AGAIN, POETS AND JULIUS CAESAR

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Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, a dramatization of Plutarch's account of the death of Julius Caesar and the consequences of that event in the war waged against his assassins by Mark Antony and Octavian, is particularly admired for the elegance of its plot. The main episodes in the history as Plutarch's Lives conveys them are contained in a structure that, by line count, is shorter than any of Shakespeare's English histories and all but two of his tragedies. In relation to his apparent commitment to economy in Julius Caesar, Shakespeare's inclusion in his play of two episodes involving characters identified as poets invites comment and has drawn it concertedly in three essays: Norman Holland, "The 'Cinna' and 'Cynicke' Episodes in Julius Caesar" (1960); Thomas Pughe, "What should the wars do with these jigging fools? The Poets in Julius Caesar" (1988); and Gary Taylor's "Bardicide" (1992).

A curious feature of the attention paid these scenes by all three of these essays is that none of them considers all of what is known about Cinna, the poet identified by name in Shakespeare's play. Being specific about this, however, particularly about what was known by Shakespeare of Cinna's poetry (and little more is known today than what Shakespeare knew), heightens the already remarkable effect of Shakespeare including these scenes. In this light, incidental as they remain to the historical and political questions surrounding the play's action, the poet scenes make Julius Caesar eerily predictive of the dilemmas faced by teachers of the humanities these days. Because of them, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar seems to be considering the value of poetry in a time of cataclysmic change; and it is a consideration that, typical of Shakespeare, is unflinching in its unwillingness to mount an expedient defense.

Holland and Pughe avoid the questions attendant on Cinna's poetry by assuming his name is no more than a counter for the figure of a poet. In accord with the critical assumptions implicit in close reading, they justify both 3.3 (the scene depicting the death of Cinna) and lines 123-36 of 4.3 (in which an unnamed camp poet intrudes on the quarrel of Brutus and Cassius) by emphasizing thematic connections to what they define, differently, as the prevailing concerns of the play. Holland sees 3.3 and 4.3.124-38 as "play[ing] into one of the chief complexes of imagery" in the play (sleep) and underscoring an important theme in the play, "the separation between Brutus the idealist and Cassius the realist." Pughe sees the "poets, together with some of the other minor figures [in the play, as] establish[ing] a metalevel of criticism on which the discourse of reason can be seen to deconstruct itself."

Holland, Pughe, and Taylor all notice that it is Shakespeare who makes the person who Plutarch says reconciled Brutus and Cassius in the camp scene of 4.3 into an unnamed poet, transforming him from Plutarch's "one Marcus Phaonius, that had bene a friend and follower of Cato...and [who] tooke upon him to counterfeate a Philosopher." But only Taylor, approaching the play from a more
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Historicist perspective, acknowledges that the Cinna of 3.3 is an actual, if shadowy, figure in literary history. Noting that the poet Cinna's existence is a historical fact but that his poetry has all but vanished, Taylor argues that what Shakespeare does with the two episodes in Plutarch makes *Julius Caesar* "Shakespeare's Defence of Poetry." He suggests, in effect, that in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare is defending poetry as Sir Philip Sidney does in a treatise published under that name, *The Defence of Poesie.* In so doing, Taylor says, Shakespeare means to distinguish genuine poetry, that is, his own, from that of writers whose topical satires and epigrams were ordered to be publicly burnt in 1599, the probable date of Julius Caesar's composition and performance.

Taylor pays close attention to the changes Shakespeare makes as he adapts the episodes from Plutarch's life of Brutus, observing (somewhat tendentiously, since the detail that "poore Cinna the Poet" is "torne . . . in peeces" comes from Plutarch) that Shakespeare's representation of Cinna's murder is modeled on the death of Orpheus:

> the only wholly admirable poet would have to be a murdered poet, none of whose poems survive—that is a poet like Shakespeare's Cinna. Because every action involves political and moral choice, the perfect poet must be passive, must be a victim, must be murdered. And because any surviving poem would be subject to criticism, the perfect poet's work could only be beyond criticism if it were beyond content: absent, ravaged, and murdered.

For Taylor, the implication of Shakespeare emphasizing that it is the plebeians who silence the poet is that Shakespeare distances himself from writers who, in his own day, were the object, not of public outrage, but of the government's censure: "The poet Shakespeare constructs a scenario in which the [genuine] poet is unmistakably innocent; the poet's work, unmistakably apolitical; the poet's intentions, unmistakably clear; the popular reading of the poet, unmistakably mistaken." So, Taylor argues, Shakespeare uses the episode to exonerate the real agents of censorship; and his Cinna, the martyred poet, a true poet, is nothing at all like the writers whose satires were being prohibited and destroyed.

The element of Taylor's argument that requires reconsideration, however, is the inference he draws about Shakespeare's interest in Cinna from the fact that none of his poems survive. Though it is true that only a few words of Cinna's poetry are known, Shakespeare and probably many in his audience knew perfectly well what his poem *Smyrna* was about from Ovid's retelling of its story in *Metamorphoses* 10. Acknowledging Ovid's connection to Cinna's poem has important implications for interpreting the changes Shakespeare makes in the Cinna episode and, by extension, his inclusion of a figure called a poet in the quarrel scene of 4.3.

It is as if *Julius Caesar*, in the text of it that comes down to us, catches Shakespeare reading Plutarch's account of Julius Caesar's assassination and its consequences in the civil war that followed and puzzling over the relationship between this cataclysmic event and the magnificent poetry he associated with this time and its
immediate aftermath—with the poetry of Vergil, Horace, and Ovid, all of whom wrote their greatest works under the regime of the man who triumphed at Philippi, and one of whom, Ovid, was ultimately banished from Rome, according to the literary history Shakespeare knew, by that man for, in the poet’s own account in *Tristia II*, “duo crimina, carmen et error,” two crimes, a poem and a mistake. That is, in its representation of one of the most significant moments in Roman history, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* obliquely considers a question as old as Plato and as much alive to Shakespeare and his contemporaries as it is to humanist educators today: what good is poetry? or, if some poetry’s goodness be granted, what kind of poetry is good?

In his play *Poetaster* (ca. 1601), Shakespeare’s younger contemporary Ben Jonson imagines the mature Octavian, Augustus Caesar, in conversation with poets, with Vergil, Horace, Ovid, Tibullus, and Gallus. Augustus addresses the question of poetry’s value to society by asserting that poems have value, but it is for their capacity to convey wisdom, promote virtue, and condemn vice. Vergil, the epic poet, and Horace, a satiric one, receive Augustus’s particular commendation. The play also, however, condemns a certain kind of poet and poetry. Augustus exiles “Licentious Naso . . . From all approach to our imperial court / On pain of death” (4.6.52, 55-56).

Augustus’s taste in poetry in Jonson’s play accords with the overt argument mounted by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defence*. In that treatise, which Shakespeare might well have known before it was printed in 1595 but which he had almost certainly read by the time he wrote Julius Caesar, Shakespeare would have found the argument that genuine poetry, which Sidney defines as “an art of imitation . . . a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight,” can be favorably compared to history and philosophy because it more effectively than any other form of writing can promote virtue, both in the general sense of men’s manners or behavior and in the particular sense to which Sidney repeatedly reverts, valorous action in war:

> The philosopher, therefore, and the historian are they which would win the goal [of being the supreme knowledge], the one by precept, the other by example. But both, not having both, do both halt. . . . Now doth the peerless poet perform both. . . .

Poetry, Sidney asserts, not history and not philosophy, is “the companion of camps,” the form of writing that men take to war with them to inspire them to heroism. The point is explicitly raised in the *Defence* and underscored by example:

> This Alexander [the Great of Macedon] left his schoolmaster, living Aristotle, behind him, but took dead Homer with him. He put the philosopher Callisthenes to death for his seeming philosophical, indeed mutinous, stubbornness; but the chief thing he ever was heard to wish for was that Homer had been alive.
In the two poet scenes in *Julius Caesar*, especially when considered against the form in which Shakespeare found them in Plutarch, Shakespeare seems to be calling into question if not mocking outright Sidney's argument. Both of *Julius Caesar*'s poet scenes seem to be addressing Sidney's *Defence*, but 4.3 warrants attention first as the more clear-cut instance of Shakespeare's rejection of Sidney's terms. Shakespeare read in Plutarch's life of Brutus that during the military campaign that followed the assassination an enmity arose between Brutus and Cassius: "Nowe, as it commonly hapneth in great affayres betwene two persons . . . there ranne tales and complaints betwixt them." Plutarch describes how this conflict came to a head in the city of Sardis, where the two met:

they went into a little chamber together, and bad every man avoyde, and did shut the dores to them. . . . Their friends that were without the chamber hearing them lowd within, and angry betwene them selves, they were both amased, and affrayd also lest it would grow to further matter: but yet they were commanded that no man should come to them.

It is then, according to Plutarch, that "one Marcus Phaonius, that had bene a friend and follower of Cato while he lived, and tooke upon him to counterfeate a Philosopher, not with wisedom and discretion, but with a certaine bedlem and frantick motion," forces his way into the room:

This Phaonius at that time, in despite of the doorekeepers, came into the chamber, and with a certaine scoffing and mocking gesture which he counterfeated of purpose, he rehearsed the verses which old Nestor sayd in Homer:

My Lords, I pray you harken both to mee,
For I have seene moe yeares than suchye three.

Cassius fel a laughing at him: but Brutus thrust him out of the chamber, and called him dogge, and counterfeate Cynick. Howbeit his comming in brake their strife at that time, and so they left eche other.17

Shakespeare uses only this much of the incident, omitting Plutarch's account of Phaonius's further antics to keep the company in good humor.

In 4.3 of *Julius Caesar*, the episode unfolds in fourteen lines. The intruder is not named but is described in the stage directions and speech headings as a poet. Even if this word in the direction is not authorial, other words in the episode as it unfolds ("rhyme" at line 131 and "jigging" at line 135) associate his speech with characteristics of poetry, though, significantly, with characteristics of poetry that Sidney insists are not essential to it.18 Shakespeare's translation of this character from "counterfeate" philosopher to poet recalls Sidney's argument in the *Defence* that
poetry surpasses philosophy in its capacity to inculcate virtue, and Shakespeare's imagining of the presence of a poet in the tents of an army preparing for battle likewise recalls Sidney's description of poetry as the "companion of camps." The "scoffing and mocking gesture" with which Phaonius parodies lines from Homer's \textit{Iliad} in Plutarch is not explicit in the lines Shakespeare writes for the poet, who appears to take his role in the camp very seriously:

\begin{quote}
Let me go in to see the generals.  
There is some grudge between 'em; 'tis not meet  
They be alone.
\end{quote}

When Lucilius tries to prevent his entrance, the poet responds heroically:

\begin{quote}
Nothing but death shall stay me.
\end{quote}

His admonition is likewise high-toned:

\begin{quote}
For shame, you generals, what do you mean?  
Love, and be friends, as two such men should be,  
For I have seen more years, I'm sure, than ye.
\end{quote}

His earnestness contrasts to the reactions of Brutus and Cassius, which register, in Shakespeare's text, the irrelevance of his intervention. Cassius says, "Ha, ha, how wildly doth this cynic rhyme," and Brutus is angry: "Get you hence, sirrah; saucy fellow, hence." Cassius is amused: "Bear with him, Brutus, 'tis his fashion," but Brutus is impatient:

\begin{quote}
I'll know his humour, when he knows his time.  
What should the wars do with these jigging fools?  
Companion, hence. (4.3.123-36)
\end{quote}

Glossing "companion" as a term of contempt, as editors do, is surely right.\textsuperscript{19} Sidney's use of the word to express the relationship between poetry and valorous action is decidedly perverted.

Though the reactions of Brutus and Cassius to the poet differ, they are alike in registering the inconsequentiality of what he says. Shakespeare has not followed Plutarch in using the episode to resolve the quarrel: the poet's assumption of the role of Nestor in Homer's \textit{Iliad} urging Achilles and Agamemnon to forego their differences occurs after Brutus and Cassius have clasped hands. By introducing the intrusion belatedly and translating Plutarch's counterfeit philosopher into a poet who construes his function as holding up models of conduct to Brutus and Cassius, Shakespeare seems to be registering, if only to himself, the pretension of such arguments as Sidney makes. Shakespeare seems disinclined to impute to poets here any overtly significant role in the great events he recounts beyond their capacity to provide diversion.
The other poet scene, the Cinna episode of 3.1, is a more oblique pondering of the terms of Sidney's *Defence*. In that scene, Shakespeare is not quibbling with the inadequacy of the argument Sidney puts forward to defend poetry but rather confronts directly the charges against poetry that Sidney tries to answer—its duplicity, its frivolity, its indifference to the judgment that what it represents might be considered impious or perverse. The murder of a poet named Cinna by the riotous "mutinie" of common people who set fire to Caesar's body is recounted by Plutarch in both his life of Julius Caesar and his life of Brutus. The latter account is longer and is the version in which Plutarch explicitly says Cinna is a poet:

And furthermore, when the fire was thoroughly kindled, some here, some there, tooke burning fire brands, and ranne with them to the murmurers houses that had killed him, to set them a fire. Howbeit the conspirators foreseeing the daunger before, had wisely provided for them selves, and fled. But there was a Poet called Cinna, who had bene no partaker of the conspiracy, but was alway one of Caesars chiefest friends: he dreamed the night before, that Caesar bad him to supper with him, and that he refusing to goe, Caesar was very importunate with him, and compelled him, so that at length he led him by the hand into a great darke place, where being marvelously affrayd, he was driven to follow him in spite of his hart. This dreame put him all night into a fever, and yet notwithstanding, the next morning when he heard that they caried Caesars body to buriall, being ashamed not to accompany his funerals: he went out of his house, and thrust him self into the prease of the common people that were in a great uprore. And bicause some one called him by his name, Cinna: the people thinking that he had bene that Cinna, who in an oration he made had spoken very evill of Caesar, they falling upon him in their rage, slue him outright in the market place. This made Brutus and his companions more affrayd, then any other thing, next unto the chaunge of Antonius. Wherefore they got them out of Rome, and kept at the first in the city of Antium, hoping to returne againe to Rome, when the furie of the people were a little asswaged. The which they hoped would be quickly, considering that they had to deale with a fickle and unconstant multitude, easye to be caried, and that the Senate stoode for them: who notwithstanding made no enquiery of them that had torne poore Cinna the Poet in peeces . . .

Shakespeare is a poet of great inventive power in his own right, but moments like this are occasions to observe that an important element of his genius was his knowing whom to imitate and adapt.

The description of Cinna in his dream, being led by Caesar "into a great darke place" and being afraid but being "driven to follow him in spite of his hart," is already dramatic in its aura of suspense. Shakespeare seems unable to resist writing the scene and even sets it up in 3.1 with a small exchange that the conspirators have with Publius, giving to Brutus lines that will reverberate ironically when Cinna meets his
fate. In the confusion following the assassination, Brutus says, “Where’s Publius?” Someone, the conspirator Cinna, in fact, answers, “Here, quite confounded with this mutiny”; and a nervous exchange unfolds:

METELLUS. Stand fast together, lest some friend of Caesar’s should chance—
BRUTUS. Talk not of standing. Publius, good cheer. There is no harm intended to your person, nor to no Roman else. So tell them, Publius.
CASSIUS. And leave us, Publius, lest that the people rushing on us, should do your age some mischief.
BRUTUS. Do so, and let no man abide this deed but we the doers.
(3.1.85-95)

Cinna’s brutal death will confirm just how inadequate is Brutus’s attempt to confine the chaos they have unleashed to themselves.

Shakespeare’s handling of the scene makes Cinna’s identity as a poet crucial to what transpires and characterizes him as the kind of poet particularly given to incidentally witty display. Plutarch uses Cinna’s name as he begins his account, calling him a poet, an identity that seems underscored by his vividly prophetic dream. The mob that kills him, however, as Plutarch tells it, has no sense of who he is beyond his name, which causes them to assume he is one of the assassins. Indeed, to accept Plutarch’s account as a plausible report and not his own invention (that is, as history, not poetry), a reader needs to assume that Cinna confided his prophetic dream and his motive for leaving his house before setting out on that fatal day to someone who might have passed the story along after the fact, because, in Plutarch’s telling of it, once Cinna appears in the streets, he is swept to his death without being given the opportunity to say anything.

Shakespeare rationalizes any uncertainty about the credibility of the story of Cinna’s premonition by having Cinna speak aloud about his dream and his motive in coming forth. Both are established in the four lines with which he opens the scene:

I dreamt tonight that I did feast with Caesar,
And things unluckily charge my fantasy.
I have no will to wander forth of doors,
Yet something leads me forth. (3.3.1-4)

His identity as a poet, however, in contrast to Plutarch’s account, is a point of suspense in the scene, even more postponed than his name, emerging gradually in the dialogue that ensues between him and the plebeians. First, he tries to deflect their menacing questions with verbal wit, delaying as long as possible his answer to the initial question they ask, “What is your name?” (3.3.5). His cleverness seems to incite them. When he at last replies, “Truly, my name is Cinna” (3.3.27), he finds that he has, truly, told them something that falsely fuels their mischievous intent.21 As poets often do, he has, here unwittingly, used a word with more than one signification. His name Cinna
admits two interpretations, that of friend and enemy to Caesar. Once he has said it, in vain does he assert the truth of the matter: “I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet” (3.3.29). Rather than “tear him to pieces” because “he’s a conspirator,” they “tear him for his bad verses” (3.3.28, 30).

Gaius Helvius Cinna’s name would have been known to any grammar school boy in Shakespeare’s time. Cinna and his fellow poet Catullus began their careers in the age of Pompey, whom Caesar had defeated on his own path to power. Though “three lines and a stray word” are all that survive of Cinna’s Smyrna, two things can be said with certainty about it—that it told the story of Myrrha and that the poet Catullus thought it was superb.

Catullus alludes to his friendship with Cinna in carmen 10, an anecdote of his encounter with another friend’s girlfriend (the speaker of the poem blurts out Cinna’s name to deflect the girlfriend’s attempt to get the speaker to lend him the litter he is bragging of). Catullus also addresses Cinna by name in carmen 113 to share with him a wittily salacious joke about the prostitute Mucia, who has plied her trade consistently through the years when Pompey has been consul, the first and second time. It is in carmen 95 that Cinna is more than a name, identified by Catullus as the author of Smyrna:

Smyrna, my Cinna’s opus, is published at last, nine harvests  
and nine long winters after she was begun,  
While Hortensius meantime scribbles five hundred thousand  
<ill-chosen words, never pausing, in one short day.>
Smyrna will travel as far as Satrachus’ sacred streambed;  
when the ages are hoary, Smyrna will still be read—  
unlike Volusius’ Annals, that’ll die by Padua’s river,  
their only regular use to wrap cheap fish.  
Dear to my heart is my comrade’s small monument—let the  
vulgar enjoy their bloated Antimachus.23

The reader who takes Catullus’s word on the excellence of Cinna’s poetry, and it is likely that Shakespeare would have done so because anyone who can read Latin poetry knows Catullus as an excellent poet himself, must register the irony of his prediction that his Smyrna will be read “when the ages are hoary” in contrast to the oblivion to which his contemporaries’ works would be consigned. Shakespeare might have observed that the people (“populus” at carmen 95.10) who praised tumidus Antimachus over Cinna are akin to the citizens of his play, who literalize their judgments of Cinna’s poetry by tearing his body to pieces.

The camp poet and Cinna episodes in Julius Caesar register two comments on the impulse to assert the value of poetry to a society negotiating profound change. In the camp poet episode, Shakespeare arranges things so that the model of conduct offered by the intruder in what Brutus calls his jigging poetry is belated advice, deeply irritating to Brutus, merely amusing to Cassius. The Cinna episode conveys another image of an ineffectual poet, handicapped this time by his own cleverness;
he becomes the occasion of, in this case, brutal amusement. But the Cinna episode raises, albeit away from the surface of the play, another aspect of this issue in the plebeians’ description of Cinna’s poetry as “bad verses.” So long as what Cinna wrote remains unspecified, their judgment of his work can be imagined as hasty, imperfect, unsophisticated. In relation to what Smyrna was about, however, Shakespeare’s reconstruction of the episode begins to look like the representation of an act of censorship, one that, applied to such a story as Cinna seems to have told, public schools in a modern republic would be hard pressed not to accept.

Ovid makes his retelling of Cinna’s Smyrna the longest of the songs of Orpheus, the Thracian bard whose exquisitely beautiful singing is enhanced by the irrevocable loss of his Eurydice. His singing is so ravishing that it insulates him from any harm; his music can charm even stones and trees. In this mournful but protected condition, Orpheus turns from the “graver” subjects of his earlier work to sing “Of boys beloved of gods and girls bewitched / By lawless fires who paid the price of lust.”

Myrrha is a girl consumed by a love for own father, King Cinyras. With the help of her nurse, she contrives to have sex with him without him knowing it, and she conceives by him Adonis, who bursts from her after her grief and shame have transformed her into a myrrh tree.

Ultimately, Orpheus, like Cinna, is a poet ripped apart by a mob of frantic people, all women in Orpheus’s case, who in their frenzy drown out the music of his lyre, leaving him vulnerable to their fury. Ovid connects the circumstances of his demise to the tradition that it was Opheus’s “lead that taught the folk of Thrace / The love for tender boys, to pluck the buds, / The brief springtime, with manhood still to come” (10.83-85). So, as Ovid tells it, the Thracian women assault him for his scorn of them (11.7ff.). Presumably, they are individually enraged by his scorn for each of them; but they act collectively, so their outrage seems to register the threat his poetry poses to the social order. In Ovid’s account, however, the impiety of Orpheus’s poetry proceeds not from any commitment to a subversive system of beliefs (in Hades after his death, “he found Eurydice, / And took her in his arms with leaping heart,” 11.63) but from the mad indifference induced by loss, from his sublimated desire for Eurydice, which becomes complete involvement with his art, regardless of any consequences that might result from the stories or ideas it conveys. Poetry’s involvement with its medium, language, to the point of distracting its readers from making judgments about the situations or ideas it represents, is the crime for which poets like Cinna must answer. Shakespeare represents Cinna as disdainful of his interrogators, glibly dodging with incidental cleverness the implications of the questions posed to him. Similarly, Ovid’s retelling of Smyrna exploits opportunities, presumably implicit in Cinna’s poem, for irony and witty double entendre that deflect a reader’s attention from condemning Myrrha’s incestuous love.

To value imaginative writing at all is to mount, at least implicitly and maybe, if its enemies are confrontational enough, explicitly, a defense of poetry. Julius Caesar is a play that, on the level of its major action, offers elements out of which a good argument in poetry’s defense can be constructed. It is a play that teaches a kind of history, that holds up models of human conduct constructed to allow us to consider virtue and vice as we judge the actions of the people it represents. These are the
terms of Sidney’s defense of poetry. They allow us to construct an easy defense and, on its own terms, a persuasive one. It is a wonder, then, that Shakespeare seems not to have been able to let it go at that.

It would appear that Shakespeare recognized, as teachers of him must also acknowledge, that the easy and persuasive defense is not, after all, predicated on the mysterious operations of what the best poetry is all too apt to do: to drive both language and all that it conveys to the verge of, if not beyond, coherence and acceptability. By most metrics, poetry is not defensible. It is not moral nor useful in any ordinary way. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare seems compelled to grant the validity of what those who disdain poetry say about it: that it is inherently, and, especially in moments of political crisis, at best irrelevant to the world’s workings and at worst liable to the accusation of being perverse, even dangerous, in its indifference to everything but its own logic. His camp poet, intent on doing the job of a defensible poet, misses the point entirely of the enormity that is unfolding; and his Cinna dies for being what he truly is: a poet who, if Ovid’s retelling of *Smyrna* is any measure, represented with reckless wit the consummation of indecent desire. Writing a play about the assassination of Julius Caesar, the author of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Twelfth Night*, of *Hamlet* could not, apparently, resist taking passing note of him, the first victim of citizens made profoundly fearful by radical change.

Notes


3. Holland, 439, 443. Holland’s essay assumes that Shakespeare was primarily influenced by Plutarch’s life of Caesar. It is more likely that the life of Brutus was his primary source. It is in the latter that Plutarch emphasizes that Cinna was a poet.

4. Pughe, 313.

5. Throughout this essay, I cite Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* in the translation by Sir Thomas North from the excerpts reprinted in Geoffrey Bullough’s *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 5 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964). Relevant excerpts from “The Life of Marcus Brutus” are on 98-140. This passage occurs on 114.

6. Taylor, 190.

7. Sidney’s treatise appeared in print in 1595, nine years after his death, in two somewhat different versions and under two titles: *An Apologie for Poetrie* and *The Defence of Poesie*. I cite the text of

8. Plutarch, 106.


10. Taylor, 190.


12. At 5.3.600, Augustus Caesar calls Horace, Gallus, Tibullus, Maecenas, and Vergil the “worthiest friends of Caesar.” Maecenas was a patron of poets; Gallus and Tibullus were other poets praised, respectively, by Vergil and Horace. See Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*, ed. Tom Cain (New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995), 64. Sidney does not mention Ovid’s poetry in his *Defence*, though he quotes or adapts lines from *Ars Amatoria, Remedium Amoris* (only in the version called *A Defence*), and *Tristia*, and alludes to stories of *Metamorphoses*.


15. Sidney, 56.


17. Plutarch, 114.

18. “For indeed the greatest part of poets have appareled their poetical inventions in that numerous kind of writing which is called verse—indeed but appareled, verse being but an ornament and no cause to poetry.” Sidney, 27.


20. Plutarch, 105-06.

21. The plebeians require Cinna to speak “directly,” “briefly,” “wisely,” and “truly” (3.3.9, 10, 11, 12) to the four questions they ask him: “What is your name? / Wither are you going? / Where do you dwell? / Are you a married man or a bachelor?” (3.3.5-8). Cinna plays with the symmetry between the four questions and the four requirements they impose on him, answering the last question first and “wisely,” then the second question “directly,” then the third “briefly.” This leaves “truly” to accompany his fateful declaration in response to their first question, “What is your name? / Truly, my name is Cinna.” “Truly” is a word that recurs in Sidney’s *Defence*, conspicuously when he refutes the objection made to poetry that it “is the mother of lies” and for this reason “Plato banished [poets] out of his commonwealth” (51, 52). “Truly, this is much,” Sidney writes, “if there be much truth in it. . . . [To that charge] I answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar. . . . Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth” (52). This conspicuousness of “truly” in Sidney’s *Defence* may underlie Touchstone’s rationalization of his wish that the gods had made Audrey poetical in *As You Like It* 3.3. Audrey, who claims not to know “what poetical is,” asks, “Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?” to which Touchstone replies, “No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning” (3.3.15-18).


25. Thus Shakespeare would have read this story just ahead of the tale in Ovid that he transformed into his poem *Venus and Adonis*.

26. According to Kenney, George Sandys, the seventeenth-century translator of Ovid, found these lines “too shocking to translate” (note to 10.84). He also notes (to 11.7) that when Vergil recounts the death of Orpheus in *Georgics* iv, he “delicately scouts the Alexandrian tradition [that Ovid follows]: ‘no love, no thought of marriage moved his mind.’”

27. Kenney notes to this line that “this happy ending is Ovid’s invention.” It sets up a moment of whimsical irony: “There [in Hades] hand in hand they stroll, the two together; / Sometimes he follows as she walks in front, / Sometimes he goes ahead and gazes back...” (11.64-65).

28. I am obviously assuming that, in Shakespeare’s view, Ovid was a poet like Cinna—a reasonable assumption, I think, as Ovid’s poem would be what Shakespeare would know of Cinna’s. That Shakespeare himself should be grouped with them is suggested by Frances Meres’ comment in *Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury* (1598), that “As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to Hue in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ouid liues in mellifluous & hony-tongued Shakespeare, witnes his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c.” I quote Meres from the excerpt included in Appendix C of *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 1970.

29. One example will have to suffice here:

   . . . the old nurse took her hand
   And led her to the high-raised couch and said
   “She’s yours” [ista tua est], your Majesty. “Take her”; and joined
   The pair in doom. In that incestuous bed
   The father took his flesh and blood, and calmed
   Her girlish fears and cheered her bashfulness.
   Maybe, to suit her age, he called her “daughter”
   And she him “father”—names to seal the crime.
   Filled with her father Myrrha left the room... (10.462-69)

   Kenney notes (to 10.429 and also at 10.464) that “tuus” would be used for “loved one,” though it primarily is the familiar possessive pronoun, “your own.”