



The reception of Caesar and the “Republic”

The Life and Times of Caesar and Cicero
(HPAH5046/6046)

Reception Studies



The reading, interpretation, (re)fashioning, appropriation, use, and abuse of past “texts”.

From “high” art (e.g. renaissance portraiture) to literary texts (e.g. Dante’s *Inferno*), movies, the small screen and popular fiction, etc.



Boundaries: temporal; medium/form; audience, etc.

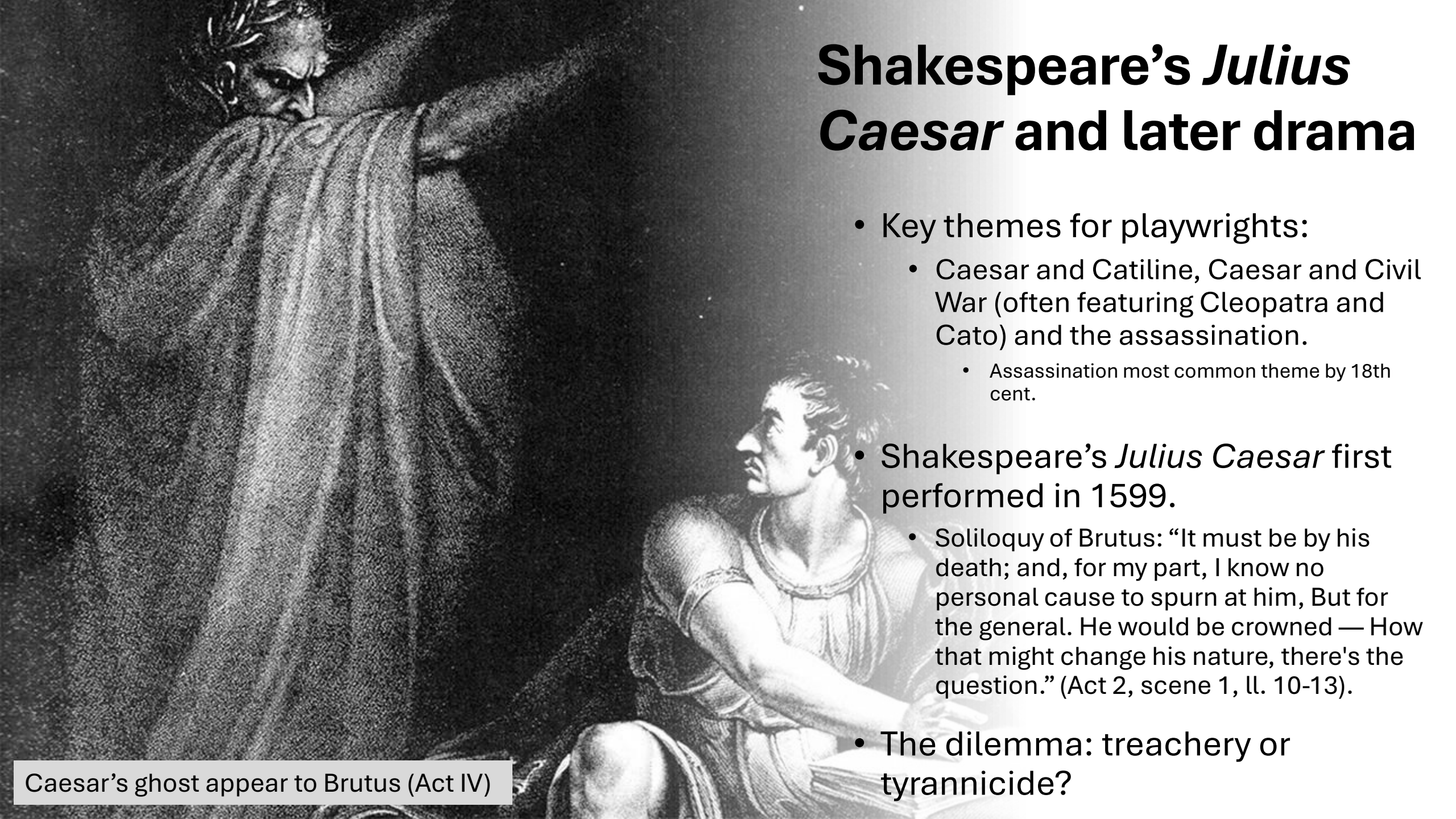


Influence (impact on our views) and **use** (adaptation of certain material of “texts”).



Caesar and the Italian Renaissance

- Medieval image of Caesar – divinely ordained founder of the Roman Empire.
 - Caesar among the virtuous “heathens” in limbo in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1321).
 - “[Emperor Justinian explaining Roman history]: Then, near the time when Heaven wished to lead the world to its own peaceful mode, Caesar laid hands on it...” – **Dante *Paradiso* 6.55 ff.**
 - Anti-Caesar tradition (via Cicero and Lucan) present but less prominent.
- Ideological debates about monarchical vs. republican forms of government.
 - Petrarch *De gestis Cesaris* (14th cent.).
 - Compare Machiavelli’s *Discourses on the First Decade of Livy* (1516-17) to *The Art of War* (1520).
 - Republic of Florence to Medici rule (esp. from 1530s).



Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and later drama

- Key themes for playwrights:
 - Caesar and Catiline, Caesar and Civil War (often featuring Cleopatra and Cato) and the assassination.
 - Assassination most common theme by 18th cent.
- Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* first performed in 1599.
 - Soliloquy of Brutus: "It must be by his death; and, for my part, I know no personal cause to spurn at him, But for the general. He would be crowned — How that might change his nature, there's the question." (Act 2, scene 1, ll. 10-13).
- The dilemma: treachery or tyrannicide?

Caesar's ghost appear to Brutus (Act IV)



Caesar on screen

Challenges

Historical evidence (or rather scholarly interpretation of it) vs. popular images of Caesar.

Filtered through earlier depictions, e.g. Shakespeare.



No duty upon creations (screen writers, director, producers, etc.) to strive for “historical accuracy” – though they may aim for verisimilitude.



Special effects as a means of conveying verisimilitude.



BBC-HBO series *Rome* (2005-2007)

- Mixing the plausible and fantasy.
 - Difficulty of a non-Classicists to distinguish “truth” from fiction.
 - Atia – real historical woman, though we know little historically about her.
 - But pivotal to many plot points in the series.

Strong and intriguing character to appeal to a modern audience?



Sensationalism very much a feature that can be found in ancient literature!

[Polybius' criticism of Phylarchus, ca. 3rd century BC historian] '...to provoke pity and compassion in the reader by means of graphic depictions of women clinging to one another, their hair dishevelled and their breasts bare, or again crowds of men and women, along with their children and elderly parents, weeping and lamenting as they are dragged away into slavery.' (2.56.7)

Assassination of Caesar

- Imagery of Caesar's assassination highly influenced by Shakespeare for a western audience.
- **How** the assassins kills Caesar convey ideological meanings (treachery or high principals).
- How do you think the director wanted the audience to respond to this representation of the scene? - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FvgP5hO99o>



Vincenzo Camuccini (1771–1844), *The Death of Caesar*





BBC-HBO's *Rome* and the use of Special Effects (1)

- Before 1990s to 2000s, use of special effects conventionally associated with “big budget” block busters.
 - CGI allowed for a revival of “swords and sandals” – crippling costs of physical sets, battle scenes and extras.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzYnPrarCqQ>
- *Rome* made greater use of cinematic conventions than previous TV programmes.
- Television’s depictions of ancient Rome traditionally tended to favour character studies and complex, interweaving narratives.
 - To some extent lending itself better to an imperial court context, e.g. *I Claudius*.



BBC-HBO's *Rome* and the use of Special Effects (2)

- By 2005 the same technologies used in gladiator were deployed for Rome.
- Harnessing DVFX for example in the battle of Philippi) - this alongside more traditional effects:
 - 3D modelling (of the Aventine collegium)
 - Matte painting (of the Roman countryside in Octavian's flight to Gaul).
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7VJB3-HBo0>
 - 2 mins 5 secs

