"Peace, Count the Clock": The Chronological Framework of the Passion in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

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I

Critics of *The Tragedie of Julius Caesar*, while most of them agreeing on the point that it is the gateway through which Shakespeare passed to his later greatest plays, have often disputed its hidden message. The play's structural complexity and the ambiguous nature of the characters make it hard to grasp. Not only does the focus of the play itself seem to shift from the contention between conspirators' republicanism and Caesar's monarchism to the victory of Antony's Machiavellianism over Brutus' idealism, but also the impression of the assassination itself and the image of each character involved in it change and fluctuate from one scene to another so that the spectators have difficulty in finding out what is really at stake in this dramatic conflict. With what intention does the dramatist create this pagan world, and how does he manipulate his complex and sometimes deceptive characters?

It has often been noticed that in *Julius Caesar*, one could perceive the playwright's heavy reliance on North's translation of Plutarch. There is, indeed, a close correspondence between the two, and most of the actions that take place on the stage are pretty faithful to the records.¹ But that does not necessarily mean that Shakespeare simply duplicated Plutarch's story. In the play, he omitted a number of incidents recorded in Plutarch, while adding various characters and anecdotes that are his own invention.

At what point of his life Shakespeare came to know Plutarch is unde-
terminable, but he must have found the work both fascinating and inspiring. As a Greek, living in the age of Pax Romana (he being a contemporary of the Emperor Nero), Plutarch’s essential attitude in writing his biography is objective and detached. Though there is something that verges on sympathy in the depiction of his ancestral Greek heroes, Plutarch is not their devotee any more than he is the admirer of the Romans. With impartial eyes that almost approximate to those of a scientist, he dissects the lives of his subjects, evaluating their characters, deeds, and situations, piece by piece. In Lives, we find the historian anatomizing the life of Julius Caesar who, as the initiator of the most influential dynasty, literally shaped the history of the Mediterranean world. For Plutarch, Julius is a man who lived less than a century ago, and his words and deeds are inextricably bound to the formation of the contemporary social and political system he himself lives in. In that sense, his grasp of this historical figure is essentially based on his realistic observation of the man as an individual, a statesman, and a Roman.

In the eyes of Shakespeare, such detached portrayal of the dynastic initiator without any religious implication must have been rather striking. Born in the Elizabethan era more than sixteen-hundred years after Caesar’s assassination, he lived in a society where idealized images of just and pious sovereigns abounded. Elizabeth I, of course, made the best of this glorification of the monarchs as blessed rulers. But the pious role-playing of the Tudors is not by any means their invention.

It was as early as the fourth century, soon after the legal sanction of Christian worship by Constantine I, that “Christ had come to be portrayed as an enthroned and crowned emperor presiding over a court composed of angels and saints” (King 9). The Roman emperors on earth, on the other hand, came to be seen as his lesser and subordinate mirror image. And this tradition of seeing the emperors as the earthly counter-
part of the ruler in heaven had lived on long after the collapse of the
Roman Empire. Thus, when Charlemagne received the crown from Pope
Leo III on Christmas of 800, he claimed to inherit the Holy Roman
Empire which is on a symbolic parallel with the "universal Roman
Church" founded by Christ.

During the Middle Ages, the idea of a kingdom on earth that mirrors
the one in heaven bred the idea of two contrastive monarchs: the one a
king who, acknowledging divine supremacy, conjoins the secular and
spiritual realms in his authority: the other a tyrant who, falling from
grace, loses his kingdom and perishes himself. While the image of the
former was often exploited by the monarchs themselves, the latter figure
commonly appeared on the medieval stages as the representation of the
mortals against whose vulnerability Christ's power over death is con­
trasted.

Patricia L. Carlin points out that this problem of the King's mortality
that frequently appears in medieval drama was carried over to some of
Shakespeare's plays. In her Shakespeare's Mortal Men, she observes that
there is a resemblance between Shakespearean drama and medieval
drama to the extent that in both king figures appear who, diverse in
character and function, "continue to assert a more-than-mortal status,
and then discover, terribly, their own mortal vulnerability" (27).

In Julius Caesar, we encounter the titular character who exactly fits
into this type. He, too, in his aspiration to kingship, asserts his "more­
than-mortal" status—exclaiming "I am constant as the northern star" (3.
1. 60)—and in the height of his hubris, is broken down. But Shakespeare
does not seem to be satisfied with the production of a simple Herod-like
figure. He brings in another man into the scene—Brutus. Of his charac­
ter and role in the play, Joseph S. M. J. Chang gives a vivid and clear-cut
description:
Rather than an objective portrait of Brutus, Shakespeare presents the noblest Roman of them all, a man so completely dedicated to honor that he never for a moment considers that he may be wrong. Such is the protagonist who kills the man he honors in death with the title, "my best lover" (III.i.50), and who incites the civil war which destroys the very Republic he seeks to preserve. (70)

If Brutus was a remorseless man, he would have deemed slaying of Caesar no more than a simple act of eliminating a potential security risk to the Roman republic. But Brutus is an "honorable man," and it requires a whole set of ceremonies to kill his patronizing "lover." In answer to this requirement, the dramatist lays a ritual plan so elaborately figured out that it almost appears to us there is no room left for the protagonists to escape from their fates. But this elaborate ritual has another peculiar feature in that it is embellished with a number of biblical overtones. Steve Sohmer noticed it most keenly. Suggesting "Shakespeare's borrowings from Scripture are methodical and systematized" (26), he pushes his argument further that in the play Shakespeare "dared to draw parallels between his Caesar and Christ which were detectable by members of his audience" (28).

Truly, we could find a number of biblical allusions that suggest a close correspondence between the two. But it was not Shakespeare's daring that enabled him to draw the parallel. The method of symbolic parallelism took root in far away medieval times, and under its tradition, placing the heavenly and the earthly side by side does not guarantee their likenesses nor equality, but rather exposes the undeniable gap between the two. In this type of parallelism, therefore, the closer the correspondence between the two, the keener the irony becomes when the latter's mortal vulnerability is finally exposed.

And it is for this enhanced irony, perhaps, that *Julius Caesar* borrows
some part of its scheme from the Passion narrative. In Caesar's assassi-
nation, we find a series of events taking place which appears to synchro-
nize with the order of events in the Passion. Starting from Caesar's tri-
umphal return to Rome, every major incident up to his assassination
could find its counterpart in the narratives that tell of Christ's last few
days in Jerusalem. By examining the similarities and differences
between the two narratives carefully, we could appreciate Shakespeare's
ingenuity in revealing the fate of Man, whose aspiring desire, in contrast
to devine will, is bound to deviate from its intended course.

II

But before going into the play itself, we have to understand certain
aspects of the Passion narrative. Owing to their religious education from
childhood and their regular exposure to scriptural reading at church ser-
vices, Elizabethans had a thorough knowledge of the Bible, and every
single episode in the Passion must have been deeply engraved in their
minds. But for those who live in the present-day society remote from
Merry England in 1599 (the year *Julius Caesar* was written), it may be
helpful to enumerate the major incidents in the Passion narratives: (1)
Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem; (2) the Conspiracy against Jesus (two days
before the Passover); (3) the Passover Meal, or the Last Supper (soon
after sunset 'when the even was come' (Matthewe: 26.20); (4) the Prayer
in Gethsemane; (5) the Arrest of Jesus; (6) the Trial before the Jewish
authorities; (7) Peter's denial of Jesus before the cock crows; (8) the
Handover of Jesus to Pilate ('assone as it was day' (Marke: 15. 1) (Jesus'
brief handover to Herod is inserted here in the Gospel of Luke but not in
any other.); (9) the Crucifixion of Jesus (at the third hour, i.e. at 9 a.m.);
(10) the Death of Jesus (at the ninth hour, i.e. at 3 p.m.); (11) the Burial
of Jesus (around sunset when 'the Sabbath drewe on' (Luke: 23. 54); (12)
the Discovery of the Resurrection (when 'the first day of the weke began to dawne' (Matthewe: 28. 1). Since it is a very basic outline of the Passion narratives, there are a number of episodes that have slipped out from the list. Still, we can perceive the overall flow of the events.

What strikes us most in this table is its rapid cycle of events which makes relentless progress with clockwork precision. On the eve of the first day of Passover, Jesus sits at the meal table with his disciples, and on the course of that night, he retreats to Gethsemane (the name of a garden east of Jerusalem, near the brook of Kedron) for prayer, and is arrested and put on the Jewish trial. Next day, as soon as the day breaks, the Jewish authorities hold a council and decide to deliver Jesus to Pilate for the Roman trial. On "the thirde houre" (i. e., 9 a.m., as the Romans counted time by deviding a day from sunrise to sunset into twelve), he is crucified. From the sixth hour (i. e., noon), darkness covers the land until the ninth hour (3 p.m.) when Jesus dies. He was buried hastily as the Jewish Sabbath—which begins on Friday evening with sunset and ends on Saturday evening with sunset—is drawing on. Since the Passover begins on the 14th day of Nisan (the 7th month of the Jewish calendar corresponding to March-April, Gregorian), the sun during the Passion period rises at 6 a.m. and sets at 6 p.m approximately. And during this twelve-hour period, incidents are recorded every three hours as if they are timed to the movement of the sun.4

Besides this three-hour cycle, there is another feature peculiar to the Passion narratives. There is no detailed time-table of the night extending from the beginning of the Last Supper to just before the early morning meeting of the Council. We do not know, therefore, when Jesus reached Gethsemane, when he was arrested, and how long his trial before the Jewish authorities lasted. But as Etienne Trocme points out, "some features of the narrative give a kind of rhythm to the main events":

4
the division of the prayer in Gethsemane into three episodes
... gives it, by its repetitiveness, the appearance of an incantation or
a sacred dance; the triple denial of Jesus by Peter, which is part of
the original narrative, is also very repetitive and adds an element of
dramatic tension to the Jewish trial, while it also contributes some
chronological notes. (79)5

The religious signification of the repetitiveness and the ternary struc-
ture of these events cannot be determined easily and are irrelevant to the
purpose of this paper. What should be stressed here, rather, is that this
pattern of threefold repetition, alongside the chronological framework
based on the solar movement, is featured in the four canonical Passion
narratives in the Bible, and Shakespeare undoubtedly utilized both
devices in several scenes in *Julius Caesar*. Through a close examination
of these scenes embedded with a number of biblical references, we could
perceive the playwright’s secret intention hidden in the seemingly
ambiguous structure of the play.

III

It has often been pointed out that in the assassination of Julius Caesar,
one could perceive the notion of sacrificial rite indicated, and because of
his role as a sacrifice in the ritual, Caesar is occasionally associated with
Christ.6 Steve Sohmer, one of the most confident advocates of this opin-
ion, observes that the readers of North’s Plutarch in the Elizabethan
period must have found a number of “uncanny parallels between the lives
of Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ” (28):

Plutarch recorded that a man with the initials JC had lived at the
time of the first Caesars. He was an exalted religious figure (North,
1579, 766), renowned for his piety, beloved of the poor, mistrusted by
the elite (791). Certain Romans dressed him in a purple robe (975).
One offered him a crown (976). Adherents hailed him by the title of king (791). One closest in his love betrayed him (793). Omens and portents surrounded his last days (797). He was martyred, but rose and was seen to walk the earth (797). Some declared him god. He reformed the calendar (738). (Sohmer, 28)

As Sohmer points out, the circumstances surrounding Caesar seem to suggest a number of tacit implications of Christ, the first of which may be his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. At the opening of the play, we encounter two tribunes reprehending a group of artisans for making a holiday of Caesar’s triumphal return to Rome after defeating Pompey:

Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you climbed up to walls and battlements,

To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.
And when you saw his chariot but appear
Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tiber trembled underneath her banks
To hear the replication of your sounds
Made in her concave shores?
And do you now put on your best attire?
And do you now strew flowers in his [Caesar’s] way,
That comes in triumph over Pompey’s blood? (1. 1. 36-50)

The tribunes, for sure, are reproaching the fickleness of the commoners. But their words give us a vivid picture of people cheering enthusiastically over Caesar’s triumphal entry to Rome.

A very similar sight could be found in a biblical passage which depicts Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

And a great multitude spred their garments in the way: and other
cutte downe braches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. Moreover, the people that went before, and they also that followed, cryed, saying, Hosanna the sonne of David: blessed be he that cometh in the Name of the Lord, Hosanna thou which art in the hiest heavens. (Matthewe: 21. 8-9)\(^8\)

The sight of the multitude flocking to the street of Jerusalem, rejoicing at the arrival of the man of prodigy is certainly memorable. But as the Bible tells us, it is this Christ worship among the people that incurs envy from the Jewish authorities, which eventually leads to their execution of Jesus. In that sense, then, this glorious scene could also be perceived as a prelude to Christ’ final suffering and is inextricably bound to the dark shadow of the conspirators.

In *Julius Caesar*, likewise, Caesar's momentary triumph is immediately taken over by the conspirators' hostile criticisms against him. In Act I, Scene 2, Caesar appears with a train of Roman nobles. His mind seems to be totally engrossed in the preparation for the ceremony of the Lupercal. According to Plutarch, the Lupercal began, in the old days, as “the feast of sheapheards or heard men,” during which there was a holy course that was run by “divers noble mens sonnes . . . striking in sport them they meete in their way, with leather thongs” (*Lives*, vol. 5, 62). As Mark Antony is to join the race, Caesar anxiously reminds him to touch his wife Calphurnia, as the “barren” who are touched by the thongs are believed to “shake off their sterile curse” (1. 2. 5-8).\(^9\) To this request, Antony answers respectfully: “When Caesar says, ‘Do this’, it is performed” (1. 2. 9-10).

Prone to be unnoticed, though, his answer brings into our mind one of the well-known episodes from the Bible in which a centurion beseeches Jesus to dispel his servant’s illness saying: “speake the worde onely, and my servant shalbe healed. For I am a man also under the autoritie of
another, and have soldiery under me: and I say to one, Go: and he goeth, and to another, Come: and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this: and he doeth it” (Matthew 8: 8-9). The comparison between Antony’s and centurion’s words here may sound too obscure at first hearing, but for Elizabethans who had fairly sharp ears for biblical passages, catching the similarity between Antony’s and the centurion’s wordings would not have been too difficult.

After this brief scene, the playwright clears Caesar and his followers away from the stage, and Cassius, left with Brutus, begins to accuse Caesar of his alleged ambition to be a king and of his weakness unworthy of such a title. Meanwhile, Brutus remains tacit. The only reaction from him is his visible agitation shown every time they hear the flourish and shout which divide Cassius’ impeachment into three segments. Later when Caesar and his attendants returns with sour faces, we learn from Casca of Caesar’s thrice refusal of the diadem, and of the his falling afterwards. The repetitiveness and the ternary structure we see in Cassius’ speech and the offstage incidents are surely revealing in that they remind us of the narrative features of the Passion.

Naomi Conn Liebler, on the other hand, focuses her attention on the gesture which Caesar shows just before his falling—“he pluck’d me ope his doublet, and offer’d them his throat to cut” (1. 2. 265-266). Suggesting that by this theatrical gesture, Caesar presented himself unwittingly as a sacrificial animal, she points out the fact that the feast of Lupercal—which was actually held in February—is inserted one day before the Ides of March in the play, The fact cannot be overlooked. As one of the central rites of the Lupercalia, there was the killing of sacrificial goats, whose blood was smeared on the foreheads of two young boys participating in the rites (Lives, vol. 1, 100). Looking back at the scene accompanied with such knowledge, Caesar’s theatrical gesture toward himself surely comes
to bear a smack of a sacrificial goat.\(^\text{10}\)

Although Liebler does not admit any Christian overtone in her perception of a sacrificial ceremony in the assassination, we may push our argument forward to suggest that Caesar’s representation as a sacrificial animal slayed after the Lupercal strangely reminds us of yet another sacrificial figure who, crucified after the celebration of the Passover, is often referred to as the paschal lamb. But does that mean we could draw a parallel between Caesar and Christ?

In Act I, Scene 1, Flavius describes Caesar as a superhuman being who, unchecked, “would soar above the view of men” (1. 1. 74). But as the play progresses, this impression of him as a man of omnipotence grows weaker and weaker. Not only is he annoyed by his sterile marriage, but as Cassius’ and Casca’s later reports reveal, Caesar is also assailed with a number of infirmities, like deafness, fever, and falling sickness.\(^\text{11}\) Ironically enough, they are the typical ailments that abound in the biblical world, and healing these diseases was one of Jesus’ specialties.

Caesar’s physical vulnerability is depicted further in Cassius’ description of the swimming contest at the Tiber in which Caesar, half drowned, was obliged to ask for help: “Help me, Cassius, or I sink!” (1. 2. 111). Caesar’s cry, in our ears, rings somewhat similar to the cry Peter raises when he, following Jesus walking on the water, begins to sink: “Master, save me” (Matthewe 14: 30). And while Jesus saves Peter with an assured air, Caesar appears from the Tiber in a state as miserable as “old Anchises” born “from the flames of Troy” upon his son Aeneas’ shoulder (1. 2. 112-114).

Throughout his accusation, Cassius keeps on criticizing Caesar for his bodily defects. And partly because of that, Cassius’ affinity to physical attributes, something tangible and concrete, has often been pointed out. But viewed from the other side, it could also be said that Cassius is not
allowed to expose anything about Caesar but his external appearance. It is the playwright himself, actually, who is most close about giving out any information on Caesar's inner state. In Act I, Scene 2, he gives a glimpse of his titular character, but soon tucks him away from the stage never to be seen again until the morning of his death. What we could learn from his brief appearances is very limited, indeed. We know that he is worried about his lack of an heir, that he prefers "fat sleek-headed men" to men with "a lean and hungry look" (1. 2. 192-194), that he is somewhat disturbed by the supernatural phenomena seen on the eve of the assassination. But that is about all that we know about his psychology.

This niggardliness on Shakespeare's part, however, could be explained by his essential attitude toward Caesar as a sacrificial animal. Unlike the story of the Passion which invites our emotional participation through feeling for Christ's sufferings, Shakespeare prohibits us from having an unnecessary attachment to the victim, since it may create a serious hindrance to the execution of the play's sacrificial rite. To keep us away, therefore, from sympathizing with the one who is going to be slaughtered, the dramatist hides Caesar's heart and mind as much as possible. Though shrouded with a number of symbolic signs that denote his parallel with Jesus, Caesar is not Christ. In spite of his claim to be the "one / That unassailable holds on his rank, / Unshake'd of motion" (3. 1. 68-70), he cannot construe the turbulent world around him nor could he see what is going on in the surrounding people's minds. Mute, expressionless, and unaware of the calamity that would fall on him, Caesar makes a perfect sacrifice for the ritualistic assassins.

IV

Act II begins with the appearance of Brutus in his orchard deep in
thought, and he calls out for his page Lucius. The poor sleepy boy, who is totally Shakespeare's invention, bustles in and out of the stage on Brutus' errands: first, to get a taper; next, to consult a calendar to check on the date; then to answer the knock at the gate; and last, to usher in the conspirators. All the while, his master is in pensive mood, but the flow of his thought revealed in his soliloquy seems to go through three stages, each of which is punctuated by Lucius' return from his errand.

In the first stage, his mind is completely engrossed in the search for a satisfactory justification for Caesar's assassination. When he concludes his reasoning with the image of killing a serpent before it hatches out of its egg, Lucius comes back and hands him the letter forged by Cassius. In the second stage of his thought, Brutus reads and construes its rather obscure contents after his "fashion," and gives the final pledge: "O Rome, I make thee promise, / If the redress will follow, thou receivest / Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus!" (2. 1. 56-58). As if taking his cue from the utterance, Lucius appears again to announce that it is the Ides of March. On that very moment, the knock on the gate announces the coming of fate. While Lucius is away to see who there is at the gate, Brutus plunges into the last stage of his thought. Already resolved on what course to take, his mind has nothing to reflect but his own mental state: "Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma or a hideous dream. / The Genius and the mortal instruments / Are then in council; and the state of a man, / Like to a little kingdom, suffers then / The nature of an insurrection" (2. 1. 63-69).

Although Brutus in this scene is often blamed for his illogical thinking, the overall flow of his mind is simple and intelligible. What is more striking in the scene is its structural similarity to the episode of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. As Jesus watches through the night, Brutus is "awake all night" (2. 1. 88). As Jesus' prayer is composed of three segments,
Brutus' speculation is divided into three stages. As Jesus interrupts his prayer three times to awake his disciples from their sleep, Brutus breaks his thought three times to give sleepy Lucius his next errands. As Jesus' prayer terminates with his arrest, Brutus' soliloquy ends with the arrival of the conspirators. And just as Jesus grows "sorrowful and grievously troubled" (Matthew 26. 37) upon his prayer, Brutus' mental state suffers the "nature of an insurrection." Proceeding thus far, there arises a question whether the repetitiveness and the ternary structure of these two distinct episodes indicate any kind of parallel between the two figures.

In Brutus, indeed, one may find some degree of likeness to Jesus. That he is universally liked, sitting "high in all the people's hearts"(2. 1. 157), there is no doubt. Throughout the play, Cassius presses Brutus for his "gentleness / And show of love" (1. 2. 33-34) and pledges that he "cannot drink too much of Brutus' love" (4. 3. 162). Sleepy Lucius exerts himself to do anything that pleases him. Portia claims her unity with Brutus in every aspect of their life. And there is that Caius Ligarius who, in answer to Brutus' summons, emerges from his sickbed:

By all the gods that Romans bow before,  
I here discard my sickness! Soul of Rome!  
Brave son, deriv'd from honorable loins!  
Thou, like an exorcist, hast conjur'd up  
My mortified spirit. Now bid me run,  
And I will strive with things impossible,  
Yea, get the better of them. (2. 1. 320-326)

Caius' rapturous cry not only shows the depth of his devotion to Brutus, but also reminds us of Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead. "With a heart new-fir'd" (2. 1. 333), Caius pledges to follow Brutus, believing him
to be the reviver of Rome, and Brutus, likewise, aspires to be such. But in his aspiration, he seems to forget something important—the essential qualification for a redeemer.

Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane, which is usually seen as an instance of his submissiveness to God's will, occupies an important place in the Passion narratives. The episode not only reveals the spiritual crisis he undergoes, but also signifies Christ's final assent to his own death as a sacrifice to God. ("O my Father, if this cup cannot passe away from me, but that I must drinke it, thy wil be done" [Matthew, 26: 42].) In that sense, the episode of Gethsemane is indispensable, for only through its description, the Gospel writers could show that Jesus' death on the cross is not the materialization of the conspirators' plot, but the fulfillment of the Messianic prophesy which was made possible by the willing ascension on Jesus' part to die for the salvation of mankind. Under the light, the role Jesus plays in the Passion is both that of an active participant and a passive sacrifice.

Brutus, likewise, assents to redress wrongs to save the Romans from their sufferings. But the role he promises to take is as a sacrificer not as a sacrifice. The latter role is for Caesar. With limited appearance on the stage, and with few personal remarks from his lips, Caesar's existence is somewhat isolated from the spectators, and Brutus and his followers make the best of it. Whatever offence they impute to him, Caesar himself is out of our hearing. Whether Caesar really had the ambition to be a king or not is not important here. Whichever the case, his fate is already set from the beginning.

Concerning Brutus' role-playing, there is a curious passage in the play which is very suggestive of Brutus' self-image. In Act I, Scene 2, we find that Cassius, trying to seduce Brutus into their conspiracy, invokes almost a legendary figure in Roman history: "There was a Brutus once
that would have brook’d / Th’ eternal devil to keep his state in Rome / As easily as a king” (1. 2. 159-161). And surely, Brutus has this person in mind, when he soliloquizes in his orchard: “My ancestors did from the streets of Rome / The Tarquin drive when he was call’d a king” (2. 1. 53-54). The man he ponders on is Lucius Junius Brutus who, as the leader in the expulsion of the Tarquins, established the Roman republic. Proud to be his descendant, Brutus aspires to rebuild the crumbling republic just as his ancestor did. Here, he thinks of Junius only as a man who drove out the tyrant from Rome. But as Plutarch records, he is also a man who executed his own sons on charge of taking part in a plot to reestablish banished Tarquin back in Rome (Lives, vol. 6, 182). Just like this father of the Roman republic who kills his sons for the sake of the people, Brutus desires to earn redemption through his sacrificial assassination.

His hope, however, never reaches its goal. Unlike Jesus, who has full mastery over the progression of events, everything Brutus strives for goes awry. There is a scene which forebodes the bankruptcy of his hope. Just after the conspirators’ meeting in Brutus’ orchard, Portia appears on the stage. Reproaching Brutus for his recent strange behavior, she depicts their supper table the night before:

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yesternight at supper
You suddenly arose and walk’d about,
Musing and sighing, with your arms across;
And when I ask’d you what the matter was,
You star’d upon me with ungentle looks.
I urg’d you further; then you scratch’d your head,
And too impatiently stamp’d with your foot.
Yet I insisted, yet you answer’d not,
But with an angry wafter of your hand
Gave sign for me to leave you. (2. 1. 238-247)14
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The distracted behavior he shows certainly gives an important clue to his psychological state, but what is more striking to us is the couple's almost ceremonious exchange. Here, Portia asks Brutus thrice the cause of his disturbance, and Brutus, with his theatrical gestures, denies the answer three times. The thrice repeated actions from both sides render a constrained atmosphere to their supper table, which seems to indicate almost a liturgical setting. But at this scene of the last supper, Brutus is so much assailed by his anxiety that it would not let him "eat, nor talk, nor sleep" (II. 2. 252). Far from the Lord's Supper that confers divine grace, Brutus' table, featuring his repeated gesture of rejection, forebodes the disruption of the ritual he is going to perform. No wonder Portia grows anxious. Her husband has embarked upon a desperate undertaking that is bound to fail.

V

In Brutus' orchard scene, there appears another interesting episode which concerns the chronological framework of the play. While Brutus and Cassius are having tête-à-tête, the rest of the conspirators pass their time arguing with each other about the exact spot where the sun rises. Their conversation sounds meaningless in our ears, but from Cinna's words—"yon grey lines / That fret the clouds are messengers of day" (2. 1. 103-104), we could gather at least that it is before dawn. After the brief interlude, the conspirators go into particulars of the plan. From the moment he joins the band, Brutus takes absolute charge. He rejects the oath-taking, denies Cicero's taking part in the plan, insists on sparing Mark Antony's life; all against Cassius' proposal. And all of a sudden, he hushes his company into silence and admonishes them to "count the clock" (2. 1. 192) which strikes three. This is rather a bizarre action for him to take. In no other works of Shakespeare does there appear a main
character who specifically tells his companions to listen to the chime of the clock. And only 29 lines later, Cassius says, "The morning comes upon's" (2. 1. 221), and with Brutus' parting words, "And so good morrow to you every one" (2. 1. 228), they disperse. What could we make of it? In this one scene, Shakespeare notifies the movement of the sun twice: once before dawn, and again at daybreak. And in-between, he specifically announces the time of day. Could it be taken otherwise than that he wants to inform the audience that in the world of *Julius Caesar*, the sun rises about three o'clock?

There is another reference to three o'clock near the end of the play. In the Battle of Philippi, Titinius mourns the death of Cassius: "O setting sun, / As in thy red rays thou dost sink to-night; / So in his red blood Cassius' day is set!" (5. 3. 60-62). Soon afterwards, Brutus shows up and after a brief condolence, he cries, "'Tis three a' clock, and, Romans, yet ere night / We shall try fortune in a second fight" (5. 3. 109-110). There may be still some light lingering on in the sky, but dusk must be approaching fast, for in the ensuing scene, we find Lucilius in captivity pretending he is Brutus. The soldiers deceived by his words may not know Brutus by his countenance, but, quite possibly, it is too dark already to distinguish his face.

How could we, then, explain this strange solar movement? There seems to be a clue in Brutus' words uttered just before the Battle of Phillippi: "But this same day / Must end that work the ides of March begun" (5. 1. 112-113). After Caesar's assassination, we see at least two nights: the night on which Cinna the Poet was slain, and the night on which Brutus encounters Caesar's ghost. We do not see, however, Brutus taking a night's rest anywhere. As he maintains here, the undertaking he embarked upon at the break of day on the Ides of March is yet to be finished. And in his mind, from the day he decided to kill Caesar to the
day of the Battle of Phillippi is one stretch of a time whose end he must seek by himself.

As Man's day of labor begins with sunrise and terminates with sunset, Brutus' and Caesar's day of sacrificial rite must be framed by the movement of the sun. At the same time, however, it is specifically written in the Bible that the Lord died at the ninth hour, i.e., at three o'clock. If the playwright intends to establish some kind of correspondence between the assassination and the Passion, then, the only way left for him to fill the discrepancy was to knell three-o'clock at the break of Caesar's last day, and with another three-o'clock bell toll Brutus and the sun out of the stage.

Once we determine that the play's time-table is synchronous to that of the Passion narratives, it becomes much easier to follow the progress of events. In Act II, Scene 2, Caesar appears followed by his wife. Besides the strange supernatural phenomena seen in the Capitol, Calphurnia is deeply disturbed by the nightmare she had on the previous night and presses him to stay at home. Everything that is related in the scene is just in accordance with Plutarch's record. But the scene also reminds us of the episode of Pilate's wife's dream which appears in the Bible and is represented more in detail in two collections of mysteries, the Coventry and the York. In the mystery plays, the wife, assailed by a nightmare, pleads with Pilate not to crucify Jesus, and Pilate promises to grant her wish. But exposed to the Jewish authorities' vehement protest, Pilate gradually softens and he at last yields to their demand to execute Jesus.

Caesar, likewise, agrees to his wife's request at first, but Decius shows up and makes a drastically different interpretation of Calphurnia's dream: "Your statue spouting blood in many pipes, / In which so many smiling Romans bathed, / Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck / Reviving blood" (2. 2. 85-90). Here, of course, Decius is trying to cozen
Caesar out of his house, but the words he utters are not lies totally. He and his fellow Romans are in firm belief that by shedding Caesar's blood, they would be able to revive the republic of Rome. Unaware of such intention, Caesar yields to Decius' flattering interpretation and proclaims that he will go to the Capitol. With this announcement, however, he unwittingly gives out the order to execute himself. At eight o'clock in the morning, Caesar, led by Decius and his band, is dragged to the Capitol which would be his slaughterhouse.

Act II ends with the scene in which Portia, almost in a distracting mood from fear, encounters the soothsayer. To her inquiries about the time ("What is't a' clock?[2. 4. 22]"), the soothsayer answers, "About the ninth hour, lady" (2. 4. 23). If we take his words literally as nine o'clock, it points to the exact time when Christ was crucified. But take them in observance of Roman horology, the words come to point three o'clock, which is the hour Christ dies. 17 (Since it took six hours for him to die, the soothsayer's words could refer to either.) But then, if we remember the 3 a.m.-3 p.m. solar framework we have discussed previously, this "nine" could also fall on the hour when the sun reaches its culmination. And in the very next scene at the opening of Act III, we find Brutus and his band drawing swords against Caesar.

VI

In the play, we encounter Brutus, a would-be saver who aspires to perform a kind of ritual assassination through which the crumbling Roman republic would "suck a reviving blood." But to carry out this rite, the existence of the performer alone is not sufficient. It requires a suitable sacrifice. Caesar, with his passive and vulnerable presence on the stage, appears to make an easy prey that best fits Brutus' intention. And as the chief performer of the rite, he exhorts his comrades to be in the psycho-
logical state of a devout priest whose mind is intent on the performance of his duty, not on infliction of bloody vengeance:

Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.

Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;
Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds. (2. 1. 166-174)

One as the sacrifice, the other as the sacrificer, Caesar and Brutus are, in a sense, foils to each other, and they both play pivotal roles in the ritualistic assassination. That does not signify, however, their likeness to Christ. Though they both aspire to be a kind of god-like figure claiming their infallibility, both in the end are crushed by their physical vulnerability and erroneous perception. Unlike Jesus' crucifixion that procures divine grace, their ritual incurs nothing but death and destruction.

The conspirators themselves soon find this out. As David Kaula puts it, what Brutus and his followers produce is "a disastrous imitation of the true redemptive action" (209), for Christian sacrifice is the sacrifice of oneself, not others. To terminate what they incurred, they must shed their own blood. The drama ends with the death of Brutus and his followers, bringing the disastrous world back to its normal state—which is essentially mercenary and cold-blooded. In his representation of the ironic discrepancy between man's aspiration and his vulnerability, Shakespeare draws a parallel between the assassination and the Passion. *Julius Caesar*, in that sense, makes a kind of mock-Passion both symbolically and schematically.

From the point of Caesar's assassination, however, the play, unleashed from the original framework, starts to revolve on its own. After his death, Rome is thrown into a state of convulsion. Incidents occur one after
another: the Forum speeches, slaying of Cinna the Poet, the triumvirs’ conference, the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius, and so forth. In the midst of the uproar, Caesar comes back to the stage on the eve of the Battle of Phillippi. At first sight, the scene seems to imitate the Christ’s resurrection on the third day, but unlike Jesus who reveals to his disciples the evangelical message of salvation, the ghost of Caesar reveals nothing. He only announces himself to be Brutus’ “evil spirit” (4. 3. 282) and states that they shall meet each other at Phillippi. It is as if the only role he is expected to play here is to usher Brutus into the graveyard.

The sacrificial rite that Brutus and Caesar conjointly initiate does not end with Caesar’s death. On the day of the Crucifixion, the land is covered by darkness from the hour when the sun culminates and remains so until the death of Jesus at 3 o’clock. Likewise, the dramatic world of Julius Caesar must wait for the shadow to be lifted until the hour of Brutus’ death. The death of Brutus foretells the advent of the ruthless and mercenary world that men like Antony and Octavius bring about. At the end of the play, however, Brutus does not seem to care anymore. With the air of a man relieved from the stressful day of labour, he concludes: “Night hangs upon mine eyes, my bones would rest, / That have but labor’d to attain this hour” (5. 5. 41-42). In the world of Julius Caesar, Brutus’ sun sinks at last, and he is now free to rest in peace.

Notes
1 Robert S. Miola warns against the “excessive reliance on Plutarch” (72) as the play’s source. And there are, indeed, several other suggested sources. But as Kenneth Muir points out, “there are . . . enough verbal echoes of Plutarch’s three Lives to make it reasonably certain that North’s translation was Shakespeare’s main source” (116).
2 The most well-known of the wicked tyrants would be Herod who makes frequent appearances in the mystery plays.
Some people may not include Christ’s entry into Jerusalem in the Passion narratives. In medieval times, however, this episode was thought indispensable as the initiator of the sequence of events leading to the crucifixion. In all of the three collections of ancient English mysteries that have descended to modern times—i.e. the Chester, the Coventry, and the York Mysteries—, we could find “the Entry into Jerusalem” placed invariably at the beginning the Passion episodes.

Etienne Trocmé pays special attention to this unique chronological framework which “crams too many events into much too short a time” (78). Observing that those times of day coincided with the hours of prayer of the Jews, she makes an assumption that the original form of the Passion narratives must have been a kind of liturgical text intended to be read at an early Christian celebration of the sufferings and death of Christ. And indeed, if we assume that there the Jewish tradition of worship lies behind the narratives, the choice of such a strangely tight schedule becomes comprehensible.

She suggests here that the repetitiveness and the ternary structure of these events also indicates the liturgical origin of the Passion narratives.

Brent Stirling’s “Ritual in Julius Caesar” represents the classic view of Brutus as the would-be performer of the sacrificial ceremony. In Brutus’ ritualistic assassination, however, he does not see any Christian overtone any more then Liebler does. David Kaula, on the other hand, perceives in the assassination the parody of Christian sacrifice, but he associates Caesar with the Pope, noticing a resemblance of tone between Caesar worship in the play and Roman Catholic worship. Mark Rose proposes to interpret the play as a kind of political Mass, suggesting the assassination as a parody of Christian sacrifice. He acknowledges the assassination of Caesar and Christ, but refers to it only casually and tentatively.

This and all other quotations from Shakespeare’s plays are taken from The Riverside Shakespeare under the general editorship of G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974). Reference numbers in the text indicate act, scene and line.

This and all subsequent biblical quotations are taken from the Geneva Bible, which, since its publication in 1560, enjoyed a wide circulation in the
Elizabethan society. According to Naseeb Shaheen, Shakespeare must have read this version regularly, and most of the passages cited in his plays were to this edition (206).

9 That Mark Antony joined the race is in accordance with Lives (vol. 6, 13), but there is no record of Caesar asking him to touch his wife.

10 From this point, however, Liebler's observation turns to the suggested "metatheatrical connections between Caesar and Romulus" (95), the legendary founder of Rome. In the argument, she specifically focuses on Shakespeare's treatment of the Lupercal. According to her, by referring to this ritual, which came down from time immemorial and was growing more and more secularized by the time of Julius Caesar, the playwright illuminated the obsoleteness of Brutus's ritualistic idea of sacrificial assassination.

11 That Caesar was afflicted with fever and falling sickness is recorded in Plutarch, but his deafness is entirely Shakespeare's invention.

12 It appears in the OED that the word "orchard" signified "formerly, in general sense, A garden, for herbs and fruit-trees."

13 An episode close to this scene appears in Plutarch (vol. 6, 191), but it is long before Caesar's assassination that Brutus visits Caius in bed. There must be an ample explanation for why Shakespeare staged Caius only this once, never to be seen again.

14 The Brutuses' last supper described by Portia is totally Shakespeare's invention. On the other hand, there is an episode concerning Caesar's last supper recorded in Plutarch: "And the very day before [the Ides of March], Caesar [supped] with Marcus Lepidus. . . . so talke falling out amongst them, reasoning what death was best: he preventing their opinions, cried out alowde, Death unlooked for" (Lives, vol. 5, 64). If the playwright wished to stress the implications of a Christ-like figure in Caesar, he could have well utilized the episode.

15 This episode, which appears to be out of place in the tense atmosphere of the occasion, often puzzled the critics with its peculiarity. Suggesting that the scene alludes to the Elizabethan calendar controversy, Steve Sohmer deftly explains its signification from the astronomical standpoint (88-95).

16 Sohmer first notified me of this bizarreness of the sunrise c. 3 a.m. and sun-
set c. 3 p.m. in Chapter 8 of his work.

17 Sohmer, paying attention to this phrase, points out that this “ninth hour” (the ninth after sunrise in Roman horology) is recorded in the Gospels as the time when Jesus died on the cross (130).

**Works Cited**


