SHAKESPEARE'S REFERENCES to Alexander and Caesar in Henry V make it appear likely that he was reading Plutarch while writing the English history play that he followed up very shortly with his second Roman tragedy, the first to be based on Plutarch. But whether Shakespeare was reading the Life of Brutus while he wrote Henry V or soon after it, he must have felt that Brutus, no less than Caesar and Alexander, resembled his ideal king in some important respects but differed from him in others. Brutus was Plutarch's pattern of perfection as much as Henry was Holinshed's; but in Holinshed, the pattern was equated with success, in Plutarch, with failure. Brutus was a man of moral excellence; yet he murdered the greatest man of the world. In making him into the protagonist, Shakespeare could not take a simple and absolute approach; he had to accept the relativistic position that, under certain circumstances, ethical strength becomes ineffective and that what is good from one point of view is evil from another. He must have felt at this time, if not before, that neither man nor the universe was quite what, on the basis of his humanistic education, he had thought they were, and he must have been struck by the baffling discrepancies in human life between intention and execution, character and motive, action and result.

At any rate, to dramatize the story of the assassination of Julius Caesar meant for Shakespeare to take a new and uncertain road. In the present chapter, I shall examine Shakespeare's difficulties and his solution; in particular, I shall review in some detail how he created Brutus from Plutarch's facts and appraisals and what changes he made, changes that had considerable influence on the patterns of self-knowledge not only in Julius Caesar but also in Hamlet, which was to follow.
Plutarch characterized Brutus as an ideal personality, Roman style; but, since many features of this type were taken over by the humanists, Plutarch's Brutus resembled the humanists' pattern of perfection. Examples of his courage, magnanimity, constancy, gentleness, and justice abound in the Life of Brutus. He was for Plutarch, particularly in contrast with Cassius, a model of temperance, that virtue central to self-knowledge: Cassius, although skillful in war, was too choleric, too familiar with his friends, and too cruel with his enemies. Brutus, however, was esteemed by everybody, "because he was a marvelous lowly and gentle person, noble-minded, and would never be in any rage, nor carried away with pleasure and covetousness, but had ever an upright mind with him and would never yield to any wrong or injustice, the which was the chiefest cause of his fame, of his rising, and of the good will that every man bare him: for they were all persuaded that his intent was good." Plutarch certified this portrait by the testimony of Caesar's closest friend and Brutus's conqueror: "For it was said that Antonius spoke it openly diverse times that he thought that of all them that had slain Caesar there was none but Brutus only that was moved to do it as thinking the act commendable of itself, but that all the other conspirators did conspire his death for some private malice or envy that they otherwise did bear unto him." "

From this passage Shakespeare fashioned Antony's famous epitaph of Brutus:

This was the noblest Roman of them all.
All the conspirators save only he
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
He only in a general honest thought
And common good to all made one of them.

(V.v.68–72)

To this paraphrase from Plutarch, Shakespeare added a characterization of Brutus in terms of Renaissance humor physiology by taking up the cue of temperance:

His life was gentle; and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world "This was a man!"

(V.v.73–75)
We could have no better authority and no clearer formulation: Brutus is a harmonious, balanced man, a man who knows himself. Yet it is remarkable how little of this Brutus we ever actually see in the play. When he first appears, he is a deeply unhappy man, a lonely figure who takes no "gamesome" interest in the public competition at the feast of Lupercalia. He is absorbed with his own problems, "vexed . . . with passions of some difference . . . with himself at war" (I.ii.39-46). And this conflict in his soul grows as he ponders whether to join the conspiracy. He disquiets his wife by his musing and sighing, his "ungentle looks," his angry gestures, and his walking at night (II.i.237). After he has made his decision, it is true, he is resolute; but we still have indications, such as his irritability toward Cassius and his restlessness in the dark tent at Sardis, that all is not well with him.

Not that we ought to write off Antony's tribute to Brutus's internal harmony as posthumous glorification. We see sufficient vestiges of the earlier, balanced Brutus to accept the notion that he was once a completely harmonious man. This is most apparent in his private life. His tender care for his friends and servants shows him to be a man of exceptional humaneness. But, most of all, he has in Portia a companion whom he trusts and who in return enters into his life and gives it completion. The episode in which she proves her constancy by wounding herself in her thigh presents a picture of a marriage of two souls, who yet—in an image of which Shakespeare was fond—become one self. She implores him gently,

By all your vows of love, and that great vow
Which did incorporate and make us one,
That you unfold to me, your self, your half,
Why you are heavy . . .

Am I your self
But, as it were, in sort or limitation?
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes?

(II.i.272-85)

Brutus's subsequent revelation of his plans to her shows that there are no impediments to this marriage.

Even in his public life; Brutus evinces something of his earlier harmony. His firm leadership of the conspiracy points to his basic stability and equanimity. Divided and disharmonious as he is inter-
nally, he braces himself outwardly and exerts a vivifying effect on the conspirators similar to that which Henry V has on his troops before Agincourt. Like the English king, he exhorts his followers to look “fresh and merrily” and to bear their burdens “with untir’d spirits and formal constancy” (II.i.224–27). His example has an inspirational effect on Caius Ligarius, who arrives at the conspiratorial meeting in the guise of a sick man:

I here discard my sickness. Soul of Rome!
Brave son, deriv’d from honourable loins!
Thou, like an exorcist, hast conjur’d up
My mortified spirit.
(321–24)

Like Henry, Brutus can conjure up mortified spirits, but—the difference is essential—he cannot sound in harmony with the state, whose soul Caius thinks him to be. In the English history play, an harmonious king is in tune with an essentially harmonious kingdom; in the Roman tragedy, a potentially harmonious statesman is placed in a commonwealth which does not “keep in one consent, / Congreeing in a full and natural close, / Like music” (Henry V, I.ii.181–83).

As Brutus prepares himself for his deed, the microcosmic-macrocosmic analogy he draws suggests that the discord of the state is reflected in the dissonance of his soul:

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 man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.
(II.i.63–69)

The psychological lore on which Shakespeare drew for this passage is the organic and hierarchical conception of the microcosm as he used it in the history plays. The harmony of Brutus’s soul is disturbed because the natural order has ceased to function; the king-like mind no longer rules; the psychic instruments refuse to play their proper advisory and executive functions. Instead, “the mortal
instruments," that is, the lower parts of the soul, the senses and passions, arrogate seats in the royal council to which they are not entitled. The soul of Brutus is in a state of crisis.

We should not be oversubtle and diagnose Brutus’s “aristocratic” psychology as reflecting a subconscious desire to be king instead of Caesar. Shakespeare psychologized in the terminology of his time, as we do in ours, and the political analogy was natural to him. However, the passage is symptomatic of his general lack of interest in Brutus’s republicanism and of his concern with a larger issue, that of the interaction between the order of the state and the individual’s self-fulfillment. The psychological problem of Brutus is analogous to the political problem of Rome; it turns on the question of how to establish a legitimate and functioning order, and Brutus’s psyche is affected by the perplexing situation that order in Rome is represented by the detestable system of Caesarism. There can be no such simple solution for him as there is for the heroes of the history plays, who realize their self by bringing it in harmony with a monarchical and organic conception of the state. In this respect, Shakespeare’s choice of the unusual, Latinate word “Genius,” meaning the mind, is of interest; it is a reminder that the particular mind now ruling Rome is Caesar. And in Elizabethan English, “Genius” denoted not only the rational soul but also the daimon, a spirit, good or evil, with which man had an inseparable and fateful connection.

Shakespeare used the word in this latter sense at the end of The Comedy of Errors when the duke wonders whether one of the Antipholuses is “genius to the other” (V.i.331). The clever Antony alludes to the same superstition when he calls Brutus “Caesar’s angel” (III.ii.181), hinting ambiguously that Brutus was beloved by Caesar but turned into his evil spirit. But for the Brutus that ponders the conspiracy, the designation of “genius” applies to Caesar, and it does so in an even more sinister manner: Caesar is the evil angel that has usurped the state, and this usurpation is reflected in the disturbed order of Brutus’s microcosm. The image of Caesar becomes the “genius” of the mind of Brutus. But, as he sees his problem, it is not the simple one of restoring harmony in the state and order in the soul by removal of the corruption in the former and the conquest of the passion in the latter; it is the task of liberating state and soul from the danger of being dominated by a demonic spirit. To say that Brutus invents the spirit of Caesar would be an exaggeration, for we see the spirit manifested in Caesar’s frail body
and later in his much stronger ghost; yet only Brutus among the conspirators conceives the issue in terms of a fight against an evil force rather than a tangible person or a definable system. Brutus can be said to exorcise the spirit that defeats him.

The dissonance in the soul of Brutus was altogether Shakespeare's idea. Plutarch's Brutus suffered no anxiety until he joined the conspiracy, and he was nervous then merely because of the danger of discovery. Nor was Plutarch's Rome as turbulent as Shakespeare's; although in transition from republic to monarchy, it was competently ruled and not particularly dissonant. In the play, the political atmosphere is as stormy as the nights in which the conspiracy gathers force; the transition that threatens is not one from a republic—it has ceased to exist—into a monarchy but from a dictatorship into a tyranny based on the low instincts of the crowd.

This, I believe, is the main point of the opening scene, in which the tribunes, Marullus and Flavius, oppose the populace by pulling the trophies off Caesar's images. The anecdote was in Plutarch's Life of Caesar, but its occasion and meaning were quite different. The incident followed rather than preceded the Lupercalia, and the people sided with the tribunes, who were adherents of Brutus rather than of Pompey. In the play, the opening conveys a feeling of a loosening order: the "mechanicals" are in the streets without the signs of their trades and make a holiday where none is called for. They have lost their sense of what is due to Rome and what to Caesar; they are sheep running after their leader. As Marullus pointedly reminds them, it was for Pompey's victory over external enemies that they cheered earlier; now they hail Caesar for triumphing over a personal, internal foe, this very Pompey. And Shakespeare's crowd is particularly fickle and shifty. Scolded by the tribunes, the people appear ready for another turnabout and "vanish tongue-tied in their guiltiness" (I.i.63).

This is the disturbing prelude to the intricate second scene in which Cassius accosts Brutus while Caesar takes part in the feast of Lupercalia, is offered the crown, and refuses. This scene is most important for an understanding of the character and situation of Brutus; but we will do well to turn first to Caesar, whose words and actions—partly presented on the stage and partly reported by the blunt and cynical Casca—are intertwined with the probing of Brutus by Cassius. In this play of conflicting personal and political loyalties, it is particularly difficult to isolate one figure from the other. One is
forced to piece together his opinion about a character from words and actions that are partisan; sometimes these are spoken by someone bound to this character by friendship or separated from him by enmity; at other times what is said subtly involves one's own political bias. What one thinks of Brutus, in particular, rests very much on what one holds of a Caesar and Caesarism.

I cannot attempt here to do justice to Shakespeare's subtle portrait of Caesar. He is neither simply a hero nor clearly a villain. But I think that in the second scene an unpleasant fact about Caesar emerges, which, at this point, would have influenced favorably the Elizabethans' attitude toward Brutus: Caesar shows himself as "ambitious"—a word they uniformly took in a bad sense. He wants the crown, but does not dare to claim it yet because the people cheer his feigned reluctance. His first words are almost all orders, and they are promptly obeyed by the sycophants around him. As Antony puts it euphemistically, "When Caesar says 'Do this', it is perform'd" (I.i.10). These and other features, such as his appeal to crowd instincts and prejudices, his boastfulness, and his capricious insistence that his every whim be gratified, would have made an Elizabethan audience conclude that Caesar is, or aspires to be, a tyrant. And that is exactly what Plutarch said he was: when the Romans chose him to be perpetual dictator, they chose "plain tyranny." In Elizabethan English, this word had strong emotional associations; it evoked fear of misrule and of the vengeance of God. Shakespeare's audience would transfer to Caesar some of the apprehension they felt about a tyrant like Richard III.

But the second scene depicts also a curiously frail Caesar who suffers from epilepsy and is deaf in one ear. The contrast between his physical infirmity and his unquestioned political power is ironic, and so is that between the sterility of his marriage and his attempt to reach for the crown. In a way, Caesar's frailties serve to humanize him. Although in that moment of hybris before his downfall he sees himself as above the ranks of men of flesh and blood, he is human enough to make one believe that Brutus loves him or loved him once. But he is also the instigator of a new, tyrannical order, which is ominously evoked by Casca's laconic report that the two censorious tribunes "are put to silence" (284)—a much more sinister remark than Plutarch's comment that they were deprived of their tribuneship. This is the same order as that instituted after Caesar's death, when men are "pricked to death" without trial—an order
triumphant in the coolly effective Octavius, who has no human handicaps. If Brutus has reason to love Caesar, he has even more reason to fear him; the behavior of the crowd, of Caesar, and of Caesar's entourage all support his apprehension. Shakespeare's ambiguous portrait of Caesar gives Brutus a cause to oppose him that is subtler and more difficult to define than the solid republicanism embraced by Brutus in Plutarch; he is a man of divided feelings who requires an internal struggle and clever outside persuasion before he joins the conspiracy.

The Cassius who approaches Brutus in the play is a much more skillful intriguer than Plutarch's. He uses even Machiavellian techniques: he has letters thrown into Brutus's window, reminding him of his noble ancestor who defeated tyranny (whereas in Plutarch, the friends of Brutus spontaneously urged him to oppose Caesar). Caesar judges Cassius shrewdly as a dangerous man who sees through the deeds of others and envies those greater than himself. Cassius's arguments to make Brutus join the conspiracy are artful and deceptive: they appeal astutely to Brutus's self-image and distort cleverly a text from the book of self-knowledge.

The cue for Cassius's appeal was in Plutarch, who had him demand that Brutus prove worthy of his name: "What, knowest thou not that thou art Brutus?" The Romans, said Plutarch's Cassius, would suffer any hardship for Brutus's sake "if thou wilt show thyself to be the man thou art taken for and that they hope thou art."* Shakespeare's Cassius couches this appeal in a figure traditionally associated with self-knowledge, that of the eye's inability (analogous to the soul's) to see itself. Cassius's opening gambit—"Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?"—produces Brutus's expected answer: "No, Cassius; for the eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things" (51-53). Cassius now offers himself as the convenient medium by which Brutus may look into his soul or, to use Cassius's conventional figure, as the glass, which "Will modestly discover to yourself / That of yourself which you yet know not of" (69-70). Brutus recognizes the drift of this argument even before it is made:

Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
That you would have me seek into myself
For that which is not in me?

(63-65)
But by the end of the scene it is evident that Brutus will search his soul.

The persuasion of Brutus by Cassius introduces a problematic quality into Shakespeare’s patterns of self-knowledge. In a way, it is true, the use of the mirror image has some resemblance to that in *Richard II*; the mirror is ambiguous, it is simultaneously one of truth and flattery. But truth and flattery become now inextricable. Caesar’s power is dangerous; the freedom-loving, noble Brutus must oppose Caesar and Caesarism if his soul is to see itself clearly. But Cassius appeals covertly to the pride of Brutus in his honor and strength; Cassius’s account of Caesar’s weakness is surely not merely evidence of his envious nature but also a subtle blandishment of Brutus’s self-conception as a strong man who fears the loss of honor more than death—unlike the Caesar who dared Cassius to a swimming match and then had to implore him for help. Brutus’s sense of honor, justified by his reputation, provides an opening for Cassius to demand that Brutus take his fate into his hands and show that the name of Caesar is no more than that of Brutus (139 ff.). We are not told how much this argument influences Brutus; but certainly his attempt at gaining self-knowledge is polluted by elements of deception: by flattery and by an evil insinuation. Cassius’s Iagoesque sneer that noble minds should ever be with their likes is a grim comment on the ambiguous image of Brutus as a virtuous seeker and a deluded victim.

It is worth noting that in the passage in Plato’s *First Alcibiades* (132 ff.)—the *locus classicus* for the eye-mirror analogy—the comparison illustrates the argument of Socrates that the statesman requires self-knowledge. I wonder whether Shakespeare knew the passage, perhaps through some commentary on Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*; if not, certainly he was familiar with the ubiquitous idea of the mirror for princes and magistrates. In direct contrast to these precedents, the mirror of Brutus promises no clarity. If Brutus is to seek in his soul “what is not there,” he must seek to establish order, a different one from Caesar’s, in himself and in the state. Yet the traditional self-examination advocated by the Renaissance moralists provided no help for a situation like his. We cannot say, as we can with Richard II, that disaster would have been avoided if he had considered himself in time; had known himself as a composite of body and soul; and had realized the presumption and weakness of the former, and the strength and glory of the latter. The kind
of questions that Brutus should ask himself are much more practical and particular than those asked in the conventional nosce teipsum tracts. He should concern himself with his role in politics, with the suitability of his temperament and character for political leadership, with the justification of using questionable means to achieve desirable ends, and with the chances of predicting the outcome of violent action.

Brutus does examine himself, and he has no choice but to do so in uncharted ways. Nothing is more characteristic of his lack of convenient precedent than his great soliloquy, “It must be by his death” (II.i.10 ff.), which examines the motives that have made him decide to murder Caesar. The soliloquy follows that ominous scene of thunder and lightning and miraculous happenings, a scene that orchestrates the uncertainty in which the decision has to be made. In the words of the coolly skeptical Cicero, this is “a strangely-disposed time.” The conspirators, men of action, interpret without qualms the portents in a sense favorable to them; Brutus, man of action as well as of reflection, finds taking a position much harder. But three parts of him, we learn from Cassius during the storm, already are persuaded to join the conspiracy. The soliloquy shows that now the whole man is convinced. Rising before daybreak after the tempestuous night in which he has not slept, he goes over the reasons why Caesar must be killed. They are reasons of great significance for Brutus’s attempt to assess his relation to Caesar, an attempt that begins with his fateful conversation with Cassius. Although they have been often examined by critics, who have come to diverging conclusions on the bearing these reasons have on the character of Brutus, we must look at them again. Much of what one thinks of Brutus depends on them.

Shakespeare’s Brutus does not object to Caesar’s becoming king as such; he seems in fact reconciled to this prospect. Any reference to the motivation of Plutarch’s Brutus, that of restoring the republic, is avoided. Shakespeare’s Brutus fears what Caesar, crowned, may become: “How that might change his nature, there’s the question” (II.i.13). And he answers this question by finding Caesar’s coronation potentially dangerous: it would “put a sting in him / That at his will he may do danger with” (16–17). He bases his hypothesis that Caesar may turn into a tyrant on the axiom of the corrupting influence of power: “Th’ abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins / Remorse from power” (18–19). Admittedly, Brutus
has not observed that Caesar’s “affections sway’d / More than his reason” (20–21). However, he fears that Caesar’s incipient ambition will grow. This surmise is based on another axiom, a “common proof” of the danger of the upstart’s reach for power: “lowliness is young ambition’s ladder” (22). Brutus admits that this is all hypothetical, founded on what Caesar may become rather than what he is. And since the quarrel cannot be based on what Caesar is, Brutus will kill him “as a serpent’s egg, / Which, hatch’d, would as his kind grow mischievous” (32–33).

These are highly theoretical reasons, but they are surely not invented to support a foregone conclusion, as M. W. McCallum claimed, nor are they symptomatic of the muddleheaded idealism to which, according to John Palmer, all liberal politicians are given.\(^\text{11}\) Brutus’s soliloquy clearly follows a pattern of inner struggle; it is not a declaration of political principles, but a recapitulation of the reasons why Caesar must be killed. In his later speech to the people, Brutus’s tone is decisive, his attribution of ambition to Caesar categorical. In the soliloquy, he goes out of his way to take the most favorable opinion of Caesar possible. It is worth noting that Plutarch (in the comparison of Dion and Brutus, the two conspirators paired in the Lives) spoke of the skillful way in which Caesar established his dictatorship so that, to well-meaning Romans, he appeared a benevolent healer of the state: “For there never followed any tyrannical nor cruel act, but contrarily it seemed that he was a merciful physician, whom God had ordained of special grace to be governor of the empire of Rome and to set all things again at quiet stay the which required the counsel and the authority of an absolute prince.”\(^\text{12}\) Having seen Caesar and his entourage in Shakespeare, we find it difficult to accept this estimate, and Brutus’s benevolence appears akin to naivety. But, although Brutus does not see or want to see fully the progress Rome has made toward tyranny, he does not engage in fantastic theorizing when he sees Caesar as a threat. After the experience of our own age, it would be hard to deny that such “lowliness” as Caesar’s—how his fawning to the crowd contrasts with his usual presumption!—is “ambition’s ladder” and perilous to any nation. Caesar and Caesarism, as J. Dover Wilson has well argued, represent perennial dangers.\(^\text{13}\)

Brutus fails to satisfy us not so much in what he says but in what he omits to say. He should ask himself such questions as the
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following: Can I really cleanse the state by making common cause with an envious and selfish man like Cassius? Will not the act that I wish to make one of liberation become soiled by the hands of Machiavellian conspirators? And, most of all, he should ask: Does my cause justify murdering a man? Brutus does not ask these questions, and thus, scrupulous as he tries to be, he misses the mark. Brutus's soliloquy foreshadows the several overly analytical soliloquies of Hamlet, which, searching as they are, somehow do not go to the heart of the matter.

We should say, of course, that to ponder such questions as the above would have made Brutus an even more problematic leader of a conspiracy. And we must also say that the answers are not so simple as they appear. This is a difficult and confusing moral territory. All political action involves means over which the politician lacks full control. To adapt a maxim of Henry V, battles cannot be won with clean soldiers only. If Brutus's analysis of the political situation in Rome is accepted, as I think it must be, the state is in an emergency that requires an extraordinary solution. And most of us, as much as we deplore murder, sympathize with those who risk their lives to free their country from oppression. We rejoice in the fall of a tyrant and may even condone his killing if it appears the only way of his removal.

Brutus may not think hard enough; but that at least absolves him from the accusation of being too theoretical a man for leading a conspiracy. He is, admittedly, not the stock type of a conspirator; but that makes him, up to Caesar's death, not less, but more effective. He is an idealist, but he is also a man who can inspire others. Plutarch admired his leadership, and I see no reason to think that Shakespeare did not. Brutus injects fervor and a sense of purpose into what otherwise would be a merely brutal enterprise. When he takes the high road, he takes the best one—provided of course that we think he should go forward. When he dissuades the plotters from taking an oath and asks them to trust in "honesty to honesty engaged," he chooses a practical as well as a noble course: to assume loyalty is a good way to achieve it. Brutus's leadership up to and including the murder of Caesar is superior; by contrast, the others are nervous, and even Cassius turns to Brutus for reassurance and instruction when, at the last moment, he believes the plot betrayed.

But, good as Brutus's direction is, he cannot prevent the moral
ambiguities of his action from asserting themselves at the murder. In his last minute, Caesar wins, as it were, a victory over Brutus. "Et tu Brute! Then fall, Caesar!" is the most brilliant utterance of that effective phrasemaker and steals the thunder from Cinna's simultaneous cries of liberty and freedom. The great actor Caesar understands how to make himself into a martyr and a victim of ingratitude; he does not accept the role of sacrificial lamb for the gods assigned to him by Brutus. And Caesar's murder also proves the delusion of Brutus's claim that "We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar, / And in the spirit of men there is no blood" (II.i.167–68). There is much blood in Caesar, as is manifest in the rite in which the conspirators wash their hands in this blood. The hands of Brutus, too, are now soiled. What he did, he did in honest thought; but he used the unclean hands of the others, and no more than they will he escape the consequences of the act. He was wrong when he believed that he could be a sacrificer without being a butcher. Yet in an ironic sense he was right when he said that the conspirators stood up against the spirit of Caesar. A spirit cannot be laid to rest through murder. Brutus's uncertain road has led to a certain crime that will be avenged.

Shakespeare's Brutus falls, as does Plutarch's, through a series of errors. Shakespeare was bound to have Brutus commit them, but he could and did create intellectual contexts that made them more plausible. The worst of these mistakes is to let Antony live and to permit him to make the funeral oration. On both counts, the conspiratorial instinct of Cassius, who opposes him, are right even though Brutus's is the nobler attitude. But it is an attitude abetted by the delusion that a man's spirit can be killed by killing his body. Antony may be but a limb of Caesar, but the limb becomes mighty indeed when directed by Caesar's spirit.

This spirit of Caesar was Shakespeare's most brilliant addition to the story. Plutarch had almost all the elements of which it is composed—Caesar's tremendous popularity, outlasting his death, the desire of the people to be ruled by a strong man, Caesar's magnetism, the adoption of his methods by his inheritors, and an evil spirit that appears to Brutus—but he had no spirit of Caesar. By creating it, Shakespeare read sense and purpose into the facts of history Plutarch recorded, and he established a dramatic counterforce to Brutus, which prevents the play from losing its balance in the last two acts. The conspirators' failure evolves logically and consistently from the
murder and is presided over, from this very moment on, by Caesar's spirit.

We can go further and say that Caesar's spirit is actually the presiding genius from the beginning of the play when the disorderly crowd hangs trophies on Caesar's images. Brutus is up against an evil genius, in the modern and in the Elizabethan sense of the word, who exploits the disharmony in the state to create a new political system that mocks any kind of order in which men can live freely. Significantly, the one appeal to the principle of subordination on the basis of a universal order in the play is made by Caesar when he calls himself "constant as the northern star" (III.i.60), and it is conspicuously perverted by his claim of being far above humanity, "unshak'd of motion." The inhuman spirit of Caesar is in his people. As Max Lüthi has noted, it is in the seeds of violence Cassius sows in the mind of Brutus; the letter Cassius has thrown in Brutus's window incites him to "speak, strike, redress!" (II.i.47), which in its rhythm anticipates the crowd's later turn against the conspirators: "Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!" (III.i.204). It is this spirit that makes Brutus's listeners shout "let him be Caesar," when he wins their approval for his action (49)—even this moment of his greatest triumph really belongs to Caesar. And the spirit of Caesar infuses strength into Antony when, left alone with Caesar's bleeding body, he prophesies that "Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge, / With Até by his side come hot from hell" will "let slip the dogs of war" (III.i.271 ff.). Antony can turn the crowd against Brutus not merely because of his well-appreciated oratorical skill and Brutus's prosaic deficiency but also because he is carried along by the Caesarism around him. When, at the opportune moment, he removes the covering mantle from the body of his master, the populace roars for revenge. The living Caesar caters to, and espouses the spirit of, violence that sets in motion currents that ignite and that, after his death, destroy the conspirators.

The spirit of Caesar, living and dead, prevents the essentially harmonious Brutus from recovering the stability he has lost. There is one moment in the play when it looks as if he might become fully himself again, in his tent at Sardis, when he is reconciled to Cassius; he feels that he has a chance of changing his fortunes for the better: "There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune" (IV.iii.216–17). When his friends depart, he asks for music, that harmonizer of souls. The lute-playing boy falls
asleep; Brutus gently takes the instrument from him and meditates, book in hand. Just then the ghost appears and announces that he will return at Philippi. The hope for harmony is gone.

Brutus does not concern himself here or later with the question of whether his decisions are and were morally right; after his soliloquy in the second act on the reasons for murdering Caesar, he has put this question aside. The moment he comes closest to asking it again, or perhaps we should say the moment at which we feel most that he ought to ask it, is during the quarrel scene with Cassius. He does here question his friend, "Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?" But Brutus's uncertainty—if there is uncertainty in his voice—comes only from his realizing the smaller contamination of his cause through Cassius's weakness for bribery, not from understanding the more serious wholesale contamination of the cause by the egotistically-motivated conspirators. Neither does he examine the question whether political assassination is ever justified. This lack of a sufficient self-examination goes far toward making us lose our tragic sympathy for him.

Not that we really expect him to voice regret about having killed Caesar or to realize fully the fallacies of his actions; we understand his motives well enough and, if we do not approve them, we take satisfaction in our wider view of his predicament (although our wider view is facilitated by our not really being in his predicament). Regardless of how we feel about the crime he has committed, we take him for a man whom fortune has treated most harshly; his hopes for a free Rome have proved an illusion, he has become an exile, he is disappointed in his main friend and ally, and he faces the possibility of being defeated in battle. Yet, we are disappointed when he gains no insight into his condition and remains almost totally immutable while his world crumbles. We can hardly expect Shakespeare to have made him into a neurotic victim of a harrowing ghost-spirit as he made Hamlet—the conception of Brutus's character in Plutarch and in Renaissance consciousness prevented this possibility—but, had he wished, he could surely have given him some awareness of the irony of committing an act whose consequences completely contradicted his expectations. He could have given him a realization of the cleavage between intention and execution, character and events, and he could have given him something of a momentary shudder. The absence of any such reaction is remarkable. Brutus's tragedy, as Ernest Schanzer has noted, is that of a denied anagnorisis.
In seeking for an explanation as to why Shakespeare did not give Brutus as least an inkling of his tragic situation, critics often attribute to the Roman hero a rigid Stoicism and make its insufficiency as a guide to human conduct responsible for his lack of insight. Brutus, we are told, has steeled himself against fate and refuses to fret about it; the training of his will has atrophied his sensibilities. But I do not think that this is a fair judgment, and to the extent that it is based on Brutus's alleged Stoicism, it is quite false. Shakespeare did not characterize Brutus as a Stoic if the word is to be understood in any technical sense. My reader, I trust, will bear with me if I examine this matter in some detail; it is significant not only for the character of Brutus but also for Shakespeare's attitude toward Stoicism and philosophy in general.

Plutarch's Brutus was certainly not a Stoic. He had studied, as Plutarch noted at the beginning of his Life of Brutus, all sorts of Greek philosophers and liked them, "but above all the rest he loved Plato's sect best and did not much give himself to the New or Mean Academy, as they call it, but altogether to the Old Academy." Like Plutarch's Brutus, that of Shakespeare criticizes the Stoic Cato for his suicide (V.i.101 ff.). But the clearest indication that Brutus is not to be taken as a Stoic is in the quarrel scene with Cassius, when he proves incapable of suppressing the emotions in the way the austere members of this school demanded.

This is a remarkable and pivotal scene that brings into focus the contrast between the idealistic and righteous Brutus, for whom a war fought for justice' sake must not be tainted by private corruption, and the pragmatic Cassius (philosophically he is an Epicurean), who fails to see why a little bribery can hurt the war-effort. But while the scene demonstrates that Brutus is a stranger to the thought of selfish plotters, it shows that he is no stranger to the inner life, the life of feelings. He is, in Edward Dowden's phrase, "studious of self-perfection," but he is not inhumanly so. In the quarrel scene, he is close to losing his emotional control, and the real reason for that is not Cassius but Portia.

It is significant that Shakespeare connected and combined the quarrel scene with the news of Portia's death. In Plutarch, it came at a later juncture and produced no reaction from Brutus beyond making him write letters that reproached his friends for not having prevented her suicide. In combining the quarrel with the news of Portia's death, Shakespeare motivated Brutus's reaction not merely
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by his irritation about Cassius but also by his personal grief—a motivation, it appears, that was important enough for him to make it clearer by revising the scene as he had originally written it.

As the scene stands in the Folio and in modern editions, there are two mentions of Portia's death. In the first instance, Brutus himself breaks the news to Cassius when the latter accuses him of not making use of his philosophy (IV.iii.144 ff.). Cassius immediately apologizes for crossing his friend, calling the loss "insupportable" and "touching." Then Messala enters, and, in the course of questioning Brutus concerning other matters, asks him whether he has news about Portia (179). Strangely, Brutus answers in the negative, and Messala now announces hesitantly that Portia is dead. The reaction of Brutus is to assert his own patient readiness.

It has long ago been argued that in all probability the duplicate report of Portia's death was due to Shakespeare's revision of the scene, and that the canceled passage, presumably the messenger's report and Brutus's second reaction, remained accidentally in the text.\(^{18}\) In what appears to be the original version, Brutus takes refuge in his philosophy—the strain is evident—as he is apprised of Portia's death. In the presumable revision, Brutus is aware of it from the beginning, and his irritation with Cassius is partly motivated by the sorrow he finds hard to master. In either version, but more poignantly in the revision, Brutus shows signs of strain. And, after he has settled his quarrel with Cassius, he freely admits that he was ill-tempered. Emotions, as he knows, do at least temporarily affect him:

O Cassius, you are yoked with a lamb,
That carries anger as the flint bears fire;
Who, much enforced, shows a hasty spark,
And straight is cold again.

(IV.iii.109–12)

In admitting that he was affected by passion, Brutus gives a characteristic twist to an image the Elizabethans associated with Stoicism. For claiming that the wise man is impervious to all emotion, the Stoics were, since Cicero, called men of wood or stone.\(^{19}\) Antony, who surely knows that Brutus is no Stoic—as much as he knows that men's souls have not fled to beasts—seeks yet to attach to him the opprobrium of being one when he suggests in his funeral
oration that Brutus has a heart of stone. Antony does not exactly say that Brutus is devoid of human emotion—but after all, he had promised not to blame the conspirators—but he does say that everybody else has feelings. Dead Caesar, he says, was a man of compassion: "When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept; / Ambition should be made of sterner stuff" (III.ii.91–92). Antony himself chokes with emotion, an affliction he exploits oratorically: "My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, / And I must pause till it come back to me" (106–7). He cleverly alleges that he does not wish the people to see Caesar's will:

You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
And being men, hearing the will of Caesar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad.

(142–44)

The insinuation that Brutus and his conspirators are men of wood and stone—and thus for the Elizabethans the worst of austere Stoics—is clear. To emphasize the contrast between Brutus and the Romans in general, Antony approvingly notes the "gracious drops" of pity on his listeners' faces. Ironically, however, these are the same people whom Marullus called for good reasons "You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!" (I.i.36). It is equally ironic that the one character who feels that his constancy exempts him from the ranks of men who "are flesh and apprehensive" and makes him "unshaked of motion" is Caesar. In view of his previous wavering on whether to go to the Capitol, he does not appear to be totally immobile; but he sees himself at any rate as a super-Stoic. Brutus, who knows himself a flint that occasionally strikes a hasty spark, does not. And by giving way somewhat to grief and anger, he becomes indulgent with the human limitation of the boy Lucius in the next scene; he is gently protective when Lucius falls asleep. We should not succumb to stereotype notions about the Romans and Roman philosophy or to Antony's insinuation and call Brutus a Stoic.

If Brutus fails to satisfy in the end, it is not because he is a Stoic but because he does not experience his situation existentially enough. This, I think, is both an emotional and an intellectual failing, but of a different order from Stoic "apathy." If there is a shortcoming in Brutus's philosophy, it is not his failure to feel deeply enough in
general but his failure to react to the events in some way that makes one think that he understands how insecure man is and how much he sometimes becomes the prisoner of events he cannot control.

The failure of Brutus to examine his situation in some such fashion is the more notable as the characters in the play comment on man's inability to foresee the consequences of his actions. Even the generally unreflective Cassius shows an awareness of man's predicament when he questions Brutus on what to do in case of defeat: "But, since the affairs of men rest still incertain, / Let's reason with the worst that may befall" (V.i.95-96). Cassius also has something of a metaphysical shudder when he gives way to fear about unfavorable omens and "partly" credits them. This fear even makes him give up his Epicurean philosophy, which denied their meaning (V.i.76ff.). Cassius, one might say, becomes a fideist. By contrast, Brutus declares himself capable of judging the "tide in the affairs of men"—although the wave images he uses should make him aware of the erratic nature of the events on which man floats (IV.iii.216-22).

But the most explicit statement by any character concerning man's susceptibility to misjudging the tides is made earlier, during the crucial period when Brutus is in the process of coming to his fateful decision of murdering Caesar, and it is made by a character whose role in the play is secondary, although it was primary in Roman life: Cicero. In the tempestuous night full of strange happenings that frighten the previously cynical and blunt Casca and make him believe that they are portents of the events to come, the philosophic Cicero comments:

Indeed, it is a strange-disposed time;  
But men may construe things after their fashion,  
Clean from the purpose of the things themselves.  
(I.iii.33-35)

Cicero's ensuing question, "Comes Caesar to the Capitol to-morrow?" associates his generalization in our minds with the plan of murdering Caesar—of which Cicero knows nothing. But one may apply what he says to all the erroneous judgments made in the play, those of Caesar, of the conspirators, and particularly of Brutus. As Lüthi has shown, Cicero's statement characterizes the intellectual climate
of the play; its significance is enhanced by being assigned to the man whom the Renaissance recognized as its philosophical father.

The failure of Brutus, measured by Cicero's skepticism, lies in his taking a positive, idealistic attitude toward human actions in preference to a pragmatic and skeptic one. Rather than to incline toward the Old Academy (as Plutarch said Brutus did), he should favor the more skeptical New Academy (to which Cicero's Academica belonged and which, according to Plutarch, Brutus did not like). Instead, he remains an idealist; the world is his will and idea, not in the crude sense of his being arrogant, but in the sense of his believing that he can transform the world according to the ideal pattern of his mind. There may, of course, be a subtle sense of human pride in all philosophical idealism—at least, the skeptics thought so. The skeptic and fideistic atmosphere of the play is one reason more that we find the grave and sober words he continues to speak inappropriate to the occasion. In this respect, he resembles the human figures on mannerist canvases that include details that conflict with and contradict the proportions and the postures of these persons. Mannerist painters, as has been noted, often did not give to their major figures the same psychological language as that which they gave to the surroundings.

Thus, in the final analysis, Brutus offers more of a contrast than a parallel to Henry V, of whom Shakespeare must have been reminded when he created him. Both, it is true, are men in whom the elements are mixed in perfect proportions. But, in the situation in which Henry finds himself, this temperance provides a sufficient basis for the kind of self-knowledge that leads to the deployment of the self for maximum success; in the situation of Brutus it does not. If my argument is accepted that the failure of Brutus lies in not considering sufficiently the baffling uncertainty between intention and execution, character and event, one must say that the pattern of perfection cannot escape some blame for this deficiency; it had no built-in provisions for considering such uncertainty. Intentionally or not, Shakespeare's treatment of the pattern in Brutus shows up its insufficiency and even irrelevance to actual life; and it does so in a manner like Montaigne's and the skeptics', for whom the self had to adapt itself to the changing human environment. A constancy and self-consistency like Brutus's seemed to Montaigne particularly inadequate. In Julius Caesar, Shakespeare appears to have felt the
winds of skepticism that are blowing much stronger in *Hamlet*. If so, Montaigne hardly is responsible; not even the most fervent advocates of the influence of the essays have discovered parallels in *Julius Caesar*. There were, after all, native fideistic sources of skepticism, and there was the moderate New Academy of Cicero, who in the play becomes a spokesman for the skeptics' position of suspending judgments. And, there was Plutarch, whose dispassionate treatment of the events may have suggested to Shakespeare a need for rethinking his ideas on the connection between character and fate, between human agency and historical development.

But I must confess to a lingering doubt about my interpretation. If, as I have claimed, Brutus's lack of flexibility and his idealistic rigidity are fundamental flaws of his character and motivating themes of the action, it must be said that they are not given altogether convincing dramatic expression and are, to say the least, difficult to convey on the stage. What one does notice in performances is that the later Brutus becomes more withdrawn and taciturn. As Granville-Barker put it, "Having lifted his heroic Roman to this height, . . . [Shakespeare] leaves him to stand rather stockishly upon it." Barker blamed Brutus's Stoicism for his "stockishness." I believe that the explanation I have given of his inappropriate "idealism" accords better with Shakespeare's intentions as they can be ascertained from close reading of the source and the play. But to make this philosophy of Brutus responsible for his lack of self-discovery requires more arguments about what he does not do or say than what he does or says. For an audience or reader to feel that the tragic hero is denied an *anagnorisis*, they must expect one, or be told by the dramatist that they should. To see a hero's self-certitude as a failure to adopt a skeptic attitude, one must not only understand that the other characters take such an attitude but he must also sympathize with it (unless, of course, the hero himself confesses his failure in an *anagnorisis*). My reader must judge for himself on these points. In his tragedies, Shakespeare generally does seem to provide some kind of *anagnorisis*, but it is sometimes a very rudimentary one, such as Romeo's "O, I am fortune's fool!" and occasionally, as in *Hamlet*, it is so questionable as a diagnosis of the hero's flaw and situation that the term does not appear appropriate. But one can speak with greater assurance of a missed *anagnorisis* when he analyzes himself wrongly than when he says nothing at all. And we certainly do not know the percentage of skeptic-
fideists in Shakespeare’s audience, people who would have been conditioned to interpret the play in the fashion I have suggested.

Perhaps our curiosity as to why Brutus is uncommunicative about what we consider the great psychological issue of the play is merely the result of an unhistorical and oversubtle approach to character interpretation. Perhaps my explanation that Brutus fails because he faces the world with philosophic certainty comes from too much reading of Montaigne. Perhaps Shakespeare wished merely to suggest that Brutus is isolated and lonely. But the fact remains that we are baffled about his behavior. So we are, of course, about Hamlet’s; but in his case, we accept a much stranger behavior—although not verbal reticence—as dramatically right. In *Julius Caesar*, there is something dramatically not quite right. But if the play is—it seems a presumptuous judgment—something of a failure, it is an explicable one and one most beneficial for Shakespeare to have suffered. I know of no real precedent Shakespeare had for exploring the internal structure of a man like Brutus. The conventional *nosce teipsum* theories on which he had drawn for the *anagnorisis* of his earlier tragic heroes gave him no help; they were even hard to acclimatise to Rome. What he needed he could only obtain in the school of the skeptics and in the school of experience, and he had, perhaps, not yet progressed sufficiently in either. That he learned from *Julius Caesar* is evident in *Hamlet*, where the constraint of the source material and the complexity of issues created by Shakespeare himself are never allowed to detract from our fascination with, and belief in, Hamlet as a tragic human being. Shakespeare walked Hamlet’s uncertain road with dramatic certainty. Shakespeare may have learned more from the relative artistic failure of *Julius Caesar* (it was an audience success) than from his previous triumphs. And only in comparison with his later and greater tragedies can one speak of a failure at all.