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THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR: POWER, IDEAL AND TREASON¹

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ABSTRACT: This paper briefly revisits the plot of William Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* and seeks to reflect on power and human behavior at the dusk of the Roman Republic. The play, in fact, portrays the tragedy of Brutus, who, moved by idealism and the impetus to protect the Republic, betrayed Caesar and participated in the conspiracy to kill him. The article ends with considerations about love, ideal and treason.

KEYWORDS: Shakespeare; Julius Caesar; Republic; power; ideal; treason.

1 INTRODUCTION

Even you, Brutus! (“Et tu, Brute!”). There is a phrase that has crossed times as a symbol of perplexity and betrayal. And not of the detachment and idealism that were behind the gesture of Brutus. Even those who have never read the tragedy of *Julius Caesar* or even heard of William Shakespeare know the meaning of this outburst. The play is actually, as many suggest³, the tragedy of Brutus, whose moral integrity and republican values led him to sacrifice personal feelings of affection for Caesar in order to kill him in the name of a greater good. And thus, to avoid the risk of

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³ About that, it seems worthy of remembering and interesting to read the works by José Roberto Castro Neves (2014), Barbara Heliodora (2005), Harold Bloom (1998), Emma Smith (2012).

dictatorship and tyranny. That's what he supposed. The play narrates, in essence, the murder of Caesar: conspiracy, execution and consequences.

The tragedy of Caesar and Brutus was a harbinger to the tragedy of Rome. From there, on the eve of the commencement of the Common Era, disputes and wars would arise, culminating in the collapse of the Republic and the coming to power of some of the greatest tyrants in the history of mankind: Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero (Hadfield, 2007). The main characters of the play are Julius Caesar, Brutus and Mark Antony. Symptomatically, Marcus Tullius Cicero, the great intellectual and symbol of the Roman virtues, plays a minor role, merely incidental in the narrative. The play ends without reference to his tragic end, by becoming an opponent of Mark Antony. The end of the Roman Republic witnessed the rise of victorious and ambitious generals, insensitive to the subtleties and complexities of a political regime that sought some degree of equality and citizen participation, combining the role of the Senate with that of the tribunes of the plebs. In this sense, the fall of the Republic – whose dusk is portrayed in the play – foreshadowed story that would be repeated throughout the centuries, in different parts of the world, in all hemispheres and latitudes: the domination of military power over civil power.

It is possible that the history of Rome had not changed much if Caesar had remained alive. That will never be known. But to speculate as it would have been would give a good subject to another story. If no one has done this yet, there is a suggestion.

2 SHAKESPEARE AND HIS TIME

He was not of an age, but for all time.

Ben Johnson

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 and died in 1616, at age 52. He produced 38 theatrical plays and 154 sonnets, among several other writings. In 1623, the whole of his dramatic work was published posthumously, in a volume that became famous, entitled *First Folio*. In the preface to the book, Ben Johnson foreshadowed its importance for the history of world literature, in the passage whose original version opens this topic: “He was not of one age, but of all time” (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2002, p. 254). Shakespeare did not come to be

revered in life, despite having gained recognition among his contemporaries. He was also criticized, as the playwright Robert Greene, who accused him of pretentiously wanting to equate with authors with much more study and training (Shakespeare, 2006b, p. Vi). The truth, however, is that his texts have been translated into almost every known language, making him globally acclaimed as the author who “wrote the best poetry and the best prose in English, perhaps not only in English, but in any Western language” (Bloom, 1998, p. 20). Shakespeare was in fact an extraordinary interpreter of the human soul and his work more comprehensive and universal than that of other giants of world literature, such as Homer, Dante Alighieri or Leon Tolstoy.

Shakespeare’s life span corresponded to a profound transformation of England, with the change in the level of a peripheral country that gradually became an international power. A year before his birth, in 1563, an outbreak of plague decimated a third of London’s population. Throughout the decade of 1560, food shortages and *influenza* consumed many thousands of lives. Elizabeth’s arrival as queen – a protestant who succeeded her half-sister, Mary, a Catholic, who persecuted and executed Protestants to the point of being nicknamed *Bloody Mary* – sparked the fear of wars and invasion by the Catholic monarchies, inflated by Rome. This, then, is the England in which Shakespeare was born: poor, retrograde and unstable, situated in the periphery of Europe. English, on the other hand, was a minor language, spoken only in the ambit of the island, which would soon become Britain. Despite a revolt of the nobles of the North in 1569, who sought to dethrone the queen and restore Catholicism, the fact is that history began to change in favor of the English. Elizabeth I progressively imposed her domain over the nation, succeeded in conciliating religious conflicts with ambiguity and tolerance, and, more remarkably, the unlikely won the conflict with Spain. In 1588, her forces imposed a dramatic defeat on the Spanish armada.

What stands out here, therefore, is that in the course of Shakespeare’s life, England became a more prosperous, more self-reliant nation and ended up taking a prominent place on the world stage. Having died unmarried and childless, Elizabeth was succeeded – unlike all fears, with no

relevant quarrels – by James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England. Although not enjoying the prestige and authority of his predecessor, James made peace with Spain in 1604, and became historically known for sponsoring *The King James Bible*, unifying the different and conflicting previous versions. England became, during the period in which Shakespeare lived and produced his plays, an environment that seemed conducive to the flourishing of drama and theater: on the one hand, some degree of prosperity – which generated resources to finance these activities – and of education, which generated authors and an interested public; and, on the other, the dramas involving military tensions, religious disputes and uncertainties in the royal succession. When he returned to his birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon, shortly before his death, Shakespeare was already an illustrious citizen. But it would take another hundred years for the world to recognize him as one of the great geniuses of humanity, having transformed the great political, social, and moral questions of his plays into universal and timeless themes.

3 THE ROMAN REPUBLIC⁴

Athens is historically identified as the first major precedent of limited political power – *government of laws and not of men* – and of citizen participation in public affairs. Although it was a territorial and military power of some expression, its perennial legacy is of intellectual nature, as a pioneer of the constitutionalist and democratic ideals. There, ideas and institutes that still remain today were conceived and practiced, such as the division of state functions into different organs, the separation of secular power from religion, the existence of a judicial system and, above all, the supremacy of the *law*, created by a formal process appropriate and valid for all.

The constitutionalist ideal of limited power was shared by Rome, where the Republic was implanted in 529 BCE, at the end of the Etruscan

⁴ To whom may be interested in the topic, the works by Gordon Scott (1999); R. C. van Caenegem (1995); Julius H. Wolff (1951); Fritz Schulz (1953); Henrique Modanez de Santana (2014), as well as the entry “William Shakespeare” (*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1998; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1975; *The Columbia encyclopedia*, 1993) are good suggestions.

monarchy, with the Law of the Twelve Tables⁵. Roman military and political power stretched across most of the Mediterranean, but its legal structure and political institutions remained those of a city-state, with decisions concentrated on a limited number of organs and people. Such institutions included the Assembly (which, strictly speaking, was diverse and embodied the power to draft laws), the Consuls (who were the chief executive agents) and other high officials (praetors, quaestors, tribunes of the plebs), in addition to the Senate, whose formal character as mere advisory body concealed its role as a material and effective source of power. There was some degree of citizen participation, albeit small⁶.

Despite its aristocratic character, power in the Republic was shared by institutions that controlled and feared each other⁷. Nevertheless, a series of causes led to the demise of the republican model, among them the system of privileges of the patrician aristocracy and the dissatisfaction of the troops, the people and other aristocracies, who were excluded from the consular posts and the Senate. From the institutional point of view, the end came in the predictable way, which has destroyed countless other pluralistic systems throughout history: military commanders became overly powerful and escaped the effective control of political bodies. When the Republic collapsed and the Emperor was crowned, it was not the end of Rome, whose rule would last for half a millennium. What ended, on the eve of the beginning of the Christian era, was the constitutionalist experience and ideal, which came from the Greeks and had been taken over by the Romans. From there, constitutionalism would disappear from the Western world for well over a thousand years, until the end of the Middle Ages.

⁵ Only a few fragments of this Law became known. In one of them it reads: “salus populi suprema lex esto” (the welfare of the people is the supreme good). The history of Roman civilization comprises an approximate period of twelve centuries and is usually divided by historians into three phases: (i) the *Royalty*, which goes from the foundation of Rome in 753 BC, until the deposition of the Etruscan king Tarquinius; (ii) the *Republic*, which begins in 529 BCE, with the election of the two consuls; and (iii) the *Empire*, begun with the consecration of Octavius Augustus as Emperor, in 27 BC until 476 AD.

⁶ It is estimated that there were around 400,000 citizens, of whom perhaps about 10 per cent attended Assembly meetings.

⁷ Two contemporary authors of the Roman Republic – Polybius and Cicero –, both close to the aristocracy of power, wrote historically important works about the period. In his classic *On the commonwealth*, Cicero, endorsing Polybius, argued that the Roman Republic was a mixed system, in which elements of the three pure forms of government were present at the time, influenced by the writings of Aristotle: the consuls were the monarchical element, the Senate the aristocratic and the assemblies the democratic (Book I).

In the specific context relevant to the play, Julius Caesar was part of a political alliance with Crassus and Pompey, known as the Triumvirate. Caesar's success in the Gallic Wars extended the power of Rome to Britain and the Rhine, giving him prestige and political power. This fact, combined with the death of Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae, and of Julia – daughter of Caesar and wife of Pompey – destabilized the balance of power between Caesar and Pompey. Pompey aligns himself with the Senate, who orders Caesar to dissolve his army and return to Rome. Caesar defies orders and returns to Rome ahead of his legions, violating the law that prevented generals from marching with armies beyond the Rubicon. When crossing the river, Caesar would have uttered the celebrated phrase: *Allea jacta est* (“Luck is cast”). After civil war, Caesar becomes victorious and assumes absolute power. The Republic was witnessing the beginning of its end.

4 THE PLOT

4.1 First act

The plot of the play *Julius Caesar*, 1599, is composed of five acts. The first act begins in Rome, with plebeians celebrating the victory of General Julius Caesar over the sons of Pompey. During the festival of Lupercalia⁸, a seer stands out in the crowd, meets Julius Caesar and warns him to be careful of the Ides of March⁹. Julius Caesar shrugs. Meanwhile, Caius Cassius, a nobleman, meets Marcus Brutus, a man known for his moral integrity, and tries to persuade him to conspire against Julius Caesar. During the conversation of Caius Cassius and Marcus Brutus, the nobleman Mark Antony offers the crown to Julius Caesar three times, but he denies it in all. This causes the population of Rome to be extremely moved by the nobility of Julius Caesar, generating concern in Marcus Brutus, who fears the tyranny of one man's government. Knowing that the Senate intended to crown Julius Caesar the next day, Caius Cassius gathers Casca, Cinna, Decius Brutus,

⁸ Lupercalia was a Roman religious festival, which began in the end of the year, lasting until February. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lupercalia>).

⁹ In the Roman calendar, the months were divided into Ides, Kalends and Nones. In the month of March, the Ides took place on the 15th. In this case, the Ides of March mentioned in the narrative occurred in the year 44 BC (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_calendar).

Trebonius and Metellus Cimber, and organizes the conspiracy against Julius Caesar.

4.2 Second act

The second act portrays Marcus Brutus alone, at home, reflecting on what would be the best future for Rome: with Julius Caesar or without Julius Caesar. Moved by republican ideals and preoccupied with the common good, he decides to join the conspirators and together they plan to kill Julius Caesar the next day during the Capitol ceremony. At Julius Caesar's house Calpurnia, his wife, wakes up several times during the night, anticipating the tragedy that would occur the next day. In the morning, Calpurnia tries to convince Julius Caesar not to attend the ceremony of the Capitol. When Julius Caesar is almost convinced to stay home, Decius Brutus, one of the conspirators, appears and convinces him to go to the Capitol. Shortly before the ceremony, Artemidorus predicts that some evil will be done to Julius Caesar, as well as Portia, wife of Marcus Brutus.

4.3 Third act

The third act begins in a street, in front of the Capitol. Arriving at the ceremony, Julius Caesar again encounters the seer he had seen in the Lupercalia, and says that the Ides of March arrived, boasting that nothing would happen. The seer responds that the Ides of March had arrived, but had not yet left. Julius Caesar enters the Capitol and, unexpectedly, the conspirators kneel before him, one by one, asking for freedom to Publius Cimber, brother of Metellus Cimber. Julius Caesar denies the request to Metellus, then to Marcus Brutus, Caius Cassius, Cinna, Decius Brutus, until Casca stabs him, uttering the phrase: "Speak, hands, for me!"¹⁰. At that moment, all the conspirators attack Julius Caesar. Marcus Brutus takes the final blow, followed by the phrase spoken by Julius Caesar: "Et tu, Brute? Then fall, Caesar!"

The next day, during Julius Caesar's funeral, Marcus Brutus and Caius Cassius divide the crowd of plebeians and utter speeches explaining

¹⁰ Translator note: all the excerpts of Shakespeare's play in the English version of this paper were extracted from <<http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/76/the-tragedy-of-julius-caesar/>>, accessed on January 12th, 2018.

the reasons for their deeds. After Marcus Brutus' speech, the crowd began to believe that Julius Caesar would be a dangerous man to Rome, and they thank the conspirators for having killed him. But shortly after Marcus Brutus speaks, Mark Antony is authorized by the conspirators to make a speech, provided he does not speak ill of the conspirators. Mark Antony's speech, laden with rhetorical devices, shocks the crowd. Using the irony and emotional appeals, Mark Antony ennobles the image of Julius Caesar and recriminates – indirectly – the attitude of the conspirators. At the end of his speech, Mark Antony reads the testament of Julius Caesar, who bequeathed to each Roman seventy-five drachmas, along with his lands, woods and orchards on the bank of the Tiber, so that they would enjoy outdoor activity. After the speech of Mark Antony, the multitude is inflamed against the conspirators, and goes hunting for each one, promising nothing less than death. Even when they meet a citizen on the street called Cinna, the poet, they initially confuse him with Cinna, the conspirator, and they kill him without any reasonable explanation, even after they have been cleared of the misunderstanding.

4.4 Fourth act

In the fourth act, Mark Antony meets with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, to plot an attack against the conspirators who, after the speech of Mark Antony, had fled from Rome. At the same time, Marcus Brutus and Caius Cassius meet, with their respective armies, in a camp near Sardis. In the camp, Marcus Brutus and Caius Cassius disagree and exchange offenses, until Marcus Brutus claims that his wife, Portia, committed suicide after the conspirators had fled. After the shocking news, Caius Cassius apologizes, and the two go to sleep. Throughout the night, the Ghost of Julius Caesar appears to Marcus Brutus and says that they would meet on the battlefield in Philippi.

4.5 Fifth act

The fifth act begins in the plains of Philippi, where the conspirators Marcus Brutus and Caius Cassius intend to attack Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar. Before the battle, the four generals meet in the middle of the plain to exchange threats. Then they move away and combine attack

strategies. During the battle, Caius Cassius realizes that his troops are being devastated by the army of Mark Antony, and decides to retreat. Sighting fire in their stalls, Caius Cassius asks Titinius to investigate the situation, and Pindarus watches him from the top of a hill. Pindarus tells Caius Cassius that he spotted Titinius being arrested. With the weight in the consciousness of having recanted and lost his friend Titinius, Caius Cassius commits suicide with the sword that killed Julius Caesar. Pindarus flees.

Shortly after, Titinius returns with Messala, to warn Caius Cassius that the army of Marcus Brutus had overcome the one of Octavius Caesar, and is faced with Caius Cassius dead. In fact, Titinius had not been arrested; Pindarus lied to escape the battle. However, Titinius feels guilty of having been slow to return and warn Caius Cassius, and ends up committing suicide beside him. Marcus Brutus arrives and encounters Caius Cassius and Titinius dead on the ground, and assumes that it was the spirit of Julius Caesar that killed them. On the other side of the battlefield, Lucilius is taken prisoner by the army of Mark Antony, passing by Marcus Brutus. However, taken to Mark Antony, he is unmasked. Meanwhile, Marcus Brutus, devastated by the death of his colleagues, claims that the Ghost of Julius Caesar had planned to find him on the battlefield in Philippi, and if he wished, it was time for Marcus Brutus to die. Marcus Brutus asks Strato to hold the sword, and throws himself, committing suicide.

In the end, Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar find everyone dead on the floor and admire the attitude of Marcus Brutus. Mark Antony claims that all the other conspirators killed Julius Caesar out of envy, while Marcus Brutus was the only one who really cared about the common good and the future of Rome. Octavio plans a worthy funeral to Marcus Brutus, and they both retire. This is how the play ends.

5 THE MAIN CHARACTERS

5.1 Caesar and the arrogance of power

Throughout the narrative, the tone of pride in the speeches of Julius Caesar is evident, enriched by his own victories and by the power conferred on him by the Romans. Right at the beginning of the play, the extent of obedience that is devoted to him is revealed. When making a request to

Mark Antony, he hears in response: “I shall remember. When Caesar says “Do this,” it is perform’d.” Arrogance is still revealed in the same scene. Alerted by the seer to watch out for the Ides of March, Caesar reacts with disdain: “He is a dreamer; let us leave him. Pass”.

In two other situations, in the course of the play, the presumption and the contempt for the other are manifested in the actions of Julius Caesar. The first occurs in the discussion with his wife Calpurnia, in the second act, scene II. The dialogue precedes her fatal visit to the Capitol when she says it is not a good day to leave the house because she had dreamed of his death. Proudly sounding, Caesar responds:

Caesar shall forth: the things that threaten me
Ne’er look but on my back; when they shall see
The face of Caesar, they are vanished.

Still, knowing of Calpurnia’s dreams, Caesar asks the priests to sacrifice an animal and see if his future is to leave or stay at home. His servant comes back with the news:

They would not have you to stir forth to-day.
Plucking the entrails of an offering forth,
They could not find a heart within the beast.

The foresight of the priests is very clear. But Caesar rejects it, saying that he is greater than any danger:

The gods do this in shame of cowardice:
Caesar should be a beast without a heart,
If he should stay at home today for fear.
No, Caesar shall not: danger knows full well
That Caesar is more dangerous than he:
We are two lions litter’d in one day,
And I the elder and more terrible;
And Caesar shall go forth.

Faced with a last emotional appeal by Calpurnia, he still hesitates. However, he yields to the definitive argument of Decius Brutus, who convinces him to leave:

And know it now: The Senate have concluded
To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar.
If you shall send them word you will not come,
Their minds may change. Besides, it were a mock
Apt to be render’d, for someone to say
“Break up the Senate till another time,
When Caesar’s wife shall meet with better dreams.”

If Caesar hide himself, shall they not whisper
“Lo, Caesar is afraid”?

Tempted by the offer of power made by Decius Brutus and fearing the shaking of his political image before the Senators, Julius Caesar goes to the Capitol, where he shall be assassinated by the conspirators.

Already close to the scene of his murder, Caesar reveals, in a second situation, arrogance and pride. Shortly before entering the Capitol, he encounters the seer who had warned him to be careful of the Ides of March. He then proclaims himself to the clairvoyant: “The Ides of March are come”. The seer, wise, answers: “Ay, Caesar; but not gone”. Then the fatal scene occurs. At the moment when Julius Caesar enters the Capitol, Metellus Cimber asks for the freedom for his brother, Publius Cimber, who had been exiled. In this scene, the contempt for the other is evident, his immense arrogance:

I must prevent thee, Cimber.
These couchings and these lowly courtesies
Might fire the blood of ordinary men,
And turn pre-ordinance and first decree
Into the law of children. Be not fond,
To think that Caesar bears such rebel blood
That will be thaw'd from the true quality
With that which melteth fools; I mean, sweet words,
Low-crooked curtsies, and base spaniel-fawning.
Thy brother by decree is banished:
If thou dost bend, and pray, and fawn for him,
I spurn thee like a cur out of my way.

Following this, Marcus Brutus and Caius Cassius reiterate the same request, which is denied, again with great swank:

I could be well moved, if I were as you;
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me:
But I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks,
They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
But there's but one in all doth hold his place:
So in the world; 'tis furnish'd well with men,
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;
Yet in the number I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank,
Unshak'd of motion: and that I am he,
Let me a little show it, even in this,—
That I was constant Cimber should be banish'd,
And constant do remain to keep him so.

At the end of the scene, Cinna, Decius and Casca make the same request that, denied by Julius Caesar, generates the attack of the conspirators. Prudence, humility, and respect for others' opinions could have saved him from death. Even before reaching absolute power, which was still foreshadowing, Caesar already exhibited the arrogant facet of tyrants and dictators.

5.2 Brutus and the Republican sentiment

Early in the play, in Act I, Scene II, Shakespeare presents the existential dilemma of Marcus Brutus: killing or not killing Julius Caesar. Brutus respected Caesar, had debts of gratitude to him, and loved him fraternally. So the decision was not easy. On the other hand, he was convinced that Caesar had become too powerful since he had defeated the sons of Pompey, and his imperial behavior threatened the Roman Republic to become the government of one man. The prospect of tyranny sharpened Marcus Brutus' republican sentiment. When Caius Cassius tries to convince Marcus Brutus to conspire against Julius Caesar, still in the beginning of the plot, the love of Marcus Brutus by the commonwealth is revealed. As they talk, Brutus hears the cries of the people coming from the feast of Lupercalia, and exclaims: "What means this shouting? I do fear the people choose Caesar for their king." Caius Cassius, then asks: "Ay, do you fear it? Then must I think you would not have it so". So, Marcus Brutus answers:

I would not, Cassius; yet I love him well,
But wherefore do you hold me here so long?
What is it that you would impart to me?
If it be aught toward the general good,
Set honor in one eye and death i' the other
And I will look on both indifferently;
For let the gods so speed me as I love
The name of honor more than I fear death.

In the course of the play, Brutus' dilemma reveals itself in strong colors at two different times. The first of these occurs when, alone in his house, he makes the fateful decision to kill Caesar, joining the conspirators. The scene begins with a monologue of Brutus in the orchard:

It must be by his death: and, for my part,
I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general. He would be crown'd:
How that might change his nature, there's the question:
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder;
And that craves wary walking. Crown him?—that:

And then, I grant, we put a sting in him,
 That at his will he may do danger with.
 Th' abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins
 Remorse from power; and, to speak truth of Caesar,
 I have not known when his affections sway'd
 More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof,
 That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
 Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
 But, when he once attains the upmost round,
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend: so Caesar may;
 Then, lest he may, prevent. And, since the quarrel
 Will bear no color for the thing he is,
 Fashion it thus,—that what he is, augmented,
 Would run to these and these extremities:
 And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
 Which hatch'd, would, as his kind grow mischievous;
 And kill him in the shell.

At that hour, his servant Lucius interrupts him and hands him a sealed letter that someone had left. With the illumination of the stars (“The exhalations, whizzing in the air give so much light that I may read by them”), he opens the letter and reads:

“Brutus, thou sleep'st: awake and see thyself.
 Shall Rome, &c. Speak, strike, redress—!
 Brutus, thou sleep'st: awake!—”
 Such instigations have been often dropp'd
 Where I have took them up.
 “Shall Rome, & c.” Thus must I piece it out:
 Shall Rome stand under one man's awe? What, Rome?
 My ancestors did from the streets of Rome
 The Tarquin drive, when he was call'd a king.—
 “Speak, strike, redress!”—Am I entreated, then,
 To speak and strike? O Rome, I make thee promise,
 If the redress will follow, thou receivest
 Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus!

Brutus' decision to act comes even before any action by Caesar against the Republic. The second moment in which Brutus tries to justify his gesture in the name of the love to the Republic occurs at the occasion of the funeral of Caesar, when he tries to expose the reasons that justified the conspiracy:

Romans, countrymen, and lovers!
 Hear me
 for my cause; and be silent,
 that you may hear: believe me for mine
 honour, and have respect to mine honour,
 that you may believe: censure me in your
 wisdom; and awake your senses,
 that you may the better judge.
 If there be any

in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to
 him I say that Brutus' love
 to Caesar was no less than
 his. *If then that friend demand
 why
 Brutus rose against Caesar, this is
 my answer,—Not that I loved Caesar
 less, but that I loved Rome
 more. Had you rather Caesar were living,
 and die all slaves, than
 that Caesar were dead,
 to live all freemen? As Caesar loved me, I
 weep for him; as he was fortunate,
 I rejoice at it; as he was valiant,
 I honour him; but, as he was ambitious,
 I slew him. There is tears for his love;
 joy for his fortune; honour for his
 valour;
 and death for his ambition.*
 Who is here so base that would be a bondman?
 If any, speak; for him have I offended.
 Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman?
 If any, speak; for him have I offended.
 Who is here so vile that will not love his country?
 If any, speak; for him have I offended.
 I pause for a reply. [...]
 Then none have I offended. I have done no more
 to Caesar than you shall do to Brutus.
 The question of his death is enroll'd
 in the Capitol, his glory not extenuated,
 wherein he was worthy; nor his offenses enforced,
 for which he suffered death. Here comes
 his body, mourned by Mark Antony, who,
 though he had no hand in his death,
 shall receive the benefit of his dying, a
 place in the commonwealth; as which of you
 shall not? With this I depart— that,
 as I slew my best lover for the good of Rome, I
 have the same dagger for myself, when it
 shall please my country to need my death (passages were
 marked in italics for this study).

And so, the public cause prevails over the private sentiment.

5.3 Mark Antony and the art of rhetoric

Rhetoric, the art of speaking with eloquence, to persuade, to inspire or to conquer, has a leading role in the plot, especially in the figure of Mark Antony. Soon after Caesar's assassination, he seeks the conspirators to understand the reason for the extreme act they perpetrated. When he manifests himself, he disguises the indignation he feels under a cloak of ironic and sarcastic sympathy:

I know not, gentlemen, what you intend,
 Who else must be let blood, who else is rank:
 If I myself, there is no hour so fit
 As Caesar's death-hour, nor no instrument
 Of half that worth as those your swords, made rich
 With the most noble blood of all this world.
 I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,
 Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,
 Fulfill your pleasure. Live a thousand years,
 I shall not find myself so apt to die:
 No place will please me so, no means of death,
 As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,
 The choice and master spirits of this age.
 [...]
 I doubt not of your wisdom.
 Let each man render me his bloody hand:
 First, Marcus Brutus, will I shake with you;—
 Next, Caius Cassius, do I take your hand;—
 Now, Decius Brutus, yours;—now yours, Metellus;—
 Yours, Cinna;—and, my valiant Casca, yours;—
 Though last, not least in love, yours, good Trebonius.
 Gentlemen all—alas, what shall I say?
 My credit now stands on such slippery ground,
 That one of two bad ways you must conceit me,
 Either a coward or a flatterer.—
 That I did love thee, Caesar, O, 'tis true:
 If then thy spirit look upon us now,
 Shall it not grieve thee dearer than thy death
 To see thy Antony making his peace,
 Shaking the bloody fingers of thy foes,—
 Most noble!—in the presence of thy corse?
 Had I as many eyes as thou hast wounds,
 Weeping as fast as they stream forth thy blood,
 It would become me better than to close
 In terms of friendship with thine enemies.
 Pardon me, Julius! Here wast thou bay'd, brave hart;
 Here didst thou fall; and here thy hunters stand,
 Sign'd in thy spoil, and crimson'd in thy death.—
 O world, thou wast the forest to this hart;
 And this, indeed, O world, the heart of thee.—
 How like a deer stricken by many princes,
 Dost thou here lie!

After this speech, the conspirators authorize Mark Antony to speak at the funeral of Julius Caesar, which would take place the next day. However, before finishing the scene, Mark Antony, alone, expresses his true feeling as to the conspirators:

O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
 That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!
 Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
 That ever lived in the tide of times.
 Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!
 Over thy wounds now do I prophesy,—
 Which, like dumb mouths do open their ruby lips
 To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue,—

A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;
Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
And dreadful objects so familiar,
That mothers shall but smile when they behold
Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war;
All pity choked with custom of fell deeds:
And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
With Ate' by his side come hot from Hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
With carrion men, groaning for burial.

It is in the speech at Caesar's funeral, however, that Mark Antony displays all his verve, in a prayer regarded as a true rhetorical class¹¹:

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones:
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault;
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest,—
For Brutus is an honourable man;
So are they all, all honorable men,—
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honourable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once,—not without cause:
What cause withholds you, then, to mourn for him?—
O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason!—Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,

¹¹ According to José Roberto de Castro Neves (2012, p. 212): “no lawyer fails to get emotional with that speech”.

And I must pause till it come back to me. [...] But yesterday the word of Caesar might Have stood against the world: now lies he there, And none so poor to do him reverence. O masters, if I were disposed to stir Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage, I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong, Who, you all know, are honourable men: I will not do them wrong; I rather choose To wrong the dead, to wrong myself, and you, Than I will wrong such honourable men. But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar,— I found it in his closet,—'tis his will: Let but the commons hear this testament,— Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read,— And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds, And dip their napkins in his sacred blood; Yea, beg a hair of him for memory, And, dying, mention it within their wills, Bequeathing it as a rich legacy Unto their issue (added marks in italics).

The plebeians ask that Mark Antony read the will, but he refuses. However, he then goes back and decides to read it. He asks everyone to make a circle around the body of Julius Caesar, and speaks again:

If you have tears, prepare to shed them now. You all do know this mantle: I remember The first time ever Caesar put it on; 'Twas on a Summer's evening, in his tent, That day he overcame the Nervii. Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through: See what a rent the envious Casca made: Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabb'd; And as he pluck'd his cursed steel away, Mark how the blood of Caesar follow'd it,— As rushing out of doors, to be resolved If Brutus so unkindly knock'd, or no; For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel: Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him! This was the most unkindest cut of all; For when the noble Caesar saw him stab, Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms, Quite vanquish'd him: then burst his mighty heart; And, in his mantle muffling up his face, Even at the base of Pompey's statua, Which all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell. O, what a fall was there, my countrymen! Then I, and you, and all of us fell down, Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us. O, now you weep; and, I perceive, you feel The dint of pity: these are gracious drops. Kind souls, what, weep you when you but behold.

Mark Antony removes the mantle from the body of Julius Caesar, and exposes his wounds. Then he continues the speech. Enraged, the commoners plan to hunt down the conspirators. Marco Antonio draws their attention:

Why, friends, you go to do you know not what.
Wherein hath Caesar thus deserved your loves?
Alas, you know not; I must tell you then:
You have forgot the will I told you of.
[...]
Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal.
To every Roman citizen he gives,
To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.
[...]
Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbors, and new-planted orchards,
On this side Tiber: he hath left them you,
And to your heirs forever; common pleasures,
To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves.
Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?

After the speech of Mark Antony, the conspirators flee from Rome, afraid of the people. This shows, by itself, the rhetorical force of the speech made by Mark Antony. At the beginning of his speech, the people had just heard Marcus Brutus. And they were all celebrating the death of Julius Caesar, who was supposed to be a tyrant. At the end of his speech, the people realize that the act of the conspirators had no basis, but the argument of authority used by Marcus Brutus, about being a noble man. Marco Antonio can reverse the whole situation by the means of only one speech.

6 SOME PEARLS OF WISDOM

Throughout the text, Shakespeare exhibits his fine understanding of life and the human condition in its grandeur and misery. Here are some of these perceptions, in anthological passages.

6.1 The Crowd Is fickle

After the murder of Caesar, the plebeians demand an explanation. Brutus rises to the pulpit and there is silence to hear him. In a brief speech, he explains that he killed Caesar to prevent them from becoming slaves. He killed him, not because he did not love Caesar, but because he loved Rome more. Understanding the reasons, the crowd supports him:

CITIZENS.
Live, Brutus! live, live!
FIRST CITIZEN.
Bring him with triumph home unto his house.
SECOND CITIZEN.

Give him a statue with his ancestors.
 THIRD CITIZEN.
 Let him be Caesar.
 FOURTH CITIZEN.
 Caesar's better parts
 Shall be crown'd in Brutus.
 [...]
 FIRST CITIZEN.
 This Caesar was a tyrant.
 THIRD CITIZEN.
 Nay, that's certain:
 We are blest that Rome is rid of him.

However, after Mark Antony's speech, the crowd shifts side and evolves into growing fury:

FIRST CITIZEN.
 Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.
 SECOND CITIZEN.
 If thou consider rightly of the matter,
 Caesar has had great wrong.
 THIRD CITIZEN.
 Has he not, masters?
 I fear there will a worse come in his place.
 FOURTH CITIZEN.
 Mark'd ye his words? He would not take the crown;
 Therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious.

And at the end of Mark Antony's speech, out of control, they all manifest again:

SECOND CITIZEN.
 We will be revenged.
 CITIZENS.
 Revenge,—about,—seek,—burn,—fire,—kill,—slay,—let
 not a
 traitor live!
 [...]
 FIRST CITIZEN.
 We'll burn the house of Brutus.
 THIRD CITIZEN.
 Away, then! come, seek the conspirators.

6.2 Ingratitude is part of human nature

By expressing fear of Caesar's ambition, as well as the changes that the conquest of power would provoke in him, so says Brutus:

But 'tis a common proof,
 That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
 Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
 But, when he once attains the upmost round,
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend.

6.3 How to get rid of tyranny

So every bondman in his own hand bears
The power to cancel his captivity.

6.4 Cowardice

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.

6.5 Virtue does not escape envy

My heart laments that virtue cannot live
Out of the teeth of emulation.

6.6 Good and evil

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.

6.7 Disorderly passions create injustice

One of the conspirators against Julius Caesar was named Cinna. After the murder and the speech of Mark Antony, the people leave the streets in search of revenge. Along the way, the insane commoners meet a man by the name of Cinna, the namesake of one of the murderers. Due to the coincidence, they do not hesitate to kill him:

THIRD CITIZEN.
Your name, sir, truly.
CINNA.
Truly, my name is Cinna.
FIRST CITIZEN.
Tear him to pieces! he's a conspirator.
CINNA.
I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet.
FOURTH CITIZEN.
Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.
CINNA.
I am not Cinna the conspirator.
FOURTH CITIZEN.
It is no matter, his name's Cinna; pluck but his
name out of his heart, and turn him going.
THIRD CITIZEN.
Tear him, tear him!!.

6.8 The powerful distrust the intellectuals

It is true, in this particular case. In dialogue with Mark Antony, Caesar considers Cassius dangerous, because he reads a lot and thinks too much:

Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.

[...]
Would he were fatter! But I fear him not:
Yet, if my name were liable to fear,
I do not know the man I should avoid
So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much;
He is a great observer, and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men: he loves no plays,
As thou dost, Antony; he hears no music:
Seldom he smiles; and smiles in such a sort
As if he mock'd himself and scorn'd his spirit
That could be moved to smile at any thing.
Such men as he be never at heart's ease
Whiles they behold a greater than themselves;
And therefore are they very dangerous.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Love and ideal

Love moves private life. In its various manifestations: fraternal, paternal, filial, conjugal, erotic. To love means to give life a transcendent dimension, which makes it more than mere physical survival, the accumulation of goods, the satisfaction of sensory pleasures or personal achievements. Love is the counterpoint to selfishness inherent in the human condition. Self-reference and self-obsession are tempered by feeling, by the ability to empathize and share affections. Love is the discovery of the other and the good that makes us serve him. In the inspired passage of Vinícius de Moraes, “self-sufficiency is the greatest solitude”. Love is associated with virtues such as solidarity, compassion and kindness. It is beyond doubt that Brutus loved Caesar.

In turn, *idealism* stands for public life as love is for private life. To have an ideal means to live for goals that are beyond the immediate self-interest. Quite the contrary, idealism can mean sacrifice and renunciation in exchange for achievements that are not purely personal and are often intangible. The ideal, without fanaticism or omniscience, is also a way of transcending, of living beyond material conquests, and of including the other in our universe of preoccupations. Idealism is linked to ethical values, to virtue, to conquests of the spirit. It is beyond doubt, also, that Brutus was an idealist man.

Good life involves the balance between love, idealism and self-interest. *Julius Caesar* portrays an excruciating conflict: when love and idealism are on different, opposing, irreconcilable sides. The tragedy of

Brutus was the impossibility of placing his love – love of gratitude, almost filial love – where his ideal lived. It was not his personal interest that was at stake. In his view, the perverse equation was Caesar *versus* Rome. If both were incompatible, if Caesar’s tyrannical ambition was against the values of the Roman Republic, on what side would a man of good like Brutus stay? The play reveals no more than a brief hesitation: the Republic was above personal feelings. For many, Brutus’ dignity placed him above his own humanity.

7.2 Means and ends

Means and ends form the duality that moves the physical world, the world of rationality, the pragmatic world. To live is to choose means to accomplish ends. To legislate is to provide means to achieve legitimate goals. The adequacy, necessity and proportionality of the means that the individual, society and the State elect to seek their ends give the dimension of their civility, constitutionality and morality. The imbalance between means and ends, the use of illegitimate or immoral instruments to achieve legitimate, moral, and desirable ends, is an ethical dilemma that runs through the centuries. From long before Machiavelli, who did not produce the phrase – *the ends justify the means* – but deserved the authorship.

The preservation of the Roman Republic was a more than legitimate end. To avoid the historical mismatch and the despotism that radiated from its end, with the implantation of the Empire, would justify extreme efforts. But to kill a loved one; betray the confidence of a friend; allying with adversaries who moved by petty sentiments (and not by republican ideals) cost Brutus an insurmountable moral condemnation, a certain historical repulsion. Transplanting Kant’s categorical imperative from Enlightenment to Classical Antiquity, if everyone could kill, betray and defeat love in the name of a legitimate ideal, the ultimate prize would come without merit or virtue. And although he was morally bigger than Caesar, to destroy him, Brutus became smaller than he. Evil is not the source of good. No matter how good the intentions may be.

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