Subjectivity in Politics: Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* engaged by Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

I. New Eyes

Heinrich Heine wrote: “Jedes Zeitalter, wenn es neue Ideen bekömmt, bekömmt auch neue Augen und sieht gar viel Neues in den alten Geisteswerken” (*Die Nordsee*).\(^1\) In 1834, towards the end of the Romantic period in Germany, Karl Marx, then a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, began reading Shakespeare’s plays. The plays exerted a significant influence on the development of his thought and played an important role in the development of Marxism (Smith). In 1864, in the middle of the nineteenth century in Austria, Sigmund Freud, then a precocious eight-year-old schoolboy, began reading Shakespeare’s plays. The plays exerted a significant influence on the development of his thought and played an important role in the development of psychoanalysis (Smith). These two theorists, whose Shakespearean-influenced works depicted, critiqued, but also constructed the new era – modernity – gave the world new eyes with which to see itself and its history. Marxism and psychoanalysis also serve as roots and central pillars to literary criticism and its readings of Shakespeare. Through the roots that Marxism and psychoanalysis have in Shakespeare’s plays, there is a reflexive influence that is exerted by Shakespeare’s plays on themselves. The plays influenced the founders of modern theory, who gave their historical time new eyes with which to read the plays.

Instead of reading *Julius Caesar* through a Marxist or psychoanalytic theoretical lens, which may be laden with theoretical additives, it may be more interesting to read it through a lens constructed from the ways in which Marx and Freud used *Julius Caesar* in their writings. A close reading of the intertextuality of *Julius Caesar* with Marx’s and Freud’s texts can be used to track the reflexive influence that the play had on itself via the critical agents of the new historical period. This reading can uncover ways in which Shakespeare\(^2\) was prophetic in his plays; ways in which his plays depicted the contradictions and crises of modernity just as modernity was beginning to shoot up from its early modern roots.

Marx quoted from and alluded to *Julius Caesar* nine times in his writings from 1848 to 1868.\(^3\) Most of the instances occur in his journalism where he is commenting on politics. He uses lines from the play to make critical statements about his political opponents. The quotations construct metaphors

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\(^1\) Every era, when it receives/acquires new ideas, also receives/acquires new eyes and sees lots of new things in the old mind. (Translation by author).

\(^2\) As well as being the name of an individual dramatist/poet who wrote in early modern England, *Shakespeare* should also be understood to be the nexus of collaboration between the writer, his co-authors, his actors, and the entire apparatus of the early modern English theatre world, for Shakespeare did not write in isolation.

\(^3\) Standing between Shakespeare’s texts in English and Marx’s and Freud’s readings in German are the German translations of the play. *Julius Caesar* was the first play to be translated into German, in 1741 by C.W. von Borck. The first attempts to translate all of the plays occurred in 1762 when Cristoph Wieland began the project and, in 1775, Johann J. Eschenburg extended it. In 1797 August W. Schlegel began a project to translate all of the plays. He only completed eighteen of them, including *Julius Caesar*. The rest were translated by Ludwig Tieck, Dorothea Tieck and Wolf Graf Baudisson by 1833 and published as the Schlegel-Tieck translation. This is the text that Marx and Freud read; it remains the most influential German translation to this day. Translations can be seen as a version of the play with a certain interpretation visible in the translator’s word choices.
and conceits about political positioning, manipulation, power plays, and betrayal – the central mechanisms of politics. He uses this intertextuality to build his vituperative sarcasm and *ad hominem* attacks. As they are in Shakespeare’s play, Marx’s relations to the people he critiques are both personal and political. The revolutionary politics of mid-nineteenth century Europe were complex and nuanced, with allegiances switching rapidly, and friends turning on each other over high-stakes strategic decisions.

Freud quoted from the play eight times in his writings from 1895 to 1919. He uses lines from the play to describe, illustrate and support his theory of ambivalence in personal relations. According to Freud, one can feel both love and hate towards another. Analysis of jokes, slips of the tongue, and dreams show that while someone might *consciously* love someone, he might *unconsciously* hate the person and wish him dead. Freud recruited Brutus to speak his justification for why he killed Caesar, a man he loves, as an example of the psychoanalytic notion of the divided self. Psychoanalysis shows how, in the unconscious, loyalty can be turned to its opposite.

II. Such men are dangerous

Karl Marx was primarily a journalist. He edited and wrote for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, the *Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher*, the *Neue Rheinsiche Zeitung* and the *New York Daily Tribune*. While he did write on other topics such as philosophy and economics, his journalism was mostly centred on the political issues of imperialism, war and the class struggle. During the mid-nineteenth century, the class struggle consisted of long stretches of strategic organising - for example the building of the Communist League (1847-52) and the first International Workingmen’s Association (1864-76) – punctuated by failed attempts at revolution including the Revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune (1871). Marx’s journalism and pamphlet writing (e.g. *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848) were politically strategic. He frequently uses lines from Shakespeare’s plays to build the logic of his politics. Even when it seems that he is simply insulting a political opponent – something he did a lot – a closer reading reveals the rhetorical logic of his intertextuality.

On June 1st, 1848, in the heat of the revolutionary activity that spread throughout Europe, Marx, writing in Köln, wrote an article in his newspaper, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, critiquing the party that his newspaper supported, the Democratic Party. It was the party of the moderate bourgeoisie and a strange choice for Marx to support, for he had written the *Communist Manifesto* in London a few months before. However, in the political climate of the time, this party was, in Marx’s words, “the people’s party” (“The Democratic Party” 28), and he saw the task of the revolutionaries as one of critical support. After critiquing the party’s actions and positions, Marx ends with a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. Like the ending couplet of a sonnet, the quotation comments critically on the text before it.

Marx begins stating the position of his paper:

> Every new organ of public opinion is generally expected to show enthusiasm for the party whose principles it supports, unqualified confidence in the strength of this party, and constant readiness either to give the principles the cover of real power, or to cover up real weaknesses with the glamour of principles. We shall not live up to these expectations. We shall not seek to gild defeats with deceptive illusions (“The Democratic Party” 27).
Marx quickly dispels any illusion that he and the revolutionaries working with him will participate cooperatively in the European political game. The communist’s goal is socio-economic revolution, not political reform. On the other hand, the fact that his newspaper supports the Democratic Party reveals that Marx is no revolutionary adventurist. He knows that the steps towards a workers’ revolution will proceed through the thicket of European international politics. He will share political beds with enemies, but he will do it critically. He writes in this article that “only from the struggle of parties can the future welfare arise—not from seemingly clever compromises or from a hypocritical alliance brought about despite conflicting views, interests and aims” (“The Democratic Party” 27).

In the article, Marx details the causes of the Democratic Party’s recent electoral loss to the reactionaries. He warns against reverting to “wretched idealism...according to which a principle that cannot be put into practice immediately is relegated to the distant future while for the present its innocuous elaboration is left to the ‘thinkers’” (“The Democratic Party” 28). He might have been sending this caution as much to the various communists of this period, who were not patient enough to work the political steps of the class struggle, as he was to the bourgeois party that his broad front supported in 1848. Then he shifts the logic of his article into its final move, a move that ends with the quotation from Julius Caesar:

> We must clearly warn against those hypocritical friends who, while declaring that they agree with the principles, doubt whether they are practical, because, they allege, the world is not yet ready for them, and who have no intention of making it ready, but on the contrary prefer to share the common lot of the wicked in this wicked earthly life. If these are the crypto-republicans whom the Hofrat Gervinus fears so much, then we whole-heartedly agree with him: “Such men are dangerous” (“The Democratic Party” 28-9).

With this move, Marx unmasks the true intention of the moderate bourgeoisie’s idealism born of disillusionment, the intention to never allow the liberation of the working class. Hofrat Gervinus is a Liberal member of Frederik IV’s anti-democratic Prussian National Assembly. He called the republican democrats dangerous agitators. As such, he would stand as Marx’s enemy, yet, in the formulation of Marx’s logic in his article, Marx ironically steps into solidarity with Gervinus to say that the Democratic Party is dangerous—not because it is dangerous to the undemocratic state, but because it will never be dangerous to it. Hofrat Gervinus would have known exactly where Marx obtained his quotation, because the Hofrat was also a Shakespeare scholar (Deutsch Biographie).

Caesar and Hofrat Gervinus occupy the same position across the allusion. Cassius and the Democratic Party occupy the opposing position. Marx the journalist stands with Shakespeare the dramatist in the critical viewing space between the opposing camps. In both narratives—the 1599 play and the 1848 European revolution—the dangerous men turn out to be dangerous not to the system of rule they seemingly oppose, but to the possibility of overthrowing that rule. Cassius’ move towards republicanism fails and results in another, more powerful, Caesar—Augustus, and the Democratic Party fails to prevent the Prussian king from imposing a monarchist constitution and results in the suppression of the 1848 revolution. The form of both Marx’s and Shakespeare’s writing style, journalistic and dramatic respectively, constructs a critique of the political intentions and actions of their characters. Cassius’ and the Democratic Party’s position in the opening of each piece is potentially sympathetic. Cassius’ reasons for neutralising Caesar’s move towards absolute power
are convincing. The Democratic Party’s call for a democratic constitution is the reason why Marx’s paper supports them. According to the Communist Manifesto, one of the first tasks of the revolutionary workers is to aid the bourgeois revolution achieve its aims by supporting the radical bourgeoisie (43). Both Shakespeare and Marx problematise the position of their conspiratorial characters.

Caesar’s evidence of Cassius’ dangerous nature is that Cassius “has a lean and hungry look” (1.2.193), “thinks too much” (1.2.194), “reads too much”, “is a great observer, and he looks/Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays/...hears no music./Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort/As if he mocked himself and scorned his spirit/That could be moved to smile at anything” (1.2.201-6). As a thinker, a reader and an observer of men, Cassius is fit for a political figure whose social critique leads to action. As one who shuns music and plays, he is out of tune with social harmony and pleasure. As a person who does not smile and who scorns his own spirit, he seems out of tune with humanity, including his own. In spite of his observational acumen, Cassius, in Caesar’s fearful depiction, seems alienated from people. This is a fatal flaw in a conspirator; it limits his ability to survey the political landscape. This is dramatized in the fifth act when Cassius, who is near-sighted, relies on Pindarus’ incorrect assessment of events on the field to make the decision to kill himself. Before he hears Pindarus’ news, he is already convincing himself that he will die on that day, his birthday (5.3.20-46). In Shakespeare’s play, this depiction serves to deepen the play’s view of the events it is dramatizing. This depth allows space for the play to also speak to contemporary events in 1599 England. David Daniell writes: “When Julius Caesar was being written, there was in England, and associated with Caesar, a sharp political awareness that it was possible to challenge rigidity of rule: a rigidity probably extending to tyranny: a challenge possibly extending to conspiracy leading to rebellion” (22). Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and other plays such as Richard II took up an uneasy subject; is there a time to kill a king? He did not provide an answer; he provided an allowed space in which this problem could be critically explored. Shakespeare’s Cassius is a dangerous man, but it is up to the viewer/reader to figure out whether that danger is justified.

At the end of his article, Marx uses the Julius Caesar quotation to snap his scorpion-like rhetoric in multiple directions. He stings the Democratic Party for its lack of revolutionary intentions, but he also stings the communists for their revolutionary adventurism. Also present in the metaphor is the notion that the tenor of dangerous men can be read to mean that the communists are like Cassius—they read and think too much and exist in a world of abstract uprisings that end up being ill-timed when instantiated in the world political-historical realities. Could Marx even be thinking of the masses in a similar manner to Shakespeare—as easily swayed and gullible to the ideology being uttered in their faces at the moment?

Marx uses quotations and conceits from Shakespeare’s plays to suit his rhetorical needs. In the 1 July, 1848 edition of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Marx splits a metaphor between the conspirators and the triumvirate. He sets up a conceit in which the German Liberals, who support the government and insult the workers calling them a “wild horde” of “cannibals, robbers and murderers” (“The Kölnische Zeitung” 152), are in the position of the triumvirate. He refers to the Liberals Dumont, Brüggemann and Wolfers as the “praiseworthy triumvirate”, the “scientific triumvirate”, the “dearest triumvirate” (“The Kölnische Zeitung” 152). Then he shifts the positions in the metaphor. He writes:
We modestly bowed our heads, bowed them before the greatest historical crisis that has ever broken out: the class war between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. We have not created the fact, we have stated it. We have stated that one of classes is the conquered one as Cavaignac himself says. On the grave of the conquered, we have cried “woe!” to the victors and even Cavaignac shrinks from his historical responsibility (“The Kölnische Zeitung” 152). (Emphasis in original.)

General Louis Eugene Cavaignac led the French National Guard in a massacre of the Parisian insurgents thereby ending the 1848 revolution in France. The scene of a group crying “woe” on the grave of the conquered alludes to Anthony’s line “Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood” in his “bleeding piece of earth” soliloquy (3.1.258). Marx slides the protesting party, the supporters of the working class, to the other side of the metaphor. They are now in the place of the supporters of Caesar. Then Marx solidifies that move when he lists the insults that Herr Wolfers levels at the working class in France (cannibals, plunderers, robbers, criminals) and writes: “And Wolfers is an honourable man!” (“The Kölnische Zeitung” 153) The positions of the intertextual correspondences swivel to their opposites in Marx’s handling of the allusions.

In this inverted rhetorical form, Marx is depicting the inversions that occur in political struggles. The flow of logic in his article, made broader by numerous literary allusions, moves quickly across the text. It is difficult for the reader to keep track of the alliances as they switch, similar to the difficulty that political observers have in keeping track of real historical political alliances. Writing two hundred and forty-nine years before Marx, Shakespeare also depicts the vertiginous shifting of alliances that occur in politics. The plebians, who clamour to be satisfied, are depicted by Shakespeare as a politically labile mob; they switch allegiance from Pompey to Caesar to the conspirators and then to Anthony. Shakespeare seems to be more interested in constructing a dramatic space that allows for a critical view of the historical events than in taking a stand about those events. He takes the historical responsibility that Marx accuses Carvaignac of shirking and stages a critical reexamination of Julius Caesar’s assassination, and, in other plays, of regicide in general. Similarly, Marx, the journalist, creates in his newspapers, a space for critical analysis of the class struggle contemporary to his writing. He seems, in his journalistic form, less interested in revolutionary propaganda and more committed to a Shakespearean critical dramatization of the scene of struggle. 4

III. As Caesar loved me…I slew him

Sigmund Freud had a problem; he founded a system that was meant to render the human mind understandable but as he set out to do that, he found the mind’s workings to be a tangle of contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies. Enlightenment science in the form of fin de siècle neurology—the field in which Freud was trained to work—was not very useful for his task. His short journey into Charcot’s hypnosis model was an attempt to handle the ambiguities of the disturbed mind, but was only partially useful. After one more attempt at a scientific model in 1895-6 with his (unpublished) Project for a Scientific Psychology, Freud finally reached for the most apt means to

4 There are seven more quotations from and allusions to Julius Caesar that will have to go unexplored in this paper due to space limitations. They are used to depict political opponents who lie, manipulate and betray.
explore and express the complexities of the mind—world literature. Psychoanalysis was born as a literary analysis in a 15 October, 1897 letter from Freud to his friend Wilhelm Fliess. Freud wrote to Fliess that he had come to the understanding that children feel ambivalent feelings, including sexual desire and murderous jealousy, towards their parents and that the proof of that came from two plays—Sophocles *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Throughout his writing career Freud quoted from, alluded to and analysed scenes from Shakespeare’s plays one hundred and eight times. He was attracted to the soliloquys and speeches where characters worked out their conflicts. Naturally, he found Brutus’ justification for killing Caesar useful for explaining the complex human mind.

In the 1900 *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud uses lines from Brutus’ speech at Caesar’s funeral to interpret his *Non Vixit* dream. In the dream Freud is sitting at a table with his friend Wilhelm Fliess and another man, Josef Paneth, who was Freud’s colleague, friend and rival. Fliess asks Freud how much Paneth knows about his situation and Freud replies that “P. could not understand anything at all, of course, because he was not alive”...he was “NON VIXIT” (*Interpretation of Dreams* 421). Freud then gave Paneth a piercing look and caused him to melt away. This delighted Freud and resulted in the realisation that Paneth and another character, Fleischl, who had appeared in an earlier part of the dream, were revenants and that Freud could will them to go away. Freud explains that the grammatical construction *non vixit* is a mistake because it means that *he did not live* instead of, what he should have said, *he is not alive*. Freud remembered that he had seen the words NON VIXIT on the base of the Kaiser Josef Memorial in the line: “Saluti patriae vixit/non diu sed totus” (For the well-being of his country he lived not long but wholly) (*Interpretation of Dreams* 422). The dream-work associated the statue with his friend Josef Paneth through the similarity of the first names. Freud reveals that he had ambiguous feelings towards Paneth, who was his friend but also his rival. Paneth had replaced Freud in his job at Brücke’s neurology laboratory. Other associations followed including that Freud passed the Kaiser Josef Memorial on his walk to the laboratory, that Brücke once admonished and ‘reduced [Freud] to nothing” with a look from his pale blue eyes for coming late to work, and that Paneth stood for Freud’s nephew and rival John against whom Freud had to defend himself by saying that he hit (wichsen, pronounced like the English *vixen*) because John hit him first (*Interpretation of Dreams* 424-5).

In his analysis of the dream, Freud makes some associations to *Julius Caesar*. There is a detail in the dream that Freud’s friend Fliess had come unobtrusively to Vienna in July. July is named after Julius Caesar. Freud and his nephew John had played Brutus and Caesar, respectively, when they were young in a scene from Schiller’s *Die Rauber*. Freud does not notice that the title *Kaiser* is a literal translation in German of the Latin *Caesar*. Then Freud uses lines from *Julius Caesar* to support his notion that dreams can stage ambivalent relationships in a displaced manner. He writes:

> As he (Paneth) had deserved well of science I built him a memorial; but as he was guilty of an evil wish (to replace Freud) I annihilated him. I notice that this last sentence had quite a special cadence, and I must have had some model in my mind. Where was an antithesis of this sort to be found, a juxtaposition like of two opposite reactions towards a single person, both of them claiming to be completely justified and yet not incompatible? Only one passage in literature—but a passage which makes a profound impression on the reader: in Brutus’ speech of self-justification in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* [iii,2], ‘As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as
he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him.' Were not the formal structure of these sentences and their antithetical meaning precisely the same as in the dream-thought I had uncovered? Thus I had been playing the part of Brutus in the dream.

In this passage, Feud analyses not only his dream, which displaces his repressed antagonism towards Paneth, but he also analyses how his writing has been influenced by Shakespeare. Brutus’ lines from *Julius Caesar* served Freud as a “model” for his own prose (*Interpretation of Dreams* 424). Their “cadence”, which could be understood as syntactical structure—the meter of the sentence, has a prototype in Shakespeare. Freud’s words in German offer direct proof that he was influenced by Shakespeare. He writes: “Ich habe da einen Satz von ganz besonderem Klang gebildet, bei dem mich ein Vorbild beeinflußt haben muß” (*Die Traumdeutung* 445). The second half of the sentence says that he must have been influenced by a model/prototype. The word that Freud uses for model is *Vorbild*. This serves a very specific function in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic theory holds that all human relationships are built upon the model of a prototypical relationship with the first loved objects—the mother or mothering figure (Freud “A Special Type of Object Choice Made by Men” 169). In an analogous fashion to this process, Freud’s prose style, and maybe even his thinking, was mothered by his first encounters with literature. He began reading Shakespeare when he was eight years old and he acted in a Shakespearean scene from Schiller with his nephew John in his schooldays (*Prawer Cultural Citizen* 12). If the Marxist notion that men do not make history just as they please “but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” is correct, and considering too Freud’s analysis of Shakespeare’s influence on his writing, then it can be said that psychoanalysis was developed under the influence of Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s writing is one of the prototypes (*Vorbild*) of Freud’s writing.

In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare depicts the unconscious and the struggle on the fields of the first topography (conscious, preconscious, unconscious) and second topography (id, ego, superego) *avant la lettre*. Soon after Brutus first comes onstage with Caesar, he remains behind with Cassius as the train passes on. Shakespeare sends the main action in Plutarch—Anthony presenting the crown to Caesar—offstage, and replaces it with the first conspiratorial dialogue between Cassius and Brutus. The repressed but rebellious unconscious of Rome is foregrounded. Cassius teases the conspiracy in Brutus out from his private thoughts; he causes Brutus to remove his “veiled” look and to speak his mind consciously and publicly (1.2.37). Brutus explains to Cassius that he is “at war” with himself (1.2.46). When Cassius asks if Brutus can see his own face, Brutus responds with a statement that sounds clearly like Hegelian mutual recognition: “No, Cassius; for the eye sees not itself/But by reflection, by some other things” (1.2.52-3). Cassius is that mirror that reflects Brutus’ private thoughts, and with them, the unconscious of the situation in Rome, for Brutus to know himself, for Cassius to affirm that Brutus is politically reliable, and for the audience to see. Cassius serves the purpose, albeit for his own strategic interests, of the interpreter (analyst?) who reveals the tragic conflict between Brutus’ inner world and his political statecraft (Daniell *Julius Caesar* 167). In the first scene of the second act, Shakespeare has Brutus speak in soliloquy—the dramatic form that most closely resembles psychoanalytic free association. Brutus admits to himself that he has no personal reason to kill Caesar. He works out the political reasons why he must do it. It is revealed through Portia’s dialogue with Brutus that this contradiction has not been easy on Brutus. She tells Brutus that he has been getting out of bed suddenly and walking about “musing, and sighing, with [his] arms across” (2.1.239) – a position that Shakespeare stages to show disturbed thoughts (Daniell
Julius Caesar 212). After the assassination, Brutus explains to the masses why he killed Caesar. It is in this speech, which Freud quotes, where Brutus’ ambivalence is most salient. He claims to love Caesar as much as Caesar’s dearest friend. He weeps because Caesar loved him, rejoices at Caesar’s fortunes, honours Caesar’s valour, cries tears for having killed a man with all of those qualities, yet he slew Caesar to prevent becoming a slave under Caesar’s ambition. While the logic of the speech makes sense at a political level—and the gullible masses are easily swayed to its conclusions—there remains an unresolvable contradiction at the subjective level. If Brutus truly had so much love for Caesar (and there is no reason to doubt that) then his desire to kill Caesar, even in its liberationist context, must arise from and function at a different location of his mind’s topography. It arises from a place where hates Caesar. It is the result of a joining of political strategy with an unconscious death drive against a rival.

Shakespeare dramatizes the results of Brutus’ conflict. His militarily ill-timed fight with Cassius may be a symptom of Brutus’ frayed relations with those he loves. While on the surface, Brutus may have a valid and politically-correct complaint against Cassius’ forces for bribing and robbing, the traumatic memory of the assassination haunts this scene like a revenant. Brutus says to Cassius, “Remember March, the Ides of March remember” (4.3.18), which recalls the soothsayer’s warning, “Beware the Ides of March” (1.2.18). The day carries, in its traumatic memory load, Brutus’ unresolvable conflict; it now stages its traumatic repetition as a militarily inappropriate fracture of unity with Cassius. Minutes later, he reveals to Cassius that Portia committed suicide due to his absence, another victim of the fracture of loving relations. When he tries to sleep that night, Caesar comes back to him as a revenant. At this point in the play, Brutus’ logic for killing Caesar has moved to his conscious. It is his love for Caesar that has taken up a position in his unconscious, and with the unremitting force of the return of the unconscious, is manifested as a ghost. When asked what he is, the ghost claims to be Brutus’ evil spirit and announces that he will see Brutus on the battlefield at Philippi. Unlike Richard III, who struggles for many lines trying to figure out his identity after he is visited by the ghosts, Brutus answers the ghost matter-of-factly. He is now facing both of his conflict; they are both in his conscious and their dissonance will take over and determine the last few steps of Brutus’ life. He makes another military error by calling an attack too soon, which indirectly results in Cassius killing himself. Now all of the people he loved most—Caesar, Portia and Cassius—have died. It remains for Brutus to kill the last place where his struggle rages on—himself. He tells Volumnius that their enemies have beat them to “the pit” (5.5.23). The image of the pit tropes both the hunt—a hunted animal is driven into a pit—and the biblical hell as in Job 17.16 (Shoel and the Pit are terms for the underworld) (Daniell Julius Caesar 318, Coogan, Bible, 745). Brutus reasons with Volumnius that “it is more worthy to leap in [themselves]”(5.5.24). The scene that he faces is the irreconcilable conflict in his mental topography—a tragic double-bind that can only be resolved by his death. When he kills himself, he clearly states the function of his action, “Caesar, now be still” (5.5.51).

Freud uses the quotation from Julius Caesar not only as a means to explain his theory, but also as a step in his regressive analysis. His encounter with the play exists as a location in his memory. A similar regression can be made with Brutus in the play. His assassination of Caesar may have a precedent. It can be assumed that Brutus had a mother and a father. He might have had siblings. His siblings and his father may have been competitors for his mother’s love. Brutus may have wanted them out of the way; he may have even desired that they would die. However in the search for a prototype it is difficult to sustain a commitment to the unwritten pre-history of the play as evidence (unless one is performing a classical psychoanalytic interpretation). There is, however, a scene
Lurking in the background of this play that can be useful to perform a regression back to childhood where primal scenes exist and serve as the prototypes for later tragic action.

The action of this play occurs during Lupercalia, a festival in which the Roman god Faunus is worshipped. Lupercalia is actually in February, but Shakespeare telescopes the festival until the Ides of March. David Daniell holds that this is done to give the scenes a “religious colouring”, and to “weaken Calphurnia” (who is told to stand so that Anthony can touch her during the run of Lupercalia and make her fertile), and “thus Caesar” (161). However, this interpretation works only at the superficial level of imagery or tonality. Shakespeare’s dramatic use of Lupercalia serves a deeper, more structural function in the play. During the feast of Lupercalia, two noblemen are smeared with the blood of a sacrifice and run naked around the Palatine striking women so that the women can become fertile (Morford and Lenardon Classical Mythology 674). Brutus’ command that the conspirators stoop and bath their arms in Caesar’s blood (3.1.105) and Caesar’s command that Calphurnia stand in Anthony’s way to be touched as he runs by (1.2.3-4) are both allusions to this festival. Caesar is the sacrifice, but why is a sacrifice needed? For what transgression is it atoning? Lupercal is also the name of the cave where, in Roman legend, the she-wolf (lupa) suckled Romulus and Remus. In Roman mythology Romulus, a descendant of Aeneas, founded Rome. His father is Mars, who loved Rhea Silvia, and had two sons by her—Romulus and Remus. Rhea Silvia’s father Amulius wanted to keep her as a vestal virgin, and, when she bore children, he ordered them to be thrown into the Tiber. Instead they were left by the edge of the river and suckled by a she-wolf. Romulus, from whose name the word Rome arises, is named after his activity of suckling on the nipple—rumis. Hence the mother’s nipple lies at the etymological root of Rome (Morford and Lenardon Classical Mythology 674). Rome is the mother. Shakespeare depicts this also in Coriolanus, where he writes Caius Martius’ mother, Volumnia, as a staunch nationalist for Rome. In a fraternal struggle for who should rule Rome—a political fight, Romulus kills Remus. This is the Urszene, the primal scene that sits at the root of the unconscious of the play. Shakespeare, whose texts are formed in the paradigma of Classical mythology (Bate, Shakespeare and Ovid), loaded Julius Caesar with this tragic fratricide in its political unconscious.

IV. Subjectivity in politics

In his journalism, Marx constructs a space in which critical consciousness can observe and become aware of the history of the class struggle as it unfolds. Marx does not simply want a working class that is activist, but one that is conscious of the contradictions of its time and the role it is playing in the struggles that the contradictions generate. When he writes lines from Julius Caesar into the rhetorical structure of his journalism, he brings Shakespeare’s critical vision to his political writings. Marx is not simply stating a political position; he is, with Shakespeare, stating the need to be critical. Marx takes another step in that direction when he inverts the metaphors. By sliding the positions of the metaphor’s vehicles across the political divide he constructs a meta-tenor. Not only are the German Liberal Brutuses not honest men, but the Democratic conspirators are dangerous because they are not dangerous enough, and it is not the German triumvirate but the conspirators who stand by the grave of the murdered and cry woe. This is Marx’s description of conditions in the topsy-turvy world of capitalism. Marx spins his metaphors around to give his readers the vertiginous feeling of the verkehrte Welt (the inverted world) of politics (Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right 244) – a
world in which the only producers of value—the working class—are called robbers and cannibals and massacred in the streets.

Freud’s writings take the issue of subjectivity in politics inward to the psyche. The outward struggle between labour and capital works in concert with an inward struggle between ambivalent forces in the divided subject. The political economics of the societal base makes use of the latent hatred in the unconscious superstructure. Freud’s unaware subjects are doomed to repeat their traumatic primal scenes throughout their personal history. When he uses lines from *Julius Caesar* to explain his theory, he brings a historical dimension to that theory. *Julius Caesar*, as a historical tragedy, depicts the failure of intersubjectivity in politics which results in a traumatic scene— the assassination of Caesar. The need to work out the trauma is what fuels interest in the story and makes it grist for dramatic texts throughout literary history. The fact that actual politics in history have resulted in similar failures of intersubjectivity and led not only to assassinations of individuals but also to massacres of populations, makes this tragic story and the texts that depict it relevant for history. When confronted with the object of tragic art, the subject can uncover the traumatic unconscious in his own history and in the history of his world.

Psychoanalysis requires the analyst to look for the primal scene earlier and earlier in the subject’s history. If the subject is Rome, then there is a primal maternal scene that predates the suckling of Mars’ children on the she-wolf and the fratricide on which Rome was founded. Romulus and Remus descended from Aeneas. Aeneas’ mother is Venus, the goddess of beauty, love and peace. She made love to the mortal Anchises and became full with child—Aeneas, the future founder of Rome. Rome, and world history, if Rome can be understood as its synecdoche, has two primal maternal scenes: the scene of political fratricide between the two warrior children suckled by the wolf, and the scene of pastoral pleasure between the shepherd and goddess of peace who birthed Aeneas. Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* offers the world’s historical subjects who view it a space in which to work out their traumatic political unconscious and to critique their choice of maternal nourishment—war or peace.

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Works cited and consulted


