordship.

[44] Defined as such by Welles himself in an interview: to Welles, Brutus is "the classical picture of the eternal, impotent, ineffectual, fumbling liberal; the reformer who wants to do something about things but doesn't know how and gets it in the neck in the end. […] He's Shakespeare's favorite hero – the fellow who thinks the times are out of joint but who is really out of joint with his time. He's the bourgeois intellectual who, under a modem dictatorship, is the first to be put up against the wall and shot" (Welles 1937, quoted in Weiss 1994, 189).

quarrel scene. Against the 'lento' of this moment of leisure is the speed with which the events are taking place. A mere blackout and crescendo of bugle, snare drum and French horn in place of the delicate sound of Lucius' lute are sufficient for the final, inevitable unfolding of the action that follows[45], ending with the "new dictator praising Brutus' martyrdom", as Young concludes in his retelling of the story (quoted in France 2001a, 19).

7. Photographic Insights

How did the Mercury Theatre *Caesar* appear to the *eyes* of its spectators? Despite the poor quality of some of the reproductions, and the fact that nearly all are in black and white, often with patently erroneous captions or labels or none at all and almost always without any indication of the name of the photographer, the few available photographs contain invaluable documentation of costume details and facial expressions and of the positioning of the actors in group scenes and tableaus[46].

7.1. A Photostory Reportage

When the photographs appear together, in sequence, they provide their own retelling of the Caesar story. Welles's designing or blocking of positioning and movement for performance on stage is replaced by a photographic 'blocking' of chosen figures and episodes, re-adapting the scenic text to the motionless and

[45] According to Yezbick, the mock-up script also included a staging of Caesar's ghost, eliminated from both the Mercury Theatre playscript and all the radio rehearsals. "Welles originally planned the death of Cinna and the arrival of Caesar's ghost as intermittent narrative segments where characters' voices dictate the flow of the action" (Yezbick 2004, 284).

[46] Even when the scene is incomplete, since the central focus of the shot limits the number of actors included, this too adds to our knowledge of our play. The absence of Orson Welles as Brutus from an early scene of Caesar saluted by the crowd, for example, draws attention to the lateral position he often assumed, a means of distancing that replicates the distancing created by his non-military costume.

soundless context of photography and print, in what could be seen as a static version of a "dumb show" or silent film[47].

A particularly valuable example of a photographic story is contained in an anonymous reportage in *Life* (22 November 1937), titled "NEW YORK SEES A MODERN 'JULIUS CAESAR'", which summarizes the play in a few introductory lines and five photographs, each with a highly relevant caption. Since there are no references to the article in any of the studies I have managed to examine, it is worth quoting in full[48]. Three of the photographs (1, 2 and 5) seem to be unavailable elsewhere[49] and even the two that can be found in other sources are framed differently and present a fuller picture. Unlike most of the other photographs of the Mercury production they give an impression of 'snapshot', un-posed immediacy.

The first, placed immediately below the title, bears the caption "CAESAR RESEMBLES MUSSOLINI, GIVES THE FASCIST SALUTE". The play is then presented in a few introductory lines before proceeding to the photostory proper:

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47 A reference to "dumb shows" appears intriguingly in Antony's first reference to the "poor dumb mouths" of Caesar's wounds: "(Which, like *dumb shows*, do ope their ruby lips / To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue)" (Welles 2001, 138, emphasis mine). This is probably a typo, since all the other occurrences of the passage, from *ES* to the CBS broadcasts, have Shakespeare's "dumb mouths". For a reference to "the old dumb-show of monarchy" as one of the sources of Fascist showmanship, see Welles's 1945 lecture on "The Nature of the Enemy" referred to above.

48 The whole of the 22 November 1937 issue of *Life* is available in Google Books (https://books.google.it/books?id=kz8EAAAAMBAJ). Dennis Kennedy quotes two lines from the introduction without mentioning the source, except as "one New York newspaper" (Kennedy 2001, 151). He also fails to mention the presence of any photographs in the *Life* reportage.

49 With a curious exception. The filming of Antony's raising the mantle from Caesar's body during his funeral oration in the documentary bonus *Caesar* included in the video of Richard Linklater's *Me & Orson Welles* seems almost to bring the photograph to life (Linklater 2009). Although the plotline and characterization are largely fictional and even the acting differs greatly from Welles's 1937 production (Harris 2015), the documentary provides a useful supplement to the material available on Welles's original staging.

> Shakespeare in modern dress has long been familiar to U. S. audiences. Now to New York comes a production of *Julius Caesar* in which the Roman conqueror looks like Mussolini, wears fascist garb, gives a fascist salute. Pitted against him is a liberal Brutus who would preserve democracy by slaying his country's dictator. Brutus' tragedy – the tragedy of liberals in fascist lands – is that he is outwitted by Archdemagog Antony and loses his life.
>
> The fascist *Julius Caesar* was conceived by young Orson Welles, who both directs it and plays Brutus. Only 22, he already has to his credit a spectacular Haitian *Macbeth*[50] and a Freudian *Dr. Faustus*, [and] is pledged to more classical dramas seen with fresh young eyes. (*Life* 1937, 84)

After this, the rest of the story is told by the photographic images and their captions. The photographs on the first page of the article are however separated from the last three by a full-page promotion for Hires R-J root beer: "It tastes Great when the Hour is Late!" (85) with two pretty young women delightedly toasting each other in their bedroom before consuming their beer. To complete the picture, it should be mentioned that the whole of the reportage occupies only the right side of each of its two pages: on the left are eye-catching advertisements for male surgery and antidotes to slow digestion and a free crystal buffet tray offer for purchasers of Samson trimatic toasters and electric coffee percolators; contextual details that give a sense of the wide-ranging publics targeted by Welles's productions[51], and anticipate features of Welles's variety show performances of the quarrel scene on radio in the early 1940s.

The second photograph presents Calpurnia in a pose and costume worthy of *Vogue*: "Caesar's wife, in a pleated chartreuse boudoir gown, pleads with her husband not to go to the Roman Capitol, since the night is full of evil portents. But the dictator only juts his determined jaw, insisting that 'Caesar shall go forth'" (84). After the promotional interruption, the story moves rapidly to its conclusion. The third photograph shows "Conspirators against

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50 On Welles's "Voodoo" *Macbeth*, see Casale 2001, Wilkinson 2004 and Mason 2020.

51 Surrounded by pages and pages of other advertisements, the *Caesar* reportage is located between an article on women's hat fashion and an obituary for Ramsay MacDonald.

Caesar are honourable Brutus (*left*), who loves democracy, and Cassius of the 'lean and hungry look'. While the cheering populace tempts the dictator with a crown, Cassius cries: 'I was born free as Caesar; so were you'". The fourth provides a close-up of the assassination: "'Et tu, Brute', gasps Caesar, as Brutus stabs him to death. Now the conspirators proclaim: 'Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!' But to Caesar's slippery Henchman Antony they give permission to make a funeral oration in the market place". Finally, in the fifth photograph, "To 'friends, Romans, countrymen', Antony shows the dagger holes in slain Caesar's mantle. He arouses the mob to fury, destroys the 'liberals', paves the way for a new Caesar to march triumphantly into the city with fascist banners and floodlights" (86).

The last of *Life*'s photographs is unique in its presentation not only of Antony raising the mantle to show the dagger holes in both Caesar's vesture and his body, after a dramatic pause, but of the presence of the coffin on stage. Here we actually see him, for the first time, after he has descended from the pulpit and placed himself on the same level and in proximity to his listeners in order to 'produce' the spectacle of Caesar's wounds and involve them in his performance. The angle of his head and positioning of his body reveal a gesture similar to that of a conjuror.

7.2. Revisualizing Antony

Other photographs representing Antony addressing the crowd show Coulouris in the pulpit, towering over his listeners, one or both arms raised above him, dramatically foregrounded and magnified by Rosenthal's lighting. The speeches in the Forum scene, as Houseman recalls, were delivered from "a ten-foot rostrum covered with black velour that was wheeled up the ramp in the dark (under cover of the electric organ and the thunder drum)". Here, "first Brutus, then Antony, seemed to float in space *above the mass of the crowd*, gathered around *Caesar's open coffin between the speakers and the audience*" (Houseman 1972, 309, emphasis mine). The coffin is also specifically mentioned in Mantle's description of the scene: "a kind of scaffold has been built from which Brutus and Antony speak their orations over the corpse

of Caesar *in a modern casket*. With a light in front that throws their shadows huge upon the back wall" (quoted in France 1975, 61, emphasis mine). One of the most impressive documents of Antony speaking from the rostrum is Alfredo Valente's photograph, first published in 1938 in *The Stage*, discussed earlier in relation to Welles's *Everybody's Shakespeare* illustrations of Antony as orator.

France reproduces a very different image of Antony's funeral oration. Labelled "George Coulouris as Mark Antony delivering his 'Friends, Romans, countrymen' address over Caesar's body" (France 1975, 62)[52], it shows a scene illuminated by seven shafts of "Nuremberg" lights and framed on either side by helmeted soldiers bearing banners, with no indication whatsoever not only of the presence of a coffin[53], but, more importantly, of the crowd of listeners to whom Antony's oration was addressed. In all its details, the photograph corresponds not to the staging of Antony's funeral orations, but to Welles's stage direction for the final scene, with Antony standing over *Brutus'* body: "*(The lights and music wash out, leaving the stage in darkness. Then, shafts of light shoot up from the floor to reveal Marc Antony standing over the body of Brutus. He is accompanied by storm troupers carrying huge black banners)*" (Welles 2001, 165)[54]. It also recalls the drawing that closes the last page of Welles's 1934 *Caesar* in *Everybody's Shakespeare* (*MS* 63), with Antony and Octavius standing on the top of a hill overlooking Brutus' body, flanked on either side by a composition of vertical lines, probably representing the soldiers' spears and lances, replaced on stage by the verticality of the troupers' banners.

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52 See also France 1977, 113, where again the photograph is presented as a funeral oration illustration. It is not however included in France's 1990 edition of the W.P.A. and Mercury Theatre playscripts. In "Orson Welles's Shakespeare", the same photograph is labelled "Marc Anthony (George Coulouris) standing over the body of Caesar (Joseph Holland)". (https://www.hollowaypages.com/welles.htm).

53 It is worth comparing France's photograph with another coffinless photograph, almost certainly referring to the later 1938 National Theatre production, where however Antony is surrounded by a crowd of people, probably including Tom Powers as Brutus. See "The death of Caesar" in Fassler 2019.

54 In the *Me & Orson Welles Caesar* documentary, the scene is reproduced as Antony's eulogy for Brutus.

Although Octavius is notoriously absent from the Mercury Theatre finale, his elimination was apparently a last minute decision. Norman Lloyd attributes the idea to John Mason Brown, the *New York Post* theatre critic, who had attended a matinee preview on the day of the performance:

> After the show, he went backstage (unusual behaviour for a critic) and expressed himself enraptured. […]. Even more unusually for a critic, he made a suggestion: that the show should end with Antony's elegy for Brutus. He had clearly grasped the idea that Brutus was the central character. Exhilarated by his enthusiasm, they agreed; Octavius' final entrance was cut. (Quoted in Callow 1995, 336)[55]

Another revelatory photograph of Coulouris's Antony shows what could be the very last image of the production, once again an image of an Antony who has 'descended', although this time not from the pulpit of the Forum, since the scene is set on the plains of Philippi, but from one of the platforms representing the hill sketched in Welles's drawing. Published in the same issue of *The Stage* (June 1938) as Valente's photograph of his funeral oration, it shows a close-up of a less institutional, more humane Coulouris-Antony kneeling over Welles-Brutus' stretched out body "at the conclusion of the Mercury Theatre's Broadway production of *Caesar*" (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caesar-Coulouris-Welles.jpg). While his hand rests on Brutus' body, Antony's face is turned anxiously upwards, looking to the left, as if in response to a sudden, preoccupying sound or thought. Again, an image that tells or 'hints' at a story, with a flashback to one of Welles's earlier visual narratives beginning with his sketch of Antony kneeling over the body of Caesar in *Everybody's Shakespeare* (*MS* 38) and followed, two pages later, by a very different figure, once again erect and purposeful after his prophecy of blood and destruction, standing over "the ruins of the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times" (*MS* 40).

[55] See also Yezbick 2004, 284, who writes of a "series of segmented vignettes with Brutus dying on stage, Antony and Octavius arriving before his body" in the earlier mock-up script version.

Did the Mercury stage ending follow a similar sequence to that of the *ES*/*MS* illustrations? If so, Antony's descending to the level of Brutus would have shown a private, emotional moment, followed by a return to the vertical, standing position in order to utter a eulogy in which his description of Brutus is disturbingly similar to his previous definitions of Caesar. Or is Antony once again playing rhetorically on the emotions of his listeners, whether on stage or in the audience, before reverting to his vertical position as the new but even more dictatorial Caesar? In the midst of the crowd's enthusiastic response to his appeal to their emotions, while he paused to await the return of his heart "in the coffin there with Caesar", a single critical voice had already intimated a possibility of this kind: "I fear there will be a worse come in his place" (Welles 2001, 142).

If, as the caption suggests, Antony's official speech was not preceded but followed by a fracture in the verticality of power as Coulouris moves down to bend over and touch his adversary's dead body, Welles would have used the inverted order of the scenes to create a theatrical chiasmus. Rather than a definitive conclusion, the photograph appears to picture the interruption of a narrative destined 'to be continued' in an infinite rehearsal. A repetition, in Antony's mind, of the play that has just ended, with yet another complicated change of roles, of assertions of nobility countered by the evidence of weakness in the strongest of characters. Despite the elimination of the character from Welles's ending, Serpieri's comment on the implications of Octavian's interruption of Antony's eulogy in the original play applies equally to the photograph of Antony and its relevance to the ending of Welles's *Caesar*. Like Shakespeare, Welles too has used the characters of Brutus and Antony "to construct a political and psychological tragedy, not an ideological play supporting one or the other side. The two rivals are nothing more than pawns in a game neither can fully control: the game of History, which puts them on the stage in their turn, and then goes on to the next act" (Serpieri 2010, 236).

The photograph, in black and white, is unable to show the presence behind it of the ominously permanent red brick wall. Mantle's comment, quoted towards the beginning of this essay,

encourages us to remember that even when invisible, the wall "is always there", a haunting backdrop to the endless repetition of spectacles of power. The implications of its violent redness are projected onto the figures that come and go beneath it, transforming their narratives and enactments of the words and stories of the past into rehearsals for potential futures. "Now you see it, now you don't, thanks to the darkness and your imagination. But it is always there and it crowds the mind" (France 1975, 55).

7.3. Envisioning Women in Welles's Caesars

Another of the 'stories' told by the *Caesar* photographs regards the presence of Shakespeare's female characters in Welles's adaptations. Although all the photographs of Calpurnia (Evelyn Allen) and Portia (Muriel Brassler and later Alice Frost) show them pleading submissively with their husbands[56], censoring any suggestion of female subjectivity and agency, they suggest a quantitatively greater female presence than was the case in any of Welles's productions, except his *ES Caesar*.

Albeit with some omissions (including the whole of II.iv), both Calpurnia and, especially, Portia are accorded relatively ample space in the *ES* text (*MS* 12-13, 27-28, 30-32 and 56) and are also, significantly, represented in Welles's drawings. While Calpurnia's head is only portrayed together with Caesar's (*MS* 31), Portia is presented on her own, proudly erect in a side view of her splendidly dressed full body (*MS* 27), complaining of Brutus' behaviour before she claims her right to know his secrets, revealing her voluntary wounding of herself to prove her constancy (*MS* 28). The elimination of II.iv in all of Welles's *Caesars* means a drastic

[56] For photographs of Calpurnia (Evelyn Allen) pleading with Caesar, see the *Life* photostory discussed above, and a second photograph showing the actors in a slightly different pose in a Lucas-Pritchard photograph in *The Cornell Daily Sun* (30 November 1937): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caesar-Allen-Holland.jpg. For photographs of Portia and Brutus, see http://www.hollowaypages.com/welles.htm, with Muriel Brassler as Portia in the Mercury Theatre production, and for the 1938 Mercury Theatre production, with Alice Frost, in a coloured photograph by Herbert Kehl in "The Man from Mercury", *Coronet*, June 1938, see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caesar-Mercury-3.jpg.

reduction of Portia's presence in the play. The reduction is however counterbalanced by the cancelling, with the scene, of Shakespeare's image of a Portia giving way to her emotions, contradicting her previous demonstration of strength of will:

> O constancy, be strong upon my side;
> Set a huge mountain 'tween my heart and tongue!
> I have a man's mind, but a woman's might.
> How hard it is for women to keep counsel!
> […]
> Ay me, how weak a thing
> The heart of woman is!
> (Shakespeare 1988, II.iv.6-9, 39-40).

The removal of the scene leaves the *ES* readers with the image of a woman whose "might" – magnificently portrayed in Welles's drawing – is equal to or more "noble" than that of her husband who had appealed to the gods to "render" him "worthy of this noble wife!" (*MS* 28).

The presence of both women decreases in the Mercury playscript. Caesar's attempt to use the Lupercalia to cure Calpurnia's barrenness disappears, as too does Portia's story of her voluntary wounding and Brutus' admiring recognition of her nobility. A further reduction of Portia's importance is introduced in the account of her death, not, or not explicitly, as a suicide caused by her "swallow[ing] fire", as in Welles's *ES Caesar* (*MS* 56), but merely as a consequence of her falling "distract" (Welles 2001, 160).

The narrowing of the space accorded Calpurnia and Portia continues in the radio versions. Paradoxically, in all three of the Columbia *Mercury Theatre on the Air* rehearsals the *voices* of both women are reduced to silence.

In her discussion of Calpurnia's dream and Portia's wound in relation to the characterization of Caesar and Brutus, Cynthia Marshall notes how in Shakespeare's reworking of his Plutarchan source the dream reveals aspects both of "Caesar's problematic identity" and of the subjectivity of Calpurnia as dreamer:

> In an unusual reversal of an established gender dynamic, Calphurnia functions as the subject to whose knowledge the audience receives (mediated) access, while Caesar is the object of scrutiny.
> That she is denied even the articulation of her dream, which is narrated by the appropriating Caesar, demonstrates an effacement of her linguistic presence; Calphurnia is largely without the power of words in the play. But her relative muteness also confers on Calphurnia the paradoxical freedom of one unconfined by limiting verbal structures. […] [T]he dream employs a sensory form of knowledge, a literal envisioning of Caesar's fate. […].
> [It] discovers an image that condenses two opposite conceptions of Caesar, monumental and vulnerable. (Marshall 1994, 483-84)

In Welles's radio version, the effacement of Calpurnia's linguistic presence goes further, eliminating any indication of weakness on the part of Caesar. The account of Calpurnia's dream and her pleading with Caesar to remain at home is relegated to H. V. Kaltenborn's reading of an abbreviated and edited version of a Plutarchan narrative where she is mentioned, without a name, simply as Caesar's wife. In a version that differs radically from that of Hill in *MS* 5-6[57], the focus is entirely on "Caesar's wife's" defects; not only has Caesar's sharing of her concerns disappeared, but he is now represented (in a Wellesian addition) as "laughing at her fears":

> […] he perceived his wife fast asleep, but heard her utter in her dream some *indistinct words* and *inarticulate groans*. She *fancied* at that time she was weeping over Caesar, and holding him butchered in her arms. When it was day, she begged Caesar not to leave the house, but to

[57] In addition to including Calpurnia's name in his quotation of the same Plutarchan passage, Hill's text continues as follows (with occasional omissions and an interpolation): "When it was day, she begged of Caesar, if it were possible, not to stir out, but to adjourn the senate to another time. He said it was better to suffer death once than always to live in fear of it. Nor was he himself without some suspicion and fears; for he never before discovered any womanish superstition in Calpurnia, whom he now saw in such great alarm, for upon the report which the priests made to him that they had killed several sacrifices, and still found them inauspicious, he resolved to send Antony to dismiss the senate" (*MS* 5). The passage concludes with the account of Decius' scoffing dismissal of both the diviners and the dream, ending not with a response from Caesar, but by Decius' taking "Caesar by the hand, and conduct[ing] him forth" (*MS* 6).

> adjourn the senate to another time. Caesar *laughed at her fears* and when the time was come he started for the Capitol. (transcription and emphasis mine)

Portia too is downgraded both in the rehearsals for the 1938 radio broadcast and in the earlier phonograph recording. Not only is her account of her self-inflicted wounding eliminated, but also the whole of her scene with Brutus. Her first appearance in the radio rehearsals is in Plutarch's mention of Brutus bidding her farewell before leaving the city, after which her only return is in Brutus' brief account of her death to Cassius in the quarrel scene. In the March 1938 recording all that remains of either woman is the account of Portia's death, abbreviated as in the Mercury Theatre production.

In the 1944 extract of the tent scene in the *Orson Welles Almanac* broadcast, Portia disappears completely. Even her death is blotted out, leaving Brutus and Cassius to quarrel and make peace in a world so exclusively male as to admit no female presence even in the memory of the speakers.

8. Radio and Record Versions

> "There was nothing in the production the ear could not see". (*Cleveland Plain Review*, quoted in Welles 1938e)

The radio versions of Welles's *Caesar* are inevitably lacking in much of what made the Mercury performance so striking. Even the music, without its dialectical interaction with the lighting and the actors' movements, appearance and voices, seems to have lost some of its vigour. Other aspects are enhanced; new ones come to the fore.

On stage, gestures, costumes, lighting and the physical appearance of Joseph Holland as Caesar played on allusions to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. On air, the main vector of topicality was the name and voice of the narrator, the well-known radio news commentator, H. V. Kaltenborn, famed for his reports on events in Europe, charged here with reading passages drawn from Plutarch's *Lives*. The contrast between lighting and blackouts

is replaced by moments of silence. Voices are carefully pitched so as to give the impression of space, depth, proximity and distance[58], and of the movement of the actors as they enter the main stage area or retreat into the wings, or of groups of people coming together or breaking away. Several of the sound effects had already been used in the stage performance, especially but not only for scenes enacted in half-light or during a blackout, adding extra, carefully orchestrated dimensions to the performance[59]. Here they played an essential part.

The script underwent radical changes, expanded or abbreviated to adapt it to the new channel, but also to Plutarch's versions of some of the scenes, which replaced or interacted contrapuntally with the Shakespeare-Wellesian original. The high point of the Mercury production, the lynching of Cinna the Poet, disappeared, replaced not by Shakespeare's detailed Plutarchan source quoted by Hill (*MS* 7), but by another Plutarchan passage referring generically to mob violence. Yet in many ways it was the scene – even more than the opening scene and possibly even than Antony's funeral orations – that had shown the most remarkable use of sound on stage, and thus would seem to be particularly suitable for the new medium.

8.1. Telling, Acting and the Role of the Narrator

Comparison of the opening of the radio rehearsals with the accounts of the powerful shock effect of the opening scene on stage

[58] An echo, in sound, of Welles's visual structuring of the Mercury Theatre stage space to give it "an appearance of enormous depth and a great variety of playing areas" through "a series of huge, subtly graded platforms that covered the entire stage floor. First came the main downstage playing area – fourteen feet deep including the apron – which rose in a gentle rake to meet a set of shallow steps running the full width of the stage. These led to an eight-foot plateau, the mid-stage playing area, then rose again through another set of steps to a final narrow crest, six and a half feet above stage level, before falling back down in a steep, fanning ramp that ended close to the rear wall of the theatre" (Houseman 1972, 296-97).

[59] See, for example, Atkinson's review in *The New York Times* quoted earlier, and especially his comment in a later review that "[t]he Mercury Theatre which John Houseman and Orson Welles have founded with *Julius Caesar* has taken the town by the ears" (Houseman 1972, 318).

shows immediately the extent of the transformation. In place of the bare stage is a multiple introductory message: the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* theme tune from Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 1, followed by a blurb about the series, including press reviews, by CBS announcer Dan Seymour, an "Orson Welles himself to tell you about it" introduction, and a brief, final presentation listing actors and credits by Seymour. The Mercury Theatre opening blackout and Fascist March are replaced by the leisurely, elderly voice of the narrator, H.V. Kaltenborn, reading extracts from Plutarch's *Lives* to contextualize and tell the story about to be enacted. His only accompaniment is the sound of marching feet, while the music of the Fascist March begins *after* the interruption of the narrative by the soothsayer's warning to "[b]eware the Ides of March!".

The presence of a narrator in broadcasts of radio plays was quite common at the time, but Welles had his own view of the function of narrators in "radio drama", which he saw as being "more akin to a novel than a play. He insisted that [radio drama] is as dependent on storytelling as it is on performance and therefore requires a narrator to help guide the listener through the experience" (Heyer 2005, 47).

Normally, Welles favoured the use of an internal narrator, in order to create a "first person singular" sense of intimacy[60]. Often he himself assumed this role, as in his 1939 Mercury Text Recording of *Julius Caesar*, in which he read his *ES* stage directions as well as playing the parts of Cassius and Antony. For the broadcast, however, he needed a voice from outside in order to create a contrast between the status and sound of the narrator and those of the Mercury Theatre actors. This had the added advantage of allowing him to reproduce 'on air' the dialectical relationship between the onstage world of the play and its external social and political contexts, suggested in the 1937 theatrical performance by lighting, costume, gesture and physiognomy.

The choice of Kaltenborn for the *Mercury Theatre on the Air Caesar* enabled Welles to make full use of the narrator's voice both to underline the difference between telling and acting a story and to expand the time scheme into different pasts and presents. It was

[60] The revealingly characteristic title of his previous CBS series.

also an estranging device, suggesting the need to interrogate the reliability of what is shown or told, since the narrator and the actors often present conflicting versions of the same event. Plutarch's rethinking of earlier Roman history from the prospect of his own times and Shakespeare's both of Plutarch's and other versions from the prospect of the Elizabethan world are now brought into direct contact in a single text and made to interact with the worlds inhabited by Welles, his actors, music score arranger and performer, technicians and listeners. Different temporalities and discourses come into contact and self-reflexively interact 'on air'.

Instead of working his sources into a seamless presentation, Welles foregrounds their occasional contradictions in a writerly and theatrical act that self-reflexively voices the tension between each of its components. Just as the Mercury staging left the bricks of the wall, its steam pipes, fire extinguisher and even a New York City fireman visible to the audience (France 1977, 108), so Welles maintains the gaps and clashes between the text presented by his narrator and the script his actors' voices bring to life, interrupting and even contradicting the Plutarchan outline with Shakespeare's-Welles's and their own actorial reworkings. In the *Everybody's Shakespeare* version of the play, the discrepancy between parts of Plutarch's texts and the variations introduced by Shakespeare was also present, but at a distance. Plutarch was quoted at length in Roger Hill's introduction to show Shakespeare's use of his main source; although the passages were carefully labelled with Act and scene numbers to facilitate reference and comparison to the play that followed, their different editorial status made them independent of each other. Juxtaposed in the single text of the broadcast, albeit differentiated by the voice and tone of the narrator from the text given voice to by the actors, the effect is radically different.

Caesar's assassination is presented almost entirely through Kaltenborn-Plutarch's description. Of the three different versions of rehearsals for the broadcast that have so far been found, two are damaged, with the recording interrupted towards the end of the Plutarchan narrative at the words "*Brutus also gave him a stab in the groin. Some say that he fought and resisted all the rest*". It only resumes, after a pause, with Coulouris-Antony's words to Brutus and

Cassius beginning "Live a thousand years"[61]. The third, shorter recording, of the so-called "lost", but carefully edited and probably final rehearsal before going on air, contains a greatly abbreviated version of Plutarch's description of the scene, completing it however with further details (parts omitted are barred in order to show the stages of Welles's adaptation of the text; other changes in square brackets):

> *When Caesar entered [the Capitol], the senators stood up, to show their respect for him. Of the conspirators, some came about his chair and stood behind it, and others stood in front of him and talked to him.* ~~*Then Tillius, laying hold of Caesar's robe with both his hands, pulled it down from his neck, which was the signal for the assault.*~~ *Casca [that stood behind him] gave him the first [wound] in the neck.* ~~*It was not mortal […and] Caesar turned, and put his hand upon the dagger and kept hold of it. […] [The conspirators] closed around him with their naked knives in their hands. Which way so ever he turned he was met with blows and saw their blades levelled at his face and eyes […]. For it had been agreed that they should each of them make a thrust at him, and flesh themselves with his blood; for which reason Brutus also gave him one stab in the groin.*~~ *Some say that he fought and resisted all the rest, shifting his body to avoid the blows and calling out for help. But when he saw Brutus' knife drawn, he covered his face with his cloak and submitted, letting himself fall at the foot of the pedestal on which Pompey's statue stood, which was wetted with his blood*. (Welles 1938c)[62]

The passage is followed by the continuation of the scene, performed by the voices of Holland, Welles, Gabel and others in the parts of Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, Decius and Cinna: "*Et tu, Brutè*? – Then fall, Caesar. / Liberty! / Freedom! / Tyranny is dead! / Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets" etc.

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61 My transcription (as in all quotations from Welles's radio and phonographic versions of *Julius Caesar*).

62 The quotation allows a comparison between the Plutarchan narrations of the assassination reproduced in the radio rehearsals. The entire passage, with minor variations, is present in Hill's *ES* introduction, which however ends as follows: "So that Pompey himself seemed to have presided, as it were, over the revenge done upon his adversary, who lay here at his feet, and breathed out his soul through his multitude of wounds, for they say he received three and twenty" (*MS* 6). A consideration omitted in all three radio rehearsals.

For Antony's funeral orations the procedure adopted is the opposite. Plutarch's summary account of the contents of Antony's speech provides a mere outline for the scene that follows[63]:

> *When Brutus was gone, the body of Caesar was brought out into the forum, all mangled with wounds. And Anthony made a funeral oration to the people in praise of Caesar. And finding them moved by his speech, he unfolded the bloody garment of Caesar, and showed them in how many places it was pierced and the number of his wounds. He also told them at this time of Caesar's will, in which it was found that he had left a considerable legacy of money to each one of the Roman citizens*.

The actors' voices that take over from Kaltenborn reproduce Shakespeare's own 'act' of performatively reworking his source on multiple levels. The gaps in Plutarch's summary are filled in with Welles's adaptation both of the words of Shakespeare and of his own previous adaptations in the *ES*/*MS* and Mercury Theatre versions. In both examples, the effect of the juxtaposition of Plutarch and Shakespeare, telling and acting, in the performance for radio differs greatly from that of Hill and Welles's *Everybody's Shakespeare*, due above all to the distance between the respective passages (*MS* 6 and 36 for the assassination; *MS* 7 and 43-48 for Antony's funeral oration), quite apart from the abbreviations, omissions and occasionally additions to Plutarch's texts.

Even more interesting is the relation between the Plutarchan narrative and the performance of Cassius' suicide. (The latter, as we have already seen, was eliminated from the Mercury Theatre performance). The narrative ends with Cassius' head "*found severed from his body*" with beside it "*the same knife with which he had stabbed Caesar in the senate house*", followed, in all except the "lost" rehearsal, by a considerably abbreviated enactment of the

[63] The only indication of the source is Welles's generical reference to "Plutarch's *Lives*" in his introductory presentation. Neither here, nor in Roger Hill's *ES* compilation of extracts, is there any reference to the different *Lives* the texts are drawn from. A "Welles's Workshop", similar to Serpieri, Elam and Corti's *Nel laboratorio di Shakespeare. Dalle fonti ai drammi* (1988), with parallel tabulation and comment of Plutarch's texts, Shakespeare's play and Welles's adaptations would be invaluable.

Shakespearean original, framed, before and after, by plaintive notes of music:

> PINDARUS
> Oh Cassius Brutus gave the word too early,
> Who, having some advantage on Octavius,
> Took it too eagerly. His soldiers fell to spoil,
> Whilst we by Antony are all enclosed. […]
> CASSIUS
> This day I breathèd first. Time is come round,
> And where I did begin, there shall I end;
> My life is run his compass. […] Come hither, sirrah.
> […]
> And with this good sword,
> That ran through Caesar's bowels, search this bosom.
> Stand not to answer. Here, take thou the hilt,
> And, when my face is covered, as 'tis now,
> Guide thou the sword. [*pause, followed by "Aaah" as if in a sighing intake of breath*]
> Caesar, thou art revenged
> Even with the sword that killed thee.

While the inclusion of Cassius' suicide already introduces a very different conception of the play from that of the stage performance in the Mercury Theatre, the Indiana University rehearsal recording goes further, with an even more drastic transformation. In this version, after the next Plutarchan narrative, come a few brief lines that shift the focus of the conclusion from Brutus, or Brutus nobilitated by his own death and by Antony's eulogy, to Cassius, "the last of all the Romans" (words eliminated in the Mercury Theatre performance), with Brutus' "fare thee well" becoming the last words of the play:

> *Some time later, Brutus, returning from the pursuit, wondered that he could not see Cassius' tent afar off, standing high as it was wont and appearing above the rest of the camp. Then, for the first time, he suspected the defeat of Cassius and made haste to him. He heard nothing of his death until he came to the camp.*
> BRUTUS
> Where, where, Messala, doth his body lie?

> MESSALA
> Lo, yonder.
> He is slain.
> BRUTUS
> The last of all the Romans, fare thee well. (Welles 1938d)

As if in a final curtain, immediately afterwards comes the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* "extro" text, followed by the Beethovenian theme tune that opened and closed all the programme's performances:

> Tonight Orson Welles and the original Mercury Theatre cast have produced Caesar; the hit of last year's theatrical season on Broadway, as the first of a new series of weekly hours which the Columbia broadcasting system will present during the coming months. In response to the tremendous enthusiasm evoked by these programmes from all parts of the country, CBS has made the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* a regular feature of its Sunday night schedule. The drama was adapted from the play of Shakespeare and the narration was taken from Plutarch's Lives. Orson Welles directed the entire production. H. V. Kaltenborn was the narrator. And the cast included… *later*. The original music was composed for the Mercury Theatre by Marc Blitzstein. Davidson Taylor supervised the production for CBS. Dan Seymour speaking. (Welles 1938d)

In the third, "lost", rehearsal, the focus shifts once again, probably definitively, back to Brutus. Cassius' suicide is left entirely to the words of Kaltenborn-Plutarch in a slightly shorter version[64]:

> *In the beginning the tide of battle was with Brutus. ~~The right wing, which he commanded, drove back their opponents with great slaughter. Then they fell upon that part of Octavius' army which was exposed and separated and pursued them towards the sea. During this time however, Cassius, with the main body of the army, was retreating before the attack of Antony, expecting Brutus to come to his aid and acting by delay and expectation, rather than boldness and with a clear purpose.~~ But soon Cassius saw his whole army begin to give way. ~~He did as much as ever he could to hinder their flight and bring them back and snatching a flag out of the hand of one that fled, he stuck it at his feet and begged them to stand by him and fight.~~ When he found that he could not even keep his own personal guard together, Cassius retired to an*

[64] I have barred the parts omitted, to enable comparison with the other rehearsals.

> *empty tent, taking along with him only Pindarus, one of his freemen, and pulling his cloak over his head, he made his neck bare and held it forth to Pindarus, commanding him to strike. Cassius' head was found severed from his body and beside it was found the same knife with which he had stabbed Caesar. Some time later, Brutus, returning from the pursuit, wondered that he could not see Cassius' tent standing far off, standing high as it was wont and appearing above the rest of the camp. Then, for the first time, he suspected the defeat of Cassius and made haste to him. He heard nothing of his death until he came to the camp*. (Welles 1938c)

Brutus' exchanges with Messala, Cinna[65], Volumnius and Strato, his last words and the enactment of his suicide are repristinated, not in the much abbreviated, semi-concealed version performed on stage (Welles 2001, 164-65), but in a slightly reduced version of *MS* 60-63. The CBS rehearsal ends, once again, with Antony's eulogy over the body of "the noblest Roman of them all", before whom "Nature might stand up, / And say to all the world, this was a man".

8.2. Recontextualizing the Quarrel Scene

Among the "tremendous possibilities of the celebrated 'Tent Scene'" Hill speaks of in his introduction to the *Everybody's Shakespeare* version of *Julius Caesar*, he could hardly have foreseen the way it would be used by Welles on 19 December 1940, in his guest appearance opposite John Barrymore in the CBS *Rudy Vallee Sealtest Show*, or in his own *Orson Welles Almanac* variety show in 1944, with Charles Laughton[66]. Although both programmes show a fairly similar structure, there is a considerable difference in quality.

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[65] The words Shakespeare attributed to Clitus are given to Cinna in Welles's versions.

[66] For the *Rudy Vallee Sealtest Show* appearance (briefly mentioned in Callow 1995, 561), see Anderegg 1999, 9-11, and Lanier 2002, 204. The quarrel scene in the *Radio Almanac* broadcast is available at https://archive.org/details/Orson_Welles_Shakespeare_Collection/440315_Scene_from_Julius_Caesar.mp3. It should of course be considered in relation to the rest of the programme (https://ia800206.us.archive.org/16/items/owota2/owota197.mp3). For a discussion and quotations, see Heyer 2005, 182.

The *Orson Welles Almanac* broadcast contains little of interest apart from Laughton and Welles's rendering of the quarrel scene, preceded by a fine performance by a New Orleans jazz band. Both the personalized presentation of the scene – "This being the Ides of March, your *Radio Almanac* brings you a scene from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, with Charles Laughton as Cassius and your obedient servant as Brutus. This is the famous quarrel scene"[67] – and the narrative that provides its context recall features of Welles's *Mercury Theatre on the Air* broadcast rehearsals, but with none of their complexity. Most of the programme is taken up by lengthy adverts for Mobil gas, jokes about hiccup cures and tax returns, a skit on "The Private Life of Charles Laughton" and a focus on the weight problems of both actors and their need to reduce their "too too solid flesh".

In the earlier Sealtest show, also ostensibly a biography of Welles's actor-partner, the confrontation between Welles and Barrymore provides interesting variations on Welles's earlier engagements with the scene. His elimination of Portia and her death even from the memory of his characters emphasizes the theme of male friendship in an exclusively homosocial world. But the new version also offers the possibility of seeing the interaction between Welles as Brutus and Barrymore as Cassius as a relationship not just between two different Shakespearean characters, but between different styles of acting, different generations and different performance genres and media, extending Welles's metatheatrical discourse to the world of radio. In his essay on Shakespeare and American radio, Douglas Lanier interprets the performance as a self-reflexively transmedial restaging (Lanier 2002, 204)[68].

Some of the significance of the performance is to be attributed to the figure of John Barrymore, not only a celebrated

[67] My transcription.

[68] Unfortunately, no recording of the show is available. See Anderegg 1999, 9-11, and Lanier 2002, 204, for comments. While Anderegg devotes more space to the vaudeville aspects of the show, "structured as a duel between egos […] with Rudy Vallee as referee", giving detailed descriptions of the protagonists' repartees (Anderegg 1999, 10), Lanier concentrates on the actors' performance of the tent scene.

Shakespearean actor, famous in particular for his interpretation of Hamlet, but also a member of an acting family closely associated with the popularity of Shakespeare in America and a much loved friend. As well as "provid[ing] a direct link to nineteenth-century theatrical traditions through his uncle John Drew and his father Maurice Barrymore", Anderegg points out that he "had done for American Shakespeare in the 1920s what Welles did in the 1930s; turned him into a box office success and made him a cultural commodity of some note" (Anderegg 1999, 9-10). "People I Miss", the fourth episode of the *Orson Welles' Sketchbook* television series for the BBC (14 May 1955), is devoted to Barrymore and Houdini, illustrated by anecdotes and drawings of Barrymore as Hamlet following a presentation of Houdini, "[t]he master magician […], the greatest showman of our time. […]. Here's John Barrymore. Who was certainly as famous as Houdini. Houdini could get out of anything, and Jack Barrymore could get into anything. He's also one of the greatest actors I ever saw in my life"[69].

At the time of the Rudy Vallee broadcast, Barrymore was "a longtime alcoholic near the end of his life […] and well past the end of his career as one of the great stars of American theater and film" (Anderegg 1999, 9). His presence facing Welles drew some of its significance precisely from his deteriorated state and status. Playing on their common "status as Shakespearean actors and, simultaneously, as egotistical 'hams'", with Barrymore "cruelly" ribbed for "his 'advanced' age", Welles for his exhibitionism and cheap sensationalism, the pairing of twenty-five-year-old Welles and fifty-eight-year-old Barrymore, the "near has-been", brought new and poignant relevance to the scene (9-10). Lanier cites specifically Barrymore-Cassius' impotent declaration "that he is 'older in practice, abler than yourself / To make conditions' and his laments that he is 'aweary of the world: […] braved by his brother, / Checked like a bondman, all his faults observed / Set in a notebook, learned, and conned by rote, / To cast into my teeth'".

[69] All six episodes of the *Orson Welles' Sketchbook* are available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1Yv09tr1LM0pq8znhhtVgbk/orson-welles-sketch-book. For a transcript of episode 4 (14 May 1955), see http://www.wellesnet.com/sketchbook4.htm.

Beyond the biographical parallels between the deep but troubled relationship of the Shakespearean characters and Barrymore and Welles's long and lasting friendship, it is the casting of "Barrymore the Shakespearean as the representative of an outmoded medium, the classical stage" that makes the performance most significant. As Lanier concludes: "The 'conflict' and 'reconciliation' between competing Shakespeareans Welles and Barrymore, in other words, transforms Shakespeare's scene into an allegory of the relationship between stage and broadcast Shakespeare" (Lanier 2002, 204).

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