

## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

10 February 2017

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Ziogas, I. (2016) 'Famous last words : Caesar's prophecy on the Ides of March.', *Antichthon*, 50 . pp. 134-153.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1017/ann.2016.9>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

This article has been published in a revised form in *Antichthon* <https://doi.org/10.1017/ann.2016.9>. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © The Australasian Society for Classical Studies 2017

### Additional information:

## Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

## Famous Last Words: Caesar's Prophecy on the Ides of March

*Abstract.* Shakespeare's *Et tu, Brute* has been influential in shaping a tradition that interprets Caesar's last words as an expression of shock at Brutus' betrayal. Yet this interpretation is not suggested in the ancient sources that attest the tag καὶ σὺ, τέκνον ('you too, son'). This article argues that Caesar's dictum evokes a formula of funerary epigrams, which refers to death as the common lot of all mortals. The epitaphic connotations of καὶ σὺ or *tu quoque* feature in epic poetry, a connection that lends a Homeric dimension to Caesar's last words. The dictator's oral epitaph predicts the death of Brutus as a consequence of his involvement in the assassination. It means 'You too, son, will die'. The Greco-Roman belief that a dying man can foresee the future invests Caesar's last words with prophetic authority.

Julius Caesar's last words (καὶ σὺ, τέκνον 'you too, son') are so widely known that they can appear in comic strips and pop culture without any need for further explanation. The dictator's final address to Brutus has become proverbial for shocking betrayal. The reason for this popularity is not the ancient sources that attest Caesar's words, but William Shakespeare. As Nicholas Royle puts it, 'the popular cultural conception of Julius Caesar is inextricably bound up with Shakespeare's play...Shakespeare's play is the single most influential work in shaping the public imagination of this historical figure'.<sup>1</sup>

---

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 146<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for Classical Studies (New Orleans, January 10, 2015) and I would like to thank all the members who came to the panel and asked questions. I am particularly grateful to Christopher Baron, Phoebe Garrett, Joshua Katz, and my fellow Cornellians Tobias

In his *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare presents Caesar's assassination on stage, a daring choice with a powerful dramatic effect. Brutus stabs Caesar last and then the dictator breathes his last words:

*They stab Caesar, Casca first, Brutus last*

CAESAR *Et tu, Brute?* – Then fall, Caesar!

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* 3.1.77

Caesar's Latin dictum is an expression of shock at the sight of Brutus' stabbing him along with the other conspirators. Brutus' betrayal gives Caesar the last blow; it hurts him the most and his last words express his sharpest pain. *Even thou, Brutus?* exclaims the dictator in a mixture of shock, despair, and reproach before expiring. The tag *Et tu, Brute?* is first attested in Shakespeare's *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* (1595)<sup>2</sup> and reads: "*Et tu, Brute, wilt thou stab Caesar too?*". Shakespeare employs this phrase in order to highlight Caesar's deep disappointment with Brutus' disloyalty. The dramatic effect of this scene is linked to Brutus' characterization. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is uncertain about justifying the murder of Caesar. Shakespeare took the inspiration of a brooding and hesitant Brutus from ancient sources (cf. Plutarch, *Brutus* 8-10, 13; Dio 43.45.4, 44.12-14). The characterization of Brutus and the appropriation of Caesar's last words contribute to the dramatic effect of a shocked Caesar addressing a hitherto ambivalent Brutus.

---

Torgerson, Erica Bexley, Goran Vidović, and Jake Nabel. Thanks are also due to Art Pomeroy and the anonymous readers of *Antichthon*.

<sup>1</sup> Royle (2006) 205.

<sup>2</sup> This is the first published version of *3 Henry VI*.

Shakespeare's ancient source for this story is Suetonius' *Life of Caesar*:

atque ita tribus et uiginti plagis confossus est uno modo ad primum ictum gemitu  
sine uoce edito, etsi tradiderunt quidam Marco Bruto irruenti dixisse: καὶ σὺ  
τέκνον

Suetonius, *The deified Julius* 82

And thus he was stabbed with twenty three wounds, groaning just once at the first  
blow without uttering a word, even though some attested that he said, while  
Brutus was rushing: 'you too, son'

Suetonius' account reflects two different traditions: one according to which Caesar dies  
without saying anything and another according to which he addresses Brutus in Greek.  
The latter version, which became famous thanks to Shakespeare, was the less popular in  
the ancient sources. Cassius Dio, who also attests this report, seems sceptical and assigns  
it to some anonymous people:

κάκ τούτου προσπεσόντες αὐτῷ ἐκεῖνοι πολλαχόθεν ἅμα κατέτρωσαν  
αὐτόν, ὥσθ' ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους αὐτῶν μήτ' εἰπεῖν μήτε πράξαι τι τὸν  
Καίσαρα δυνηθῆναι, ἀλλὰ συγκαλυψάμενον σφαγῆναι πολλοῖς τραύμασι.  
ταῦτα μὲν **τάληθέστατα**· ἤδη δέ **τινες** καὶ ἐκεῖνο εἶπον, ὅτι πρὸς τὸν Βροῦτον  
[τὸν] ἰσχυρῶς πατάξαντα ἔφη “**καὶ σύ, τέκνον**”

Cassius Dio 44.19

Thereupon they attacked him from many sides at once and wounded him to death,  
so that by reason of their numbers Caesar was unable to say or do anything, but

veiling his face was slain with many wounds. **This is the truest account**, though **some** have added that to Brutus, when he struck him a powerful blow, he said:

**‘You too, son’**

(Cary’s Loeb translation, slightly modified)

Dio is probably influenced by Suetonius:<sup>3</sup> *τινες εἶπον* corresponds to Suetonius’ equally vague *tradiderunt quidam* with which both historians distance themselves from this version. Dio’s *τᾶληθέστατα* leaves no doubt that he questions the historicity of Caesar’s last words. Caesar was unable to speak after receiving so many blows. The silence of Plutarch and other ancient authors about this version suggests that they thought that it was not even worth mentioning. Modern historians agree with the scepticism of Suetonius and Dio.<sup>4</sup> Be that as it may, the historicity of the tale is not my main concern. My focus will be on interpreting Caesar’s last words in the context of Roman politics and ancient biographical traditions, not arguing whether the dying dictator could plausibly have said *καὶ σύ, τέκνον* right before he died.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Dio seems to have used Suetonius extensively. See Millar (1964) 85-7, 105, for the Augustan books. An important difference between Suetonius and Dio is that the effect of Caesar’s speaking in Greek is lost in Dio.

<sup>4</sup> Lintott (2009) 79, for instance, notes: ‘The story that Caesar reproached Marcus Brutus in Greek, addressing him as “my child” (Suet. *Iul.* 82.2; Dio 44.19.5), was not found in all accounts and must be subject to doubt, especially as Caesar’s relationship with Brutus’ mother Servilia probably commenced after Brutus’ birth.’ Dubuisson (1980) is an exception in defending the plausibility and historicity of the tale. On the assassination of Caesar, see Strauss (2015).

<sup>5</sup> I agree with Arnaud (1998) 67: ‘La tradition rapportée par Suétone était donc pour le moins marginale. Le sens des derniers mots de César n’en est pas moins intéressant.’

The tragic power and afterlife of Caesar's dictum make the question of its authenticity secondary. A shocked Caesar recognizes his son at the very moment of parricide. It is indeed a scene out of tragedy, reminiscent, for instance, of Clytemnestra's appeal to her maternity in order to dissuade Orestes from killing her.<sup>6</sup> Plutarch's version (*Caesar* 66.9-10), in which Brutus stabs Caesar in the groin, is even more dramatic. A son kills his father by wounding the very source of paternity.<sup>7</sup> Brutus is like Cronus: a son who castrates and deposes his tyrannical father only to become himself a victim in a violent struggle for power. Curiously, Shakespeare does not cast Caesar's assassination as a parricide, even though he did know of the rumours about Brutus being Caesar's illegitimate son.<sup>8</sup> It is unclear why Shakespeare replaces 'child' (τέκνον) with '*Brute*'. One possibility (admittedly speculative) is that the pun on the English 'brute' was too irresistible for a playwright so keen on wordplay as Shakespeare.

To be sure, Shakespeare engages closely with Suetonius' text. As critics notice, he follows the Roman historian in the bilingualism of the scene. Griffin observes:

'Suetonius' Caesar speaks Greek, in the midst of a Latin text; Shakespeare's speaks

---

<sup>6</sup> This interplay between tragedy and history is typical of ancient historiography.

Baltussen (2002), for instance, argues convincingly that the assassination of Agrippina in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio evokes the murder of Clytemnestra in specific details.

<sup>7</sup> Pelling (2011) 482 notes that the 'groin' version is likely to link, unpleasantly, with the notion of Caesar as Brutus' biological father.

<sup>8</sup> See 'Brutus' bastard hand / Stabbed Julius Caesar' 2 *Henry VI* (1594). Voltaire explicitly made Brutus Caesar's son in *La mort de César*. Brutus commits parricide irrespective of whether he was Caesar's biological son, because Caesar had been named *parens patriae*.

Latin, in the middle of the play's English. The effect is to set the quotation off, to highlight it as a quotation.<sup>9</sup> The Latin in Shakespeare is a nod to the audience that the author quotes Suetonius, a Latin source, and probably earlier dramatic versions that used this tag.<sup>10</sup> But the Greek in Suetonius also has a similar function. Julius Caesar is quoting something here. And the question is: what is he quoting?<sup>11</sup>

I shall try to answer this question and my main objective in this paper is to read Suetonius without being influenced by Shakespeare. That is not to say that Shakespeare's characterization does not engage with ancient traditions. Mark Toher argues convincingly that Nicolaus of Damascus' *Life of Augustus*, which contains the earliest account of Caesar's assassination, anticipates Shakespeare's strategy of depicting Caesar with mortal foibles.<sup>12</sup> Nicolaus' aim is to set up a politically inept Julius Caesar as a foil for Augustus' political genius. In Nicolaus, the dictator is described as a military man inexperienced in politics, naive, and failing to suspect a conspiracy among the men who

---

<sup>9</sup> Griffin (2009) 386; cf. Garber (1987) 54.

<sup>10</sup> Shakespeare is influenced both by translations of ancient sources and earlier dramas on Julius Caesar. On this topic, see Pelling (2002) 387-411; (2011) 64-76; Toher (2006); Griffin (2009); Welch (2015) 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Before crossing the Rubicon, Caesar famously said in Greek ἀνερίφθω κύβος 'let the die be cast' (see Plut. *Pompey* 60.2, *Caesar* 32.8), which Suetonius inaccurately renders as *iacta alea est* 'the die is cast' (*Caesar* 32.3). Unlike καὶ σύ, τέκνον Suetonius translates Caesar's Greek quotation. Caesar quotes Menander (see Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 13.8.28-32, fr. 59\*.4 Sandbach), though ἀνερίφθω κύβος was probably proverbial in Greek; see Dubuisson (1980) 885-6. The quotation takes on added meaning if we consider that Venus was Caesar's patron goddess and that the Venus throw was the highest dice roll.

<sup>12</sup> Toher (2006).

were praising and honouring him. Shakespeare seems to align the dictator's last words with this ancient characterization of Caesar as a clueless victim. My argument is that Caesar's last words in Suetonius can serve a different characterization and a different political agenda. Far from being surprised and plagued by mortal weaknesses, Caesar features as a divine figure prophesying the death of his assassin. A Caesar cast as a larger than life hero, a perceptive, confident, ambitious, and courageous man is the image that emerges from the works of Appian and Dio. My reading of Caesar's last words will show that they befit the powerful figure of these ancient historians, not the frail dictator of Nicolaus of Damascus and Shakespeare.

It is striking that modern critics often read this episode through Shakespeare's lens and thus connect it by default with the tradition of an imperceptive Caesar who despairs at the sight of Brutus. Maria Wyke, for instance, notes:

At the climax of the assassination, *Caesar is confronted by Brutus and despairs*. While Shakespeare was to give him the Latin tag *Et tu, Brute?* ('Also you, Brutus?'), some early reports which Suetonius and Dio had encountered claimed for him in his dying moments an intimate exclamation in Greek, *καὶ σὺ τέκνον;* ('Also you, child?').<sup>13</sup>

It is taken for granted that Caesar despairs as he is confronted by Brutus. But this is hardly proved by citing Suetonius and Dio, who say nothing of the sort about the reports they are referring to. Adding a question mark in translating *καὶ σὺ, τέκνον* is also typical and indicative of transferring Shakespeare's interpretation to the version attested in

---

<sup>13</sup> Wyke (2007) 205 (my emphasis).



Suetonius and Dio. In his shock and desperation, Caesar directs a rhetorical question to his assassin as a paternal reproach. But Caesar's address to Brutus does not have to be a direct question. It can simply be an affirmation: 'You too, son.' In fact, the only other time that Suetonius uses καὶ σύ, τέκνον is not in a direct question, but in a promise for the future of Galba (*Galba* 4.1.8; see below on this episode). We need to defamiliarize this ancient tradition from Elizabethan theatre and read it in the context of the works of Suetonius and Dio.

Before suggesting a new interpretation of Caesar's enigmatic last words, I would like to draw attention to three articles, which interpret καὶ σύ, τέκνον by focusing on aspects of the ancient world rather than accepting Shakespeare's take.<sup>14</sup> James Russell points out that a sentimental expression of affection on Caesar's part seems out of harmony with his personality and is downright banal.<sup>15</sup> He suggests an alternative interpretation in order to defend the historical plausibility of Caesar's Greek dictum. For Russell, Caesar utters an apotropaic or retributive formula (καὶ σύ). The dictator curses Brutus with his last gasp, saying 'to hell with you, too' (καὶ σύ, ἔρρε) or 'the same to you'.<sup>16</sup> Russell's interpretation is attractive, given the end of Brutus. Yet there are problems in what he suggests. As he admits, the target of the formulaic imprecation is seldom mentioned,

---

<sup>14</sup> Russell (1980); Brenk (1999) = (1998); Arnaud (1998).

<sup>15</sup> Russell (1980) 125. The word τέκνον does not have to refer to the rumours about Caesar's affair with Servilia, Brutus' mother, but can simply be a term of affection, like the English 'son'; cf. Dubuisson (1980) 884.

<sup>16</sup> Henderson (1998) 103 follows Russell (1980); see also Wenskus (1992) 214-15, who argues that Caesar's last words should be taken as a curse.

though it can be usually identified with the Evil Eye or Envy (Βάσκανος or Φθόνος).<sup>17</sup> This begs the question how we should take τέκνον in this context or how the Evil Eye and Envy are relevant to the assassination. Even though he rightly points out that the sentimental reading of Caesar's last words is problematic, his interpretation is equally out of step with Caesar's character. It is implausible that a man like Caesar would resort to superstition or that he would use an apotropaic formula, while it was clear that death was inevitable. Russell suggests that καὶ σύ is both prophylactic and retributive, two functions that are incompatible in Caesar's case. His article gathers a plethora of archaeological evidence but no examples from literary sources and no evidence for an oral delivery of the formula. Are inscriptions on Syrian lintels and tombs or stamps on eastern Roman sigillata relevant to ancient traditions of Caesar's death?

Frederick Brenk similarly uses archaeological evidence in order to reinterpret Caesar's famous last words.<sup>18</sup> Like Russell, the historicity of this version is an issue for him. His main piece of evidence is a stele erected in honour of Nero, which includes above the main inscription the mysterious words KAICY. Brenk never explains why or how this stele is relevant to Suetonius' sources and his main argument about καὶ σύ and the Evil Eye has been anticipated by Russell, as he confesses.<sup>19</sup> His short chapter includes digressions on Sumerian and Akkadian literary and archaeological material that have nothing to do with Caesar's last words. Yet he offers perceptive criticism on the problems involved in associating Caesar's καὶ σύ, τέκνον with the Evil Eye formula. Magical

---

<sup>17</sup> Russell (1980) 126.

<sup>18</sup> Brenk (1999) = (1998).

<sup>19</sup> '[T]he article had already been done by James Russell, an archaeologist, and done in an extraordinarily well-researched way.' Brenk (1999) 199-200 = (1998) 3-4.

papyri and amulets suggest that the formula was infrequent.<sup>20</sup> He points out that *καὶ σὺ* does not have to be malignant, but can be benevolent ('best wishes to you too').<sup>21</sup> He regards a superstitious saying unsuitable for the death of a man who despised superstition.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, Brenk's article argues against interpreting Caesar's *καὶ σὺ* vis-à-vis the Evil Eye formula. But he takes all the problems he points out as reasons why the words are not in Plutarch and other sources.<sup>23</sup> The logic of this argument is rather flawed. First, it assumes that *καὶ σὺ* should be related to the Evil Eye, then it points out that there are difficulties with this interpretation, and finally concludes that these shortcomings make the version about Caesar's superstitious last words implausible. In my view, the problems in interpreting Caesar's enigmatic *καὶ σὺ, τέκνον* as the Evil Eye formula simply render this interpretation unconvincing.

Pascal Arnaud's arguments are more compelling.<sup>24</sup> Arnaud reads Caesar's last words against the only other time Suetonius uses *καὶ σὺ, τέκνον*. When the young Galba visited Augustus, the emperor gave the boy a cheeky prediction about his future in the imperial dynasty:

---

<sup>20</sup> Brenk (1999) 206 = (1998) 10.

<sup>21</sup> Brenk (1999) 204 = (1998) 8. I further note that *καὶ σὺ χαῖρε* appears in a funerary inscription from Piraeus in which the deceased wife responds to her husband's sepulchral dedication: *CEG* 530 *καὶ σὺ χαῖρε, φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν* 'Greetings to you too, dearest husband' (*CEG*= Hansen 1983-9); cf. Guarducci (1974) 153, 324-5, 527; De Martino and Vox (1996) 308-11. On speaking inscriptions in Latin that open a dialogue with the dead, see Carroll (2008).

<sup>22</sup> Brenk (1999) 207 = (1998) 11.

<sup>23</sup> Brenk (1999) 207 = (1998) 11.

<sup>24</sup> Arnaud (1998).

constat Augustum puero adhuc, salutanti se inter aequales, apprehensa buccula dixisse: **καὶ σὺ τέκνον** τῆς ἀρχῆς ἡμῶν παρατρῶξη.

Suetonius, *Galba* 4.1.8

They say that while he, still a boy, was paying his respects to Augustus with his age-mates, Augustus pinched his cheek and said: ‘**You too, son,** will take a bite of my rule.’

Arnaud argues that both Caesar’s last words and Augustus’ playful paternal address to Galba are a quotation of a Greek proverb. According to Arnaud, Caesar begins but death prevents him from finishing the proverb attested in the passage cited above. His dying words do not express regret but a powerful threat, predicting that Brutus will taste the bitter fruit of tyranny by sharing his victim’s fate in death. By linking Caesar’s last words to Suetonius’ story about Augustus and Galba, Arnaud maintains that Julius Caesar adapted a line of Greek verse that was proverbial and should have been easily recognizable by educated Romans.

Versions of Suetonius’ tale are attested in Cassius Dio (57.19)<sup>25</sup> and Tacitus (*Annals* 6.20), who attribute the saying to Tiberius, not Augustus. Tacitus, though not discussed by Arnaud, supports his argument that the Greek saying evokes prophetic diction.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Dio (57.19) attests the variant **καὶ σὺ ποτε** τῆς ἡγεμονίας γεύση ‘you will one day have a taste of rule’.

<sup>26</sup> Arnaud (1998) 65 argues that Augustus’ words to Galba are to be interpreted ‘comme une parole prophétique, comme un *omen*’; cf. Arnaud (1998) 66, 70.

Non omiserim praesagium Tiberii de Seruio Galba tum consule; quem accitum et diuersis sermonibus pertemptatum postremo Graecis uerbis in hanc sententiam adlocutus <est> ‘**et tu, Galba**, quandoque degustabis imperium,’ seram ac breuem potentiam significans, scientia Chaldaeorum artis, cuius apiscendae otium apud Rhodum, magistrum Thrasillum habuit

Tacitus, *Annals* 6.20

I cannot omit the prophecy of Tiberius with regard to Servius Galba, then consul. He sent for him, sounded him in conversations on a variety of subjects, and finally addressed him in a Greek sentence, the purport of which was, ‘**You too, Galba**, will one day have your taste of empire’: a hint of belated and short-lived power, based on knowledge of the Chaldean art, the acquirement of which he owed to the leisure of Rhodes and the instructions of Thrasyllus

(Jackson’s Loeb translation, slightly modified)

Tacitus casts Tiberius’ words as a foresight uttered by an emperor versed in the oracular art of the Babylonians. Tiberius’ pursuits in Rhodes and the tutelage of the Alexandrian astrologer and philosopher Thrasyllus may explain the choice of Greek for his Chaldean oracle, given also the fascination of the Greek-speaking world with such oracles.<sup>27</sup>

Tacitus finds Tiberius’ prophecy ominous, an accurate prediction of Galba’s quick demise following his belated ascent to imperial command.

---

<sup>27</sup> The Chaldean oracles fascinated the Hellenistic world and Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus and Proclus. See Ruth (1989).

While I agree with Arnaud that Caesar's ominous words likewise predicted Philippi for his assassin,<sup>28</sup> his hypothesis about the Greek proverb strikes me as an argument from silence and his overall thesis is rather circular. Arnaud's reading relies on a non-extant and probably non-existent verse, which was supposedly proverbial. Assuming the existence of this unattested verse, he then argues that Caesar's καὶ σύ, τέκνον suffices to trigger a reference to this proverbial line. His method of explaining Suetonius out of Suetonius is attractive, but the variants in Cassius Dio and Tacitus undermine the existence of a fixed proverb.<sup>29</sup> Note, for instance, that neither Dio nor Tacitus includes the vocative τέκνον in his version. Nor is this proverb attested in a story unrelated to Galba's encounter with either Tiberius or Augustus.

Even if we accept the existence of the proverb and even though I agree that prophecy is the point both in Julius Caesar's words and the address to Galba, the proverb's emphasis on eating fits perfectly with Galba but makes no sense in Brutus' case. Suetonius tells us that Galba was a notorious glutton (*Galba* 22) and Tacitus' vocative 'Galba', instead of Suetonius' τέκνον, sardonically implies his fatness by punning on his name.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, when Augustus pinches Galba's cheek, Suetonius implies the boy's

---

<sup>28</sup> 'César mourant prédisait Philippes à son assassin', Arnaud (1998) 70.

<sup>29</sup> Arnaud (1998) 64-6 takes Augustus' saying as a pastiche.

<sup>30</sup> See Woodman 2006 (184), where he further notes that when Tacitus in *Histories* 1.49.4 described Galba as *omnium consensu capax imperii nisi imperasset* 'it was generally agreed that he was capable of the imperial office if he had never held it', the epitaph is given extra point by the realization that *capax*, 'having a capacity for', can be used of a person's capacity for food and drink. For 'Galba' denoting a fat person, see Suet. *Galba* 3.1 *cognomen Galbae tulit... quod praepinguis fuerit uisus, quem galbam Galli uocant* 'he took the name Galba...because he was a very fat man, such as the Gauls call *galba*;

appetite and plumpness. It seems more likely that we are dealing here with a widespread joke on Galba's gluttony<sup>31</sup> rather than with a proverb that could be readily evoked in other contexts. Arnaud is right to trace comedy in Suetonius' tale of Galba and point to the Aristophanic verb παρατρῶγω.<sup>32</sup> But gluttony and Aristophanic comedy seem hardly relevant to Caesar's last breath. We need to look to other genres in order to find a key to understanding the dictator's last words and I suggest that we look at funerary epigrams and epic poetry.

Caesar's Greek implies that his words are a quotation and Suetonius often has his Caesars quote lines from epic poetry.<sup>33</sup> Even though we cannot point to a specific passage from epic, Caesar's last words evoke a formula of Greek epitaphs that is employed in epic poetry. The tag καὶ σὺ is common in funerary epigrams and is usually followed by a vocative, which is either the name of the deceased or a noun that identifies the dead with a family relation (e.g., 'child', 'daughter', 'son').<sup>34</sup> Caesar's address to Brutus is an

---

cf. Maltby (1991) 252. Woodman (2006) 184 suggests that this is the reason why Tacitus substitutes 'Galba' for the original 'child'. The effect would be similar to Shakespeare's substitution of *Brute* for 'child' to suggest the murderer's brutality. The problem is that it is far from clear whether 'child' was part of the original verse, if such verse ever existed.

<sup>31</sup> The popularity of this joke at Galba's expense is also suggested in Plutarch, when the soldiers are reluctant to treat Galba 'like a youth just tasting power' (Plut. *Galba* 13.4 γευόμενον ἐξουσίας).

<sup>32</sup> Arnaud (1998) 64.

<sup>33</sup> See Berthet (1978); cf. Townend (1960) 98-103.

<sup>34</sup> See Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1975) 82-3, n.7; De Martino and Vox (1996) 308-18; for this epitaphic apostrophe, see *AP* 7.105 (Diogenes Laertius) Καὶ σέο, Λακύνδη, 123 Καὶ σὺ ποτ', Ἐμπεδόκλεις, 130, 132; 263 (Anacreon of Teos) Καὶ σέ, Κληνορίδη, πόθος ὤλεσε; 438 (Damagetos) ὤλεο...καὶ σὺ, Μαχάτα; 8.164 (Gregory of Nazianzus) Καὶ

epitaphic gesture. The dying dictator is not surprised at the sight of Brutus, but employs the sepulchral formula of a bereaved father. This reading of καὶ σύ, τέκνον thoroughly subverts the scene. Caesar addresses Brutus as if he were his dead son.

Shakespeare is unaware of the epitaphic resonances in Caesar's words. This is suggested by the translation he is using: *Et tu, Brute* is a possible translation of καὶ σύ, τέκνον, but the Latin formula that corresponds to the Greek epitaphic address is not *et tu* but *tu quoque*.<sup>35</sup> The tag *tu quoque* is common both in stone inscriptions and literary epitaphs.<sup>36</sup> The opening lines of *Aeneid* 7 are a case in point:

**Tu quoque** litoribus nostris, Aeneia **nutrix**,  
aeternam moriens famam, **Caieta**, dedisti

Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.1-2

**You too**, Aeneas' **nurse**, **Caieta**, with your death bestowed eternal fame upon our shores

---

σύ...τέκος; 13.23.5-6 (Asclepiades) φεῦ τὸν τεκόντα, φεῦ δὲ καὶ σέ, Βότρυος φίλος παῖ, / ὄσων ἄμοιρος ἠδονῶν ἀπώλεν 'woe to your father and woe to you too, dear child of Botrys, of how many pleasures inexperienced you perished'. Cf. *CEG* 519, 564 (epitaphic addresses to children); 631, 719 (addresses to dead sons); 102, 522, 655 (apostrophes to deceased daughters).

<sup>35</sup> *Et tu* is attested in some Latin epitaphs accompanied by a salutation, such as *haue* or *aue* or *uale* (see *CIL* 6.7047, 9337, 16069, 20524), and sometimes *et tu* is the concluding formula of an epitaph (18626, 33632, 35562); see Guarducci (1974) 153 n. 8. Yet *tu quoque* is more common and becomes the standard epitaphic address.

<sup>36</sup> See Horsfall (1986); (1999) on *Aen.* 7.1; (2013) on *Aen.* 6.30 rightly notes that the epigrammatists use *tu quoque* or καὶ σύ to associate the individual with the common lot.



Aeneas buries his nurse Caieta and Virgil memorializes her by incorporating a funerary inscription in his immortal epic.<sup>37</sup> The epitaphic formula *tu quoque* is followed by the vocatives *nutrix* and *Caieta*, a typical apostrophe to the deceased in sepulchral epigrams.

Caesar employs precisely this formula in his eulogy for Terence:

**tu quoque**, tu in summis, **o dimidiate Menander**,

poneris, et merito, puri sermonis amator.

Suetonius, *Terence* 7

**You too**, you are ranked among the top, **oh half-Menander**, and deservedly, oh lover of pure speech.

Caesar's epitaphic *tu quoque* corresponds to καὶ σὺ, his final address to Brutus. And it is significant that Suetonius is our source for both, so that the correspondence between Caesar's Greek and Latin addresses suggests itself. Note also that *tu quoque* appears in a comment on Terence's translation of Menander, one of his Greek models; Caesar may thus simultaneously display his own rendition of the epitaphic formula καὶ σὺ as *tu quoque*.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> On funerary epigrams in epic poetry, see Dinter (2005).

<sup>38</sup> Caesar's epitaph for Terence follows Cicero's praise along similar lines and diction; see Suet. *Vit. Ter.* 7 *tu quoque...Terenti*. Courtney (1993) 154-5 compares Cicero's and Caesar's poems; see also Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1975) 75-6. Cf. *te quoque...Tibulle* in Domitius Marsus' epitaph for Tibullus (Courtney fr. 7). For the epitaphic apostrophe in Marsus' epigram, see Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1975) 81-3.

Shakespeare's *Et tu, Brute* has become the established translation of καὶ σὺ, τέκνον, but is not the only one. Other Latin translations of καὶ σὺ better preserve the funerary resonances of the formula. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, the French scholar Charles François Lhomond in his *De uiris illustribus, Julius Caesar* renders the Greek as *tu quoque, fili mi!* The authors of *Asterix* also seem to be sensitive to Latin idiom, presumably because of Lhomond's continuing influence in French education. In *Asterix Gladiateur* (p. 34), Caesar's καὶ σὺ, τέκνον is translated as *tu quoque, fili*. In this playful twist of Caesar's last words, the dictator asks Brutus to do what everyone else is doing, that is to clap. His words are an order, not a rhetorical question or an expression of surprise. In the comic strip, Brutus, not Caesar, looks astonished as he is asked to join the crowd. It seems that Goscinny and Uderzo could appropriate Caesar's famous dictum without being influenced by Shakespeare.

It is not peculiar that Caesar employs the language of inscriptions in his oral epitaph. His epigram draws on the tradition of martial epic, thus adding epic colour to the assassination.<sup>39</sup> In battle narratives, epic heroes often taunt their opponents by delivering an epitaph. In the *Iliad*, for instance, Achilles employs the epitaphic καὶ σὺ before he kills Lycaon:

ἀλλὰ φίλος θάνε καὶ σὺ· τί ἦ ὀλοφύρεαι οὕτως;  
κάτθανε καὶ Πάτροκλος, ὃ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.  
 οὐχ ὀράας οἶος καὶ ἐγὼ καλὸς τε μέγας τε;<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> On the Homeric aspects of Suetonius' Caesars, see Berthet (1978).

<sup>40</sup> Suetonius (*Domitian* 8.3) says that Domitian quoted this line in reference to his baldness. The Homeric line is followed by the emperor's comment, *eadem me tamen*

πατρός δ' εἴμ' ἀγαθοῖο, θεὰ δέ με γείνατο μήτηρ·  
 ἀλλ' ἔπι τοι **καὶ ἐμοὶ** θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή·

*Iliad* 21.106-10

So, friend, **you die also**. Why all this clamour about it?

**Patroclus also is dead**, who was better by far than you are.

Do you not see what a man **I** am, how huge, how splendid

and born of a great father, and the mother who bore me immortal?

Yet even **I have also my death** and my strong destiny

(Lattimore's translation, slightly modified)

Lycaon implores Achilles to spare his life and offers lavish ransom. But after the death of Patroclus, Achilles is implacable. His oral inscription puts an end to Lycaon's hopes for survival and seals his inevitable death. It is ironic that Achilles addresses him as φίλος ('friend'); the killer employs the epitaphic voice of the bereaved and Lycaon's death parallels and is a recompense for the loss of Patroclus, Achilles' dear friend. The hero employs the consolatory aspect of καὶ σύ: death is the common lot of mortals (cf. *Il.* 18.117; Alcaeus 38.5; Lucretius 3.1025-45)<sup>41</sup> and Lycaon must meet the same fate as

---

*manent capillorum fata* 'yet the same fate of hair awaits me'. The quotation evokes the broader context of Lycaon's death. Berthet (1978) 329 points out that *eadem me* corresponds to καὶ ἐμοί, *tamen manent* to ἀλλ' ἔπι τοι, and *fata* to μοῖρα (*Il.* 21.110).

<sup>41</sup> See Lattimore (1962) 250-6. Cf. *CEG* 34 καὶ | σὲ μένει θάνατος 'death awaits you too', 518 Πᾶσι θανεῖν <ε>ἴμαρτα<ι>, ὅσοι ζῶσιν' σὺ δὲ πένθος οἰ|κτρὸν <ἔ>χ<ειν> ἔλιπες, Πausimάχη, προγόνοις μητρ<ί> | τ<ε Φ>αινί<π>πη καὶ πατρὶ Πausανίαι 'It is destined for all who live to die; and you, Pausimache, left behind pitiful grief to your ancestors, your mother Phaenippe and your father Pausanias'. See Tsagalis (2008)

Patroclus and, eventually, even the best of the Achaeans himself (*Il.* 21.106-13).

Employing the discourse of consolation, Achilles suggests that Lycaon should bear the inevitable. καὶ Πάτροκλος, καὶ ἐγὼ, καὶ ἐμοί, are variations on καὶ σύ, elaborating on the inevitability of death for all mortals, even for demigods. This aspect of this epitaphic formula is important for understanding Caesar's words to Brutus.

Similar occasions of oral epitaphs are common in Latin epic. A case in point is found in Evander's lament for his dead son, Pallas:

**tu quoque** nunc stares immanis truncus in armis,  
 esset par aetas et idem si robur ab annis,

**Turne.**

Virgil, *Aeneid* 11.173-5

**You too** would now stand, a mighty tree-trunk under arms, **Turnus**, were you of the same generation and did you draw the same strength from your years.

(translation Horsfall 2003)

Evander employs the epitaphic formula in the context of Pallas' funeral. But he does not apostrophize his dead son, but Turnus, his son's killer who is still alive. Turnus would have been one of Pallas' victims, had he had the same age as Evander's son.<sup>42</sup> The epitaphic apostrophe to his enemy is an expression of Evander's wishful thinking. The old father would have much preferred a sepulchral inscription for Turnus to his son's

---

20, 38-9, 49, 155-6, 297 on this epigram and the gnomic and consolatory statements of the community of death in sepulchral inscriptions.

<sup>42</sup> The mention of age suggests Pallas' *mors immatura*, another common motif of both epitaphs and Virgil's poetry of *pathos*.

funeral. Moreover, the sepulchral *tu quoque* has an oracular aspect since it foreshadows the death of Turnus. Turnus too, will die, in fact as a consequence of killing Pallas.

The formula *tu quoque* is often employed by the primary or secondary narrator as a way of commemorating the death of a hero. Thus, the undying glory of epic renown is intricately enmeshed with epitaphic memorials. Virgil's obituary for the fallen Aeolus, for instance, is marked with the funereal connotations of *te quoque* (*Aen.* 12.542-3 *te quoque Laurentes uiderunt, Aeole, campi/ oppetere et late terram consternere tergo.* 'The Laurentian fields saw you too, Aeolus, fall and spread your body widely on the ground').<sup>43</sup> The hero's epitaph is inscribed in Virgil's monumental epic.

When the funereal connotations of *tu quoque* and καὶ σὺ appear in martial epic, they are a mixture of commemoration and consolation, but, more interestingly, this epitaphic apostrophe can also be directed as a threat against an opponent who is still alive. The episode of Achilles and Lycaon in Homer includes all these aspects (commemoration, consolation, threat). Evander's wishful epitaph for Turnus is a taunt against the killer of Pallas and is meant to incite the Trojans to avenge the dead youth. In epic poetry, the common lot of mortals does not simply console the bereaved, but can also threaten a mighty enemy. In Ennius, Romulus threatens Remus with death in a passage that evokes the inevitable fate of mortality:

**Nec** pol homo quisquam faciet inpune animatus

hoc **nec tu**; nam mi calido dabis sanguine poenas.

---

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ovid's Nestor at *Met.* 12.312-13 *aduersum tu quoque, quamuis/ terga fugae dederas, uulnus, Crenaeae, tulisti* 'you too, Crenaeus, suffered a wound in front, even though you had turned your back in flight.'

Ennius, *Annales* 94-5 Skutsch

**No man** alive, I swear, will do this without punishment, **not even you**; for you will pay me with your hot blood.

Ennius' lines are attested in Macrobius (*S.* 6.1.15), who quotes Virgil (*Aen.* 9.422-3 *tu tamen interea calido mihi sanguine poenas/ persolues amborum* 'but meanwhile you will pay me with your hot blood for both'). This is Volcens' menacing address to Euryalus right before he kills him. In another imitation of Ennius' lines, Virgil has king Latinus warn Turnus about his imminent death (*Aen.* 7.595-6 *te, Turne, nefas, te triste manebit/ supplicium, uotisque deos uenerabere seris* 'You, Turnus, your crime and its grievous punishment will await and too late will you call upon the gods in your prayers' [translation Horsfall 1999]). In martial epic, the second person singular address is often combined with the motif of inevitable death. This combination evokes the language of funerary inscriptions and is often a threat or a warning about the unavoidable death that lies in store for epic heroes.

Caesar's last words need to be interpreted against this background. The dying dictator employs the commonplace that all men die, in order to threaten, not in order to console, Brutus. Caesar foretells the death of his son. Brutus' involvement in the assassination is the beginning of his demise and the dictator pointedly predicts the looming death of his killer. The prophetic effect of Caesar's last words relies on the Greco-Roman tradition that men can foresee the future right before they die. This takes us back again to the world of Homeric epic. In the *Iliad*, the dying Patroclus predicts Hector's death:

ἀλλά με μοῖρ' ὀλοή καὶ Λητοῦς ἔκτανεν υἱός,

ἀνδρῶν δ' Εὐφορβος· σὺ δέ με τρίτος ἐξεναρίζεις.

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐρέω, σὺ δ' ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλλεο σῆσιν·

οὐ θην οὐδ' αὐτὸς δηρὸν βέη, ἀλλὰ τοι ἤδη

ἄγχι παρέστηκεν θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή

χερσὶ δαμέντ' Ἀχιλλῆος ἀμύμονος Αἰακίδαο.

*Iliad* 16.849-54

But baneful Fate and Leto's son have slain me

and of men, Euphorbus; but you are the third to kill me.

And put away in your heart this one thing that I tell you.

You yourself are not one who shall live long, but now already

death and powerful destiny are standing beside you,

to go down under the hands of Aeacus' grandson, Achilles.

(translation Lattimore, modified)

You too, will die soon, says Patroclus to Hector. In his last speech, Patroclus points out that Hector is only his third and last slayer. Apollo and Euphorbus killed him; Hector just gave the final blow. It is tempting to interpret the assassination of Julius Caesar as a version of Patroclus' death. Brutus, like Hector, is just one of Caesar's many killers.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> The issue of Caesar's fatal wound is raised in Suetonius, who reports that according to the doctor Antistius only one wound was fatal (*Divus Iulius* 82.3). Cowan (2016) argues that the claim that only one wound was fatal represented a pro-Caesarian response to the rhetoric of collective tyrant-slaying adopted by Caesar's assassins. The story further reflects the clumsiness, inefficiency, and hesitation of the assassins.

Both the Homeric hero and the Roman dictator address their killers and prophesy their looming doom.

The death of Brutus is actually related to the death of Patroclus in the *Iliad*. A story attested in Plutarch (*Brutus* 24.4-7), Appian (4.134.564), and Valerius Maximus (1.5.7) links a Homeric line from the death of Patroclus with Brutus in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination:<sup>45</sup>

M. etiam Bruti dignus admisso parricidio euentus omine designatus est, si quidem post illud nefarium opus natalem suum celebrans, cum Graecum uersum expromere uellet, ad illud potissimum Homericum referendum animo tetendit:

ἀλλά με μοῖρ' ὀλοή καὶ Λητοῦς ἔκτανεν υἱός. (*Il.* 16.849)

qui deus, Philippensi acie a Caesare et Antonio signo datus, in eum tela conuertit.

Valerius Maximus 1.5.7

An outcome worthy of the parricide committed by M. Brutus was designated by an omen. As he was celebrating his birthday after that evil work, he wanted to speak a line of Greek and his mind turned to recall this of Homer: 'But baneful fate and Leto's son have slain me.' That god, given as a password by Caesar and Antony at the battle of Philippi, turned his darts against Brutus.

(Shackleton Bailey's Loeb translation, slightly modified)

---

<sup>45</sup> See Moles (1983).



The line that randomly occurs to Brutus and predicts his death at Philippi evokes the *Sortes Homericae*, the drawing of a line or sentence from Homer, usually from the *Iliad*, as a means of predicting the future. Valerius reads this Homeric lot as a reference to the watchword ‘Apollo’ at the battle of Philippi. Yet at the same time the Homeric line, which Patroclus utters right before he dies and right before he predicts the death of Hector, may be a reference to the similarities between the death of Patroclus and the assassination of Julius Caesar. Brutus’ Homeric lot brings up the broader context of Patroclus’ dying words, which can be read vis-à-vis Caesar’s famous last words.

The incident of Brutus’ ominous quotation, whether it happened or not, was either a *post euentum* fabrication of Caesarian propaganda or was readily exploited by Caesar’s camp.<sup>46</sup> The story suggests that Apollo fought in the camp of Julius Caesar’s avengers and thus dissociates the god from Cassius and Brutus.<sup>47</sup> From that perspective, Brutus corresponds to the dying Patroclus. Since the quotation of *Iliad* 16.849 evokes the broader context of Patroclus’ last words, it further implies a prophecy about the ill-fated future of his enemies. In Plutarch (*Brutus* 29.11), Brutus prophesies the civil war between Antony and Octavian.<sup>48</sup> The Homeric context of Brutus’ quotation problematizes the pro-Caesarian interpretation of the incident. Julius Caesar, Brutus, and Caesar’s avengers are

---

<sup>46</sup> See Moles (1983), who defends the historicity of the quotation.

<sup>47</sup> Cassius and Brutus issued coins with the bust and symbols of Apollo; see Moles (1983) 250. Both camps claimed Apollo in the highly charged events of the *ludi Apollinares* of July 44, which Brutus had to hold as an urban praetor; see Ramsey and Licht (1997) 44-7; cf. Moles (1983) 250, 255. After Philippi, Octavian claimed Apollo for himself.

<sup>48</sup> See Moles (1983) 255.

trapped in a cycle of revenge that evokes the sequence of the deaths of Patroclus, Hector, and Achilles. The killing anticipates the demise of the killer.

Patroclus' prophecy is fulfilled with the death of Hector. Not unlike his victim, Hector foretells the imminent death of his killer before he expires:

φράζεο νῦν, μή τοί τι θεῶν μήνιμα γένωμαι  
 ἦματι τῷ ὅτε κέν σε Πάρις καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων  
 ἐσθλὸν ἐόντ' ὀλέσωσιν ἐνὶ Σκαιῆσι πύλῃσιν. '

*Iliad* 22.359-60

Be careful now; for I might be made into the gods' curse  
 upon you, on that day when Paris and Phoebus Apollo  
 destroy you in the Scaean gates, for all your valour.

(translation Lattimore, slightly modified)

These are Hector's last words. Right before his soul goes down to Hades, the Trojan hero can accurately foresee the end of his killer: his brother Paris and Apollo will kill Achilles in the Scaean gates. The mention of Apollo would once more be readily available to Caesarian propaganda according to which the god played a key role in Brutus' downfall. The assimilation of the dead Hector with Caesar can actually be traced in the pro-Augustan Nicolaus of Damascus. In his account of Julius Caesar's assassination, Nicolaus says that 'there was not one of the conspirators still left who did not strike the body as it lay there' (καὶ οὐδεὶς ἔτι λοιπὸν ἦν ὃς οὐχὶ νεκρὸν κείμενον ἔπαιεν *Life of Augustus* 90), a mean and cowardly action that evokes the way in which the Achaeans treat Hector's dead body (*Il.* 22.371 οὐδ' ἄρα οἱ τις ἀνουτητί γε παρέστη 'and no one

stood beside him who did not strike him’).<sup>49</sup> The death of Hector thus provided the model for the heroic death of Caesar. Julius Caesar, descendant of the Trojans and protégé of Apollo, dies like Hector at the hands of his vicious enemies who wound even his lifeless corpse. If the parallel between Hector and Caesar was in play in the narrative of his assassination, then the tradition of his last words should be also linked with it. Like Hector, the dying Caesar foresees the death of his killer.

Homer endows his dying heroes with prophetic abilities and that was a common interpretation of the deaths of Patroclus and Hector in antiquity. Sextus Empiricus (*Aduersus Mathematicos* 9.21), who attributes this theory to Aristotle, argues that when the soul is separated from the body in death it takes on its own proper nature and prophesies the future. Homer’s tales of how Patroclus at the time of his death predicted the slaying of Hector and Hector the end of Achilles are cited in support of this theory. This seems to have been a widely held view in Greco-Roman antiquity. Quintus in Cicero’s *De Diuinatione* (1.64) believes in the power of dying men to prophesy and tells a story attributed to the Stoic philosopher Posidonius (c. 135-51 BCE). The story goes that a certain Rhodian, when on his death-bed, named six men of the same age and which of them would die first, second and so on. Quintus concludes:

Idque, ut modo dixi, facilius euenit appropinquante morte, ut animi futura  
augurentur. Ex quo et illud est Callani, de quo ante dixi, **et Homerici Hectoris,  
qui moriens propinquam Achilli mortem denuntiat.**

---

<sup>49</sup> Pelling (2011) 482 mentions the parallel with caution (‘Nic. Dam. 90...perhaps influenced by Hom., *Il.* 22.371’), but the similar construction (‘there was no one who did not strike the dead body’) leaves little doubt that Nicolaus is alluding to Homer.

Cicero, *De diu.* 1.65

And, as I said just now, it is when death is at hand that men most readily discern signs of the future. This is illustrated by the story which I related about Callanus [*De div.* 1.47] and by Homer's account of Hector, who, as he was dying, prophesied the early death of Achilles.

(Falconer's Loeb translation)

The story of Callanus goes as follows: Callanus of India was about to die and when Alexander asked him if he wished to say anything to him, he responded:

'Optime,' ... '**propedem te uidebo.**' Quod ita contigit; nam Babylone paucis post diebus Alexander est mortuus.

Cicero, *De diu.* 1.47

'Thank you, nothing, except that I shall see you very soon.' So it turned out, for Alexander died in Babylon a few days later.

(Falconer's Loeb translation)

The clairvoyance of dying men is not only implied in Homer, but was a widespread view attested in Aristotle, the Stoic Posidonius, and the sceptic Sextus Empiricus. Cicero, a contemporary of Julius Caesar, is probably the most relevant source; Caesar's address to Brutus needs to be read in this context. Suetonius also shared this belief. In *The deified Augustus* 99, Augustus, before he breathed his last, sees forty young men carrying him off, not a delusion but a premonition (*praesagium*), adds the historian, since the dying emperor accurately foresaw the number of praetorian soldiers that would carry his body.

Julius Caesar predicts the impending demise of his killer, just like Hector. The fact that καὶ σύ, τέκνον are his last words guarantees the prophetic accuracy of his oral epitaph since divination is the ultimate power of dying men.

Historical beliefs and epic tales converge in the account of Caesar's last words. The predictions of dying men are simultaneously related to the death of Homeric heroes and the end of great men in historiography.<sup>50</sup> The tag καὶ σύ, τέκνον is a perfect opening of a dactylic hexameter, suggesting the standard metre of funerary epigrams, epic poetry, and oracular responses. Caesar's words are interrupted by his death, but we can imagine that he would have continued his hexameter with something like καὶ σύ, τέκνον, θάνε or (to venture a complete line) καὶ σύ, τέκνον, θάνατον στυγερὸν καὶ πότμον ἐφέψεις.<sup>51</sup> Caesar's mysterious phrase remains incomplete and thus invites us to fill the gaps that are left open with his death. At the same time, his very passing right after he utters his enigmatic words gives us a clue about completing what he has started saying: 'You too,

---

<sup>50</sup> Xenophon, for instance, admires Theramenes for having the nerve to joke after he was forced to drink hemlock (*Hellenica* 2.3.56). Theramenes throws the dregs of hemlock from the cup he has just emptied and exclaims 'let this one be for beautiful Critias' in imitation of the drinking game κότταβος. The game consists in throwing the last drops from a wine-cup into a basin and wishing the health of a beloved person. Theramenes is to be admired not only for his playful spirit right before he died but also for ingeniously twisting the game in order to wish and predict the death of Critias, his executioner. Theramenes' sympotic gesture may further recall topics about the brevity of life and the inevitability of death, common discussions in a symposium.

<sup>51</sup> καὶ σύ, τέκνον, θάνατον στυγερὸν καὶ πότμον ἐφέψεις. The first syllable of τέκνον scans short, because it consists of a short vowel followed by a plosive (κ) and a nasal (ν), and can thus be syllabified τέ-κνον; see West (1982) 16-17.

son, will die just as I am dying now'.<sup>52</sup> The dramatic effect is spectacular: Caesar completes his words by dying, the very reason why he could not finish what he wanted to say. The dictator's death becomes the ultimate form of non-verbal communication.

My reading of this episode is supported by Plutarch, who tells that the ghost of Caesar visited Brutus before the battle in Philippi and told him 'you will see me at Philippi' (*Caesar* 69.11), thus foretelling his death:

ἠρώτα [ὅς] τίς ἐστίν. ἀποκρίνεται δ' αὐτῷ τὸ φάσμα· “ὁ σὸς ὦ  
 Βροῦτε δαίμων κακός· ὄψει δέ με περὶ Φιλίππου.”

Plutarch, *Caesar* 69.11

[Brutus] asked who it was. And the spectre replied to him: 'I am your ill fate, Brutus; you will see me at Philippi.'

The menacing words of Caesar's ghost resemble Callanus' last words to Alexander (*propedem te uidebo* 'I shall see you very soon'). Caesar has become Brutus' δαίμων κακός ('ill fate' or 'evil demon'), a phrase reminiscent of Hector's words to Achilles, that the Trojan hero may become the gods' curse upon his killer. We should read the tradition about Caesar's visitation to Brutus vis-à-vis the reports about his last words. Both stories cast a dead or dying Caesar threatening Brutus and predicting his death. The dictator's dying words are another version of Plutarch's story since they warn Brutus that he too, just like his victim, will soon meet his death. Of course, Caesar was right; Brutus dies

---

<sup>52</sup> Sepulchral epigrams sometimes express the deceased's wish or curse; cf *AP* 7.516 (Simonides) οἱ μὲν ἐμὲ κτείναντες ὁμοίως ἀντιτύχοιεν, / Ζεῦ Ζένη· οἱ δ' ὑπὸ γᾶν θέντες ὄναιτο βίου 'may those who killed me meet the same fate, Zeus protector of strangers, but may they who buried me enjoy life'.

when one of his friends gives him the final blow (Plutarch, *Caesar* 69.14), an end that appropriately fulfils Caesar's prophecy.

In conclusion, I suggested a different reading of Caesar's last words, which are commonly interpreted as an expression of shock at Brutus' betrayal. The tragic resonances of this scene feature prominently in Shakespeare whose appropriation of Suetonius has defined the way we understand this ancient tradition. But the epic background is also important. Caesar acts as an epic hero dying on the battlefield: he taunts his killer and foretells his death. If Caesar's assassination is Brutus' triumph, the dying dictator is there to tell his killer *memento mori*. Reading the tradition attested in Suetonius and Dio in the context of ancient epic, historiography, and philosophy can reveal unexplored facets of Caesar's famous last words. The dictator is neither surprised nor disappointed to see Brutus among the conspirators. Quite the opposite: he is ready to face his fate. His last words are a final divination that can be associated with the divine portents that appeared before his assassination. In dying, Caesar foretells death and turns into Brutus' ominous star.<sup>53</sup> Contrary to what Cassius tells Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the fault in the end may actually be in their stars.<sup>54</sup>

Durham University

IOANNIS ZIOGAS

[ioannis.ziogas@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ioannis.ziogas@durham.ac.uk)

---

<sup>53</sup> On Caesar's catasterism, which predates Augustus' Caesarian politics, and the multiple possibilities in interpreting the *sidus Iulium*, see Pandey (2013); see also Ramsey and Licht (1997).

<sup>54</sup> 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,/ But in ourselves, that we are underlings.'  
Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* 1.2.140-1.

## Bibliography

- Arnaud, P. (1998), “‘Toi aussi, mon fils, tu mangeras ta part de notre pouvoir’– Brutus le Tyrant?’, *Latomus* 57, 61-71.
- Baltussen, H. (2002), ‘Matricide Revisited: Dramatic and Rhetorical Allusion in Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio’, *Antichthon* 36, 30-40.
- Berthet, J.-F. (1978), ‘La culture homérique des Césars d’après Suétone’, *Revue des études latines* 56, 314-33.
- Brenk, F. (1999), ‘Caesar and the Evil Eye or What to Do with καὶ σὺ, τέκνον’, in F. Brenk, *Clothed in Purple Light*, 197-210 (= 1998 G. Schmeling and J. D. Mikalson (eds.), *Qui miscuit utile dulci: Festschrift Essays for Paul Lachlan MacKendrick*, 1-14).
- Carroll, M. (2008), “‘Vox tua nempe mea est’. Dialogues with the dead in Roman funerary commemoration’, *Accordia Research Papers* 11, 37-80.
- Courtney, E. (1993), *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*. Oxford.
- Cowan, E. (2016) ‘Caesar’s One Fatal Wound: Suetonius *Divus Iulius* 82.3’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 108, 361-76.
- Degl’Innocenti Pierini, R. (1975), ‘Un modulo del linguaggio critico di Cicerone (*Brutus* 76)’, *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 47, 68-85.
- De Martino, F. and Vox, O. (1996), *Lirica Greca*, 1<sup>st</sup> vol. Bari.
- Dinter, M. (2005), ‘Epic and Epigram– Minor Heroes in Virgil’s *Aeneid*’, *Classical Quarterly* 55, 153-69.
- Dubuisson, M. (1980), ‘Toi aussi, mon fils!’, *Latomus* 39, 881-90.
- Garber, M. (1987), *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality*. New York/London.
- Griffin, J. (2009), ‘Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and the Dramatic Tradition’, in M. Griffin (ed.), *A Companion to Julius Caesar*. Chichester/ Malden, MA, 371-98.
- Guarducci, M. (1974), *Epigrafia Greca*, 3<sup>rd</sup> vol. Rome.
- Hansen, P.A. (1983-9), *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca*, 2 vols. Berlin/New York.
- Henderson, J. (1998), *Fighting for Rome: Poets and Caesars, History and Civil War*. Cambridge.



- Horsfall, N. (1986), 'Virgil and the Inscriptions: A Reverse View', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 11, 44-5.
- (1999), *Virgil, Aeneid 7*. Leiden/Boston.
- (2003), *Virgil, Aeneid 11*. Leiden/Boston.
- (2013), *Virgil, Aeneid 6: A Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> vol. Berlin/Boston.
- Lattimore, R. (1962), *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, Urbana.
- Lintott, A. (2009), 'The Assassination', in M. Griffin (ed.), *A Companion to Julius Caesar*. Chichester/ Malden, 72-82.
- Maltby, R. (1991), *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*. Leeds.
- Millar, F. (1964), *A Study of Cassius Dio*. Oxford.
- Moles, J. (1983) 'Fate, Apollo, and M. Junius Brutus', *American Journal of Philology* 104, 249-56.
- Pandey, N. (2013), 'Caesar's Comet, the Julian Star, and the Invention of Augustus', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 143, 405-49.
- Pelling, C. (2002), *Plutarch and History*. Swansea.
- (2011), *Plutarch: Caesar*. Oxford.
- Ramsey, J.T. and Licht, L. (1997), *The Comet of 44 and Caesar's Funeral Games*, Atlanta.
- Royle, N. (2006), 'Julius Caesar and the Democracy to Come', in M. Wyke (ed.), 205-27.
- Russell, J. (1980), 'Julius Caesar's Last Words: A Reinterpretation', in B. Marshall (ed.), *Vindex Humanitatis. Essays in Honour of John Huntly Bishop*. Armidale, 123-8.
- Ruth, M. (1989), *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Leiden.
- Strauss, B. (2015), *The Death of Caesar: The Story of History's Most Famous Assassination*. New York.
- Tsagalis, C. (2008), *Inscribing Sorrow: Fourth Century Attic Funerary Epigrams*. Berlin/New York.
- Toher, M. (2006), 'The Earliest Depiction of Caesar and the Later Tradition', in Wyke (ed.), 29-44.
- Townend, G.B. (1960), 'The Sources of the Greek in Suetonius', *Hermes* 88, 98-120.
- Welch, K. (ed.) (2015), *Appian's Roman History: Empire and Civil War*. Swansea.

Wenskus, O. (1993), 'Zitatzwang als Motiv für Codewechsel in der lateinischen Prosa',  
*Glotta* 71, 205-16.

West, M.L. (1982), *Greek Metre*. Oxford.

Woodman, A.J. (2006), 'Tiberius and the Taste of Power: The Year 33 in Tacitus',  
*Classical Quarterly* 59, 175-89.

Wyke, M. (ed.) (2006), *Julius Caesar in Western Culture*. Malden, MA,

--- (2007), *Caesar: A Life in Western Culture*. Chicago/London.