JULIUS CAESAR AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT: TRACING THE LITERARY *ZEITGEIST* FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE RENAISSANCE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Few men have held more sway over their world than Gaius Julius Caesar and Alexander III of Macedon. They both led vast armies over vast lands to build vast empires, creating footprints that have resonated throughout history, influencing religions, political boundaries, and, especially, literature more than two millennia after their mutually premature deaths. They share many strengths; both are renowned for their rare charisma as leaders of men, their prodigious genius as military tacticians and strategists, their fierce bravery as warriors, and their single-minded drive in becoming two of the most successful conquerors the world has ever known. The two also share many faults; both are notorious for their unquenchable ambition, consuming pride, and occasional cruelty. Alexander and Caesar's phenomenal strengths and all-too-human weaknesses, along with the scope of their accomplishments and the nature of their deaths, make them wonderful literary characters, useful as heroes, villains, or victims, perfect for tragedy, romance, or legend. We can admire them, relate to them, pity them, admonish them, or learn from them. They can and have been used in all these ways, from the days of Plutarch to Hollywood. My purpose here is to examine how English writers viewed and depicted these men in poetry, prose, and drama, beginning in medieval England and on

through the Renaissance, in search of a pattern. In all ways, a society or culture is in a constant state of change. The *Zeitgeist* continuously moves, sometimes quickly, sometimes violently, and sometimes so slowly we cannot sense the direction until we have arrived. On every issue from race to animal cruelty, our collective mind evolves from generation to generation. This phenomenon is just as true in literature as it is in anything else. This paper looks at a sliver of that phenomenon in literature, from the medieval through the Renaissance periods, through the lenses of Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great.

I will begin with a discussion of medieval representations of Alexander and Caesar, focusing specifically on the epic romances that dominated the literary landscape of that time. These works largely treated their heroes as exemplary figures, ignoring or deemphasizing their flaws and magnifying their strengths to sometimes superhuman proportions. Such characterizations make sense, given the source materials these writers had available to them. One significant influence on medieval literature is the tradition of the Nine Worthies, a tradition that has been traced back to the French writer Jacques de Longuyon's early fourteenth-century work "Les Voeux du Paon." De Longuyon considered his Nine Worthies exemplars, meant to be examples of virtue and excellence, and divided them neatly into triads by religion: Christianity, Judaism, and Paganism. The three Christian worthies included King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey de Bouillon. The three Jewish worthies were Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus. Along with Hector, both Alexander and Caesar were included in the Nine Worthies tradition as Pagans. De Longuyon's concept spread through Europe and was used by many writers over the next three centuries. The appeal of the Nine Worthies lay in its ability to inspire

virtue by example, which was one of the primary justifications for literature. John L. Nevinson writes, "In the sixteenth century, as the prestige of the saints declined, the popularity of moralities and allegory grew in Protestant countries" (104). Interestingly, the time periods of the English Reformation and the medieval works I will discuss do provide some circumstantial evidence of a relationship between the rise of Protestantism in England and the popularity of the Nine Worthies in English literature of the Middle Ages. Whatever the cause, the Nine Worthy tradition exploded in popularity, even expanding beyond the page and becoming a fashionable subject for painters and decorators; their portraits have been discovered hanging on the walls of an Amersham Tudor house, painted on the ceilings of old Scottish mansions, and woven into the tapestries of Gothic castles (Marillier 13). On the page, the Nine Worthies feature prominently in several major medieval English works, such as *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* and Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes*.

As members of the Nine Worthies, Alexander and Caesar were intended to be models of chivalry and were described in unequivocally and unquestionably great terms. Likewise, English history books usually focused on their achievements and finer qualities, not their shortcomings. Even works which did not mention the Nine Worthies specifically would commonly accomplish the same ends through similar means. As a result, Middle English literature tended to treat Caesar and Alexander almost exclusively as men of greatness – powerful, wise, and courageous. In medieval literature, there was a pervading sense that the tremendous accomplishments of Alexander and Caesar alone justified the treatment of them as heroes. Moral questions involving fidelity, magnanimity, and mercy, while not ignored, could be considered afterthoughts, worthy of

mention only along the way to some great victory or adventure. Medieval writers tended to capitalize on opportunities to imbue their heroes with moral qualities, while they would often skirt incidents where their heroes acted with morally questionable behavior. Likewise, issues of poor judgment may be spun into some other heroic quality. For example, where Alexander rushes headfirst into battle, the writer may spin impetuosity into audacity and courage. We do not see these one-dimensional portraits as often during the Renaissance, especially on stage.

Before moving into the Renaissance, however, I will break chronology and spend a chapter analyzing Alexander and Caesar in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. As I will explain later in this paper, Plutarch was an enormous influence on Renaissance playwrights. Many scholars contend, for example, that Shakespeare used Plutarch as a direct source when writing *Julius Caesar*. In a side by side comparison, the relationship between Plutarch and Renaissance playwrights is unmistakable. Conversely, it is equally clear that medieval poets did not draw from Plutarch, as Plutarch makes an unmistakable effort to provide a balanced characterization of both Alexander and Caesar. As a result, the two men appear more human than superhuman. These three-dimensional depictions are almost entirely absent from medieval representations of Alexander and Caesar, but they are the engine driving the dramatic intensity of Renaissance plays.

The final two chapters will discuss representations of Caesar and Alexander in Renaissance drama. Plutarch's renditions of Caesar and Alexander provide a balanced view of each character, the qualities that made them at once beloved and vilified. During the Renaissance, English readers found a new interest in the classics, and writers like Plutarch were reborn and translated into English. The popularity of classical writers

changed the landscape of Renaissance literature, especially in the playhouses, where Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great were presented in an entirely new way. Caesar, for example, ran the gamut from villain to tragic hero, but even his most flattering portrait included towering character flaws. Shakespeare's Caesar is famous for his damning pride, which allowed his assassins to maneuver around his supreme intellect and justified suspicion. No longer would his many impressive qualities be the sum of his character. This philosophy of characterization led to more vivid, realistic, and engaging protagonists and created a greater sense of drama in the narratives.

I must be careful not to imply that Plutarch's balanced approach to characterization was uniformly adopted across Renaissance literature. In most any aspect of culture in most any period of time, there are those who represent the rearguard, those who represent the vanguard, and those who fall somewhere in the middle. Such was the case during the Renaissance; not every writer saw the purpose of literature the same way. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, for example, has much more in common with the medieval Alexander romances than Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* when it comes to characterization. Spenser, more interested in Homer and Virgil than Plutarch, states his intention in his "Letter to Raleigh," "I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall virtues, as Aristotle hath devised, the which is the purpose of these first twelve books" (136). The didactic approach in Spenser's allegory sacrifices some of the dramatic interest of a three-dimensional, complex protagonist for the idealized mirror found in his Arthur. Humphrey Tonkin describes the poem as "a book of good conduct [. . .] but cast in poetry" (45). Spenser's

influence, which can easily be underestimated today, was an important force in the early 1600s. Tonkin explains:

> Spenser's influence is most obviously discernible in the so-called Spenserian poets of the early seventeenth century, those poets, like Michael Drayton, William Browne, John Wither and the brothers Giles and Phineas Fletcher, who specifically look back to Spenser, at least in some of their works, as their inspiration. It is fashionable these days largely to discount this group of minor poets, whose backward-looking conservatism is generally judged to have passed little on to the poets of mid-century, but in reality their work dominated the publishing scene in the early 1600s, particularly following the re-publication of *The Faerie Queene* in 1609 and the collected edition of Spenser's works in 1611. (206)

Some of the differences between the poetry of Spenser and his successors and the plays of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the like can be explained by the perceived purposes of different genres of literature. According to Elizabeth Heale, epic poetry was to be "written in the highest style and to be undertaken only after the poet's skill and knowledge had properly matured." Its higher purpose was celebrating England, accounting for Arthur as the embodiment of England's greatness, both past and future (12). In this sense, the poem's dedication to Elizabeth takes on greater significance. Just as Virgil's *Aeneid* celebrates the rule of Augustus Caesar in Rome, *The Faerie Queene* celebrates the Tudor dynasty, to which Elizabeth belongs, suggesting that the Tudor lineage can be traced back to Arthur. Tonkin elaborates on Heale's previous point:

> There was a story that Arthur would one day return. He was much more, in fact, than a simple piece of British history, however fanciful. His role in folklore made him almost a parallel of Christ himself – a national hero whose return would lead the ancient British nation to greatness. Hence the arrival of the Tudors in the late fifteenth century was a kind of return[.] (19)

Clearly, epic poetry was considered serious business. Spenser had a solemn duty, he believed, to inspire and enlighten through the examples of pristine characters. Dramatic complexity was the concern of the playhouses. As drama took a position of greater prominence in the Elizabethan and through the Jacobean periods, the purely didactic version of the epic poem gave way. Milton would eventually adjust; the Satan of his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, is one of the most fascinatingly complex characters in literature and Adam is a clearly flawed protagonist.

In his seminal *The Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney, a friend of Spenser, adds another dynamic to the role of the epic poem, which, he claims, “is not only a kind, but the best and most accomplished kind of poetry,” because “the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy” (122; lines 863-67). Here we see Sidney’s clear approval of the didactic nature of *The Faerie Queen*. Like Spenser, he viewed the purpose of literature, especially the epic poem, as primarily didactic. Lock-step with Spenser, Sidney believed a literary hero should represent the best of mankind, a model of virtue to inspire all. S.K. Heninger, Jr. writes, “Sidney pursues his argument by citing examples. The true poet is he who, like Xenophon in the *Cyropaedia*, uses the arts of language to fashion an image of the hero in action” (241). In *The Defense of Poesy*, Xenophon’s Cyrus serves as

Sidney's model. According to Sidney, Xenophon combined an imitation of history with imagination to create a perfect character for emulation, to "not only make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses" (106; 217-19). Sidney's view was commonplace in the Renaissance when it came to the epic poem; however, his criticism of his contemporary drama seemed to be out of touch.

While a strong supporter of Spenser's work, as well as other poetry he considered traditional, Sidney was quite opinionated in what he perceived to be the weakness of dramatic writing during his time. Some of these opinions, from our perspective, seem somewhat prejudicial towards the more traditional heroic or epic poetry. For example, the following criticism seems petty, and, judging by the trajectory of theater in Sidney's time, was largely ignored:

> [W]here you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived? Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers: and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place: and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke: and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. While in the meantime two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers: and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? (134-35; 1369-80)

Did the requirement of an imagination really ruin Sidney's theater-going experience so profoundly? In any case, most of England must have disagreed with him, since such plays would prove to be enormously popular. Perhaps Shakespeare, in his prologue to *Henry V* two decades later, was speaking to Sidney specifically:

> Can this cockpit hold
>
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
>
> Within this wooden O the very casques
>
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?
>
> [. . . . .]
>
> And let us, ciphers to this great account,
>
> On your imaginary forces work. (Prologue.11-14, 17-18)

Sidney's problem with drama seems to lie in the difference between telling and showing, or "reporting and representing" (135;1399-1400). Epic poetry, he believes, has the advantage because there is no conceit in the retelling of a story or the description of multiple locations. Drama, on the other hand, is about showing, and a play cannot show its audience horses, armies, or castles. Four centuries of critics and audiences have sided with Shakespeare on this issue. Sidney's criticism of drama, however, extends beyond these superficial concerns:

> But besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and

> commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragic-comedy obtained. (136; 1421-27)

Despite the apparent silliness in Sidney's complaint against forced imagination in the theater, this rigid insistence on tradition and form is the greatest weakness in Sidney's dramatic criticism. There will always be a vanguard of artists pushing their art, whichever form it may be, into new directions, as Frederick S. Boas writes, "It was an irony of fortune that before the *Defence* was to appear in print Lyly, Kyd, Marlowe and the youthful Shakespeare were to invalidate Sidney's special pleading, and to endow the English theatre with novel and inspiring dramatic types" (55).

The differences between the use of Alexander and Caesar in medieval epics and Renaissance drama do not stop at their characterizations. Through the course of my research, I found that medieval writers were much more interested in Alexander than Caesar. Alexander was ubiquitous, having several long works dedicated to his story. Caesar, on the other hand, appeared mostly in cameos, usually mentioned alongside other greats typical of the Nine Worthy tradition. Conversely, several Renaissance plays focused on Caesar's life and death, while Alexander became more of an ancillary character. In addition to studying the changing depictions of these men over time, I will examine the changing interest in them as well. The simplest way to approach this question is to consider the agendas of the writers in each time period. During the Middle Ages, the epic romance was fashionable, and Alexander's life is perfectly suited for an imaginative romance. His courage, charisma, drive, and accomplishments epitomized the medieval conception of heroism. He traveled the world in his conquests, visiting foreign places which would be strange and wondrous to the medieval Englishman. These travels

were fertile ground for Middle English writers looking to add excitement and spectacle to their work; all of the Alexander romances included heroic battles with exotic armies, amiable encounters with exotic women, fascinating visits to exotic cities, and mesmerizing fights with exotic creatures.

Julius Caesar's personal characteristics are similar to Alexander's, but his biography was not as ready-made for the epic poem. His battles kept him mostly around the continent of Europe and northern Africa, travels which did not offer the intrigue of Alexander's travels to the East. The Renaissance and its emphasis on drama ushered in a renewal of interest in the conceptions of tragedy and comedy from classical antiquity. Alexander's biography met the broader definition of *tragedy* in the Middle Ages, which was simply the untimely fall of a great person. Alexander died young, but his death was not tied directly to specific flaws in his character. Renaissance writers adopted the Aristotelian definition of *tragedy*, in which the hero's death is the result of one or two tragic flaws. For this reason, Caesar became a much more obvious subject. Unlike Alexander, Caesar's assassination was directly related to clearly identifiable flaws in his character. The Aristotelian tragic form, as fashionable during the Renaissance as the romance was during the Middle Ages, has little use for Alexander's biography as source material. Caesar, on the other hand, appears to be a tragic hero by design.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge a few scholars whose work formed the foundation of mine. Through my research, I have found scholarship which thoroughly discussed the epic Alexander romances of the Middle Ages and the several Renaissance tragedies featuring Julius Caesar, but none that attempted to connect the two men, genres, or time periods. Trevor Owen's study, "Julius Caesar in English Literature from Chaucer

through the Renaissance," was fundamental to my approach to those primary texts. He traces the evolution of Caesar in early medieval literature like *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, which drew from early historical texts such as Robert Manning's *The Story of England*, through the renewed interest in Plutarch during the Renaissance and the influence of that interest on drama of that time period. Albert Cook and Naomichi Yamada each provide studies of Plutarch's influence on Shakespeare, but Owen's study is comprehensive and I drew most heavily from it. Likewise, I made great use of Jeffrey Yu's "Renaissance Caesars and the Poetics of Ambiguity: Dramatic Representations of Julius Caesar in the English Renaissance." He provides a more focused look at the depictions of Caesar on the Renaissance stage. Several scholars have addressed Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey*, and the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge*, but Yu does a wonderful job of putting those plays together in a single context, establishing the pattern of three-dimensional characterization which I discuss. I found no comprehensive study of Caesar in the Middle Ages, only mentions of him in studies of larger works, such as Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*.

As for Alexander in the Renaissance, I was able to find very little scholarship other than that dealing with Lyly's *Campaspe*. Herbert Joseph Batt wrote a critical edition of *Campaspe* in 1975 which did not focus on Lyly's treatment of Alexander. Leah Scaggs contributes an article length discussion of *Campaspe* and John Dover Wilson briefly discusses the play in his book on Lyly, but there is no study that attempts to compare *Campaspe* to medieval works or put it into a larger context involving Caesar. There are multiple comprehensive studies of Alexander in medieval literature which provide in-depth analysis of all aspects of those works, but none that attempt to bridge the

gap between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Luann Marie Kitchel's "A Critical Study of the Middle English Alexander Romances," which compares the depictions of Alexander in five romances, was crucial to that chapter of my thesis. I take her work and add smaller medieval examples of Alexander, such as those written by Hoccleve and Chaucer. I also make use of Gerrit H.V. Bunt's *Alexander the Great in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, which overlaps much of Kitchel's work in regards to my specific needs. Elizabeth Ann Flynn's "The Marvellous Element in the Middle English Alexander Romances" is thorough in its analysis of the subject indicated in its title, but pays little attention to the specific characterizations of Alexander in those works.

For my part, I have little to add to the separate discussions of the medieval Alexander or the Renaissance Caesar. My hope with this thesis is to use those discussions as a launching point for a more specific study of the trends involving the treatment of Alexander and Caesar in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, what factors contributed to those trends, and how the biographies of the those two historical figures fit into the popular genres of those two periods.

CHAPTER II

CAESAR AND ALEXANDER IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

The French tradition of the Nine Worthies, dating back at least to the 1312 poem "Les Voeux du Paon," places Caesar and Alexander alongside Joshua, David, Hector, Arthur, and Charlemagne, all well-known men of greatness. The Nine Worthies soon migrated from France to English Poetry. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* , for example, devotes more than 300 lines to "nyne of the beste / That ever wy in this werlde wiste appon erthe" (297-98), two of whom are Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great. In the poem, the eldest and wisest of the three "ages" uses the Nine Worthies as "mirrours," or models of greatness, to instruct his younger companions on how one should live. By studying these examples, we get a glimpse of what qualities were considered admirable by medieval writers. In some ways, this poem is a microcosm for what we see in longer medieval works. The poet begins with the story of Hector, his death at the hands of Achilles and the subsequent fall of Troy, and then says of Alexander:

> Aftir this Sir Alysaunder alle the world wane,
> Bothe the see and the sonde and the sadde erthe,
> The iles of the Oryent to Ercules boundes –
> Ther Ely and Ennoke ever hafe bene sythen,
> And to the come of Antechriste unclosede be thay never[.] (333-36)

Clearly, the key to Alexander's greatness and the reason he is one of the Nine Worthies is his accomplishments as a world-conqueror. The poet does not touch on moral qualities, such as mercy, compassion, or generosity, but focuses almost entirely on what Alexander is able to achieve, a common characteristic of Alexander literature during the Middle Ages.

As I will cover extensively in later paragraphs, Alexander becomes the subject of several Middle English romances. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* poet indicates, briefly, why Alexander was an ideal hero for such stories. Alexander is more than a successful general; his conquest spanned continents, taking him to exotic lands and pitting him against foreign enemies and fantastic creatures. As the poet explains, Alexander's adventures stretch from the Orient to "Ercules boundes," an allusion to Hercules' trek to the edge of the western world and into the Earthly Paradise, all excellent material for imaginative Middle English writers. In this way, Julius Caesar does not measure up to Alexander the Great; despite his impressive list of accomplishments, the events of Caesar's life do not fit the shape of an epic romance so well as Alexander's. Interestingly, the poet of *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* does not seem to be as interested in Caesar's life either, spending a mere seventeen lives on Caesar, half of which are devoted to Caesar's relatively minor and unsuccessful exploits in England. The eldest figure alludes to Ceaser's brush with British history, "Thane Sir Sezere hymselven, that Julyus was hatten, / Alle Inglande he aughte at his awnn will […] The trewe toure of Londone in his tyme he makede" (405-06, 408). Here, the poet credits Caesar with the construction of the Tower of London, an untrue legend later repeated by Shakespeare's Richard III. The poet also claims, as was believed, that Caesar was

responsible for Dover Castle. The poet does not, however, spend much time describing Caesar's successful campaigns, the massive power he obtained, or the intrigue of his assassination. In this poem, we can see the esteem medieval Englishmen held for Caesar, their one-time failed conqueror, but we do not see the same fascination that we do with Alexander. Indeed, literature of the Middle Ages is dominated by massive works on Alexander, with Caesar relegated to mostly small appearances.

Another aspect of Middle English literature epitomized in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* is the definition of literary tragedy in the Middle Ages. The poet briefly mentions Alexander's adventures in Babylon and romance with Candace and then ends his discussion of Alexander by lamenting:

> [T]hat pereles prynce was puysonede to dede,
> Thare he was dede of a drynke, as dole es to here,
> That the curssede Cassander in a cowpe hym broghte,
> He conquered with conquest kyngdomes twelve,
> Ande dalte thaym to his dussypers when he the dethe tholde;
> And thus the worthiest of this werlde went to his ende. (399-404)

Plutarch, unread by medieval writers, disputes the claim that Alexander was poisoned, but that was the legend during the Middle Ages. These final words over Alexander convey anger and sadness over his untimely death and characterize the understanding of tragedy during this time period. For medieval writers, a tragedy was simply the fall of a great person, and Alexander's murder constituted a great tragedy because his fall came from one of the highest point ever achieved.

Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale* echoes this idea of tragedy. Like *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, we can use the Monk's attitudes towards Alexander and Caesar as a typical example of the common attitudes towards them in Middle English literature. While not strictly part of the Nine Worthies tradition, it is quite similar to the stories told in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, except with an emphasis on the tragic nature of his examples. According to Helen Phillips, "The Monk's stories are *exempla*: didactic stories illustrating a lesson – or rather two lessons – that prosperity in this world is transient and that we should put no trust in it. For medieval writers this was the definition of tragedy" (180). *The Monk's Tale* includes the stories of both Alexander and Julius Caesar, but focuses on their demise more than their accomplishments. The Monk explains his use of the word *tragedy* succinctly:

> Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
>
> As olde bokes maken us memorie,
>
> Of him that stood in greet prosperitee
>
> And is y-fallen out of heigh degree
>
> Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly (lines 249-53).

The Monk's definition was common during Chaucer's time, and fits the lives of both Alexander and Caesar perfectly. Both men achieved nearly impossible feats, and both men died early and unnaturally. Of Alexander, Chaucer writes:

> The storie of Alisaundre is so commune,
>
> That every wight that hath discrecioun
>
> Hath herd somewhat or al of his fortune.
>
> [. . . . .]

Comparisoun might never yit be maked

Bitwixe him and another conqueror;

For al this world for drede of him hath quaked[.] (743-53)

As with *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, the greatness of Chaucer's Alexander the man is synonymous with the achievements of Alexander the conqueror. The Monk admits here that Alexander's story is common knowledge, so little detail about those achievements is deemed necessary, as he says, "[A]s fer as man may ryde or go, / The world was his, what sholde I more devyse?" (261). The knight eventually silences the Monk for his lack of story-telling ability, but not before the Monk relates, with characteristically few details, the circumstances of Alexander's death:

O worthy gentil Alisaundre, allas!

That ever sholde fallen swich a cas!

Empoisoned of thyn owene folk thou were;

Thy 'sys' fortune hath turned into 'as',

And yit for thee ne weep she never a tere! (770-74)

The Monk identifies Alexander's story as a tragedy himself, despite the absence of the Aristotelian tragic flaw. Phillips explains, "Though scholars in the Middle Ages were aware that classical tragedy had been a theatrical genre, the normal medieval concept of tragedy is as narrative" which held that "what tragedies are about is the action of Fortune in overturning happy kingdoms" (181). We will eventually see English writer's move towards Aristotle's definition during the Renaissance, but in the Middle Ages, a tragedy merely represented an unfortunate fall from greatness, usually to the detriment of everyone.

The Monk's retelling of Caesar's fall is similar in most ways to his story of Alexander. As with Alexander, the Monk is effusive in praise of Caesar:

By wisedom, manhede, and by gret labour

From humble bed to roial magestree

Up roos he, Julius the conquerour

That wan al thoccident by land and see

By strengthe of hand, or ells by tretee,

And unto Rome made hem tributarie[.] (783-88)

As with Alexander, the Monk's esteem for Caesar is unequivocal, and he presents Caesar as a powerful military leader, as well as a wise man capable of negotiating a treaty. As with Alexander, too, this basic view of Caesar is carried through the Middle Ages.

Additionally, the Monk's emphasis on the tragic nature of Caesar's death mirrors the Monk's treatment of Alexander's death. We do not see the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, as we do later with Shakespeare's arrogant and ambitious Caesar. Both men are lauded for "winning wide territorial power," and "the motif of friends who turn into betrayers, including Fortune, unties them also" (Phillip 183). Here, the Monk flatly condemns Brutus as envious and traitorous for leading the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar. Again, the Monk speaks fondly of Caesar as Caesar lies dying:

So manly was this Julius of herte

And so wel lovede estaatly honestee,

That though hise deedly woundes soore smere,

His mantel over hise hypes caste he,

For no man sholde seen his privetee.

And as he lay of deying in a traunce,

And wiste verraily that deed was hee,

Of honestee yet hadde he remembraunce. (823-30)

Chaucer's Caesar is not a fierce, ruthless conqueror, but a noble emperor possessed entirely of virtue. His death is unfortunate and unjustified; indeed, Rome was deprived of a great leader. Writers before and after the Middle Ages have, at the very least, questioned the veracity of that claim.

Similarly, in his *The Regiment of Princes*, Thomas Hoccleve uses Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great as positive mirrors of kingship, depicting them as models of a merciful ruler. Hoccleve compares his *Regiment* to the famous letters between Aristotle and Alexander, implicitly comparing his pupil, the future Henry V, to the Macedonian conqueror:

Arestotle, most famous Philosofre,

His Epistles to Alisaundre sent,

Whos sentence is wel bette than gold in cofre,

And more holsomer grounded to trewe entent:

Far all þat euer the Epistles ment,

To settë was þis worthy Conqueror,

In reulë, how to sústene his honour. (lines 2038-44).

Here, Alexander's worthiness is evidently self-evident, as Hoccleve makes no effort to justify that claim. Later, Hoccleve advises, "Ther is no þing, as witnessith a storie, / Makyth a knight so schynynge in renoun, / Whan þat he of his foos hath þe victórie" (3228-30), and he uses Caesar as an example, writing "Whan Cesar, emperor, eek on a

day / Pompeyë saw biforn hym lad & bounde, / Cesar in terës saltë gan habounde" (3246-48). Hoccleve does not provide any other details for the anecdote, nor does he attempt to balance his characterization of Caesar by mentioning weaker qualities; he essentially presents Caesar as a two-dimensional representation of one virtue and relies on the cachet of Caesar's name to deliver the point. The fact that Caesar and Alexander are so often presented in such a manner and associated with such illustrious men as the Nine Worthies shows the great reverence in which the people of the later Middle Ages held them, even if their opinions were built on historically inaccurate perceptions. These perceptions, for the most part, persisted for the next two centuries.

While Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* was one of the oldest accounts of Julius Caesar, it was not widely circulated until it was translated into French and English in the sixteenth century. According to Marianne Pade, "In the fourteenth century Greek was used for specific projects. Only when Greek became coupled with Latin and fixed itself to the core of Latin studies did Hellenism become a permanent aspect of western cultural and intellectual life" (20). Robert Manning's *The Story of England* was written in 1338 and was the most complete account available during its time. Manning derived his story from the French *rute d'Angleterre*, written in 1155, which derived its story from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, written in 1137 (Owen 7). There had been an established tradition of Caesar's history prior to Plutarch's introduction into mainstream English literature. This tradition devotes special attention to Caesar's exploits in Britain and, while generally considered nonhistorical now, was universally accepted by most medieval Englishmen. The fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English chronicles describe battle after battle between Britain and Caesar, yet there is surprisingly little hostility

directed at Caesar. In fact, he was regarded as an extremely worthy opponent and a man of great eminence, as Trevor Owens explains, "Caesar is, at times, anachronistically referred to as 'the emperor,' and the British chroniclers take pride in the fact that Britons were able to stand up to the man who had conquered the world. The more eminent the opponent, the more worthy are the people who courageously oppose him" (9). In Manning's account, Caesar was powerful, learned, wise, and liberal, despite being an enemy of Britain. In many ways, Caesar was as much a symbol as a real historical figure. His name had been synonymous with the word *emperor* since Augustus ruled under Caesar's name. The name *Caesar*, apart from the actual man, symbolized excellence in virtually every way (Owen 20).

As with Caesar, the medieval world's perception of Alexander the Great was a combination of history and myth, with no effort to distinguish between the two. Writers of the Middle Ages knew that Alexander died young, had conquered most of his known world before the age of thirty, and had studied under Aristotle as a youth. Also, according to Elizabeth Ann Flynn, they believed as fact the more fantastical elements of Alexander's story: that his mother was tricked into bed by his real father, the magician and Egyptian king Neptanabus; that Philip was commanded by the gods to choose as his successor the conqueror of the wild, man-eating horse Bucephalus, an embellished version of Plutarch's story of Alexander taming the wild horse of the same name; and that after encountering the exotic tribes of the Amazons and defeating the tribes of Gog and Magog, Alexander is led into a garden similar to Eden and told by talking trees that he would die within a year (3-4). Plutarch, who was, again, not attempting to write pure history, made reference to a few legendary accounts, but they were minor compared to

those listed above. He makes no mention of an Egyptian magician/king, although mystical elements do surround Alexander's birth. He writes:

> The night before the consummation of the marriage, she dreamed, that a thunder-bolt fell upon her belly, which kindled a great fire, and that the flame extended itself far and wide before it disappeared. And some time after the marriage, Philip dreamed that he sealed up the queen's womb with a seal, the impression of which he thought was a lion. Most of the interpreters believed the dream announced some reason to doubt the honour of Olympias, and that Philip ought to look more closely at her conduct. But Aristander, of Themesus, said, it only denoted that the queen was pregnant; for a seal is never put upon any thing that is empty; and that the child would prove a boy, of a bold and lionlike courage. (465)

Plutarch also mentions Philip seeing his wife in bed with a serpent and becaming cold to her, "abstain[ing] from her embraces because he thought them taken up by some superior being," and admits a rumor circulated of Alexander as the semi-divine son of Jupiter Ammon, a rumor which Olympias rejected as "an impious fiction" (465). These stories surrounding Alexander's birth represent the extent to which Plutarch delves into legend. In regard to Alexander's life and deeds, Plutarch's account reads more like history than myth.

Plutarch's *Lives*, however, was not a significant source of information for medieval writers, which helps explain the more fantastical elements of the Alexander romances of the Middle Ages. Flynn credits the Hellenistic Greek romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes as the most influential source of knowledge about Alexander during the Middle Ages. The text no longer survives but, as she explains, was translated into two

Latin versions which would become, through multiple translations, the primary sources for all English versions (6). Additionally, some of the more marvelous elements of the legend, especially those taking place in India, were borrowed from an Old English version of Alexander's letter to Aristotle (DiMarco and Perelman 27). These Latin accounts help illuminate the presence of the wilder parts of Alexander's legend, which medieval England believed to be true but were conspicuously absent from Plutarch's *Lives*. For example, Flynn sheds light on the genesis of the idea that Alexander was fathered by Neptanabus:

> The original romance was written by a patriotic Egyptian living in a city founded by Alexander. The author seems to have wanted to glorify his hero and to erase the shame of Egypt's having been conquered by Alexander. If Alexander were not a Macedonian, but the illegitimate son of the last king of Egypt, then the conquest would be merely a reinstatement of the rightful king. (6)

With the exception of theologians and moralist, medieval writers had a basically simple view of Alexander as a world-conqueror, and, judging him based upon that single quality, naturally held great admiration for arguably the greatest world-conqueror in human history, placing him fittingly alongside Caesar in the Nine Worthies tradition. Alexander's motive for uniting three continents could be labeled ambition, pride, vanity, or even megalomania; we see Plutarch hint at such, despite his obvious admiration for Alexander, and we will see Renaissance writers explore the same ideas in their character studies. Medieval writers, however, tended to look upon Alexander's quest for personal glory and belief in his own destiny as a part of what makes him admirable. They saw in him a great mind, a courageous spirit, courtesy, wisdom, and a rare determination which

allowed him to accomplish such lofty goals, qualities that made Alexander an excellent companion to Caesar as a member of the Nine Worthies. As George Cary argues, "Personal valour and personal hardiness, no less than greatness of mind, could not only easily be deduced from the Latin sources, but were also necessary to the hero of a *chanson de geste* or of a courtly romance" (196). We see this portrait of Alexander most commonly presented in the works of medieval English writers, who drew from their Latin sources the details needed to weave stories more similar to an Arthurian romance than actual history.

There are five surviving Alexander romances derived from the Latin *Historia de Preliis*, all of which are essentially the same in both their treatment of Alexander and in their narratives, with the exception of a few episodes and their specific approaches to establishing Alexander's greatness. These works are the syllabic *Kyng Alisaunder*; the prose *Life of Alexander*; the alliterative *Alexander A*; *Alexander B*, or *Alexander and Didimus*; and *Alexander C*, or *Wars of Alexander*. Because the five poems depict Alexander so similarly, it suffices my purpose to limit the scope of my discussion to *Kyng Alisaunder* and *Wars of Alexander*. The earliest of the five, *Kyng Alisaunder*, written around the year 1340, is probably the most well-known of the group. The poet adapts familiar aspects of Alexander's life into a courtly romance, where Olympias is the lady of a court and Alexander is much like a medieval knight, travelling from one strange and exotic locale to the next in search of wonders. The poet pronounces immediately that Alexander possesses two of the most important kingly virtues:

And ȝe schole here anoble ieste

Of Alisaundre þeo riche kyng

Þat dude by his maistres techyng

And ouercom also Y fynde

Darie of Pors and Pore of Ynde

And mony oþer whyt and heynde (lines 30-35)

Luann Kitchel explains, “It is not surprising that Alexander should be extolled as a mighty and wise-warrior king since […] these two qualities are quite commonplace in the medieval representation of the ideal hero.” She goes on to say that, while the poet does not mention these qualities directly throughout the story of Alexander’s conception and birth, they are implied several times in the form of predictions of future greatness (27).

The story begins with Neptanabus, in an act of revenge against Philip, convincing Olympias that Philip will, as per prophecy, take a younger wife, but she would be avenged through her son, begotten by Jupiter Ammon. Neptanabus claims of Alexander, “Of alle kynges he worþ þe beste” (313) and that “Jn eorþe no worþ him non yliche” (400). She puts her faith in the hands of Neptanabus, who enters her bed disguised as the god, part dragon and part ram, and impregnates her. The poet describes the encounter thus:

Þus charmed Neptanabus

Þe lady in hire bed lay

Aboute mydnyȝt ar þe day

[. . . . .]

Hire þouȝt adragon a doun lyȝt

To hire chaumbre he made his flyȝt

Jn he cam to hire bour

And crepe vnder hire couertour

Mony siþes he hire kust

And faste in his armes he hire þreost

And went away so dragon wild

And grete he laft hire wiþ child (340-42, 345-52)

The poet makes it clear that Neptanabus is only disguised as a god and Alexander is one-hundred percent mortal. This is an important part of Alexander's greatness, as Cary writes, "It is this view of Alexander as man unaided that lies at the heart of the secular portrait" (196). If Alexander were some part god, aided by the gods, or given some divine directive by the Christian god, then his accomplishments as a conqueror have to be shared. The interpreters of Philip's dream echo Neptanabus's predictions of Alexander's greatness, that "He schal beo kyng al aboue" (508). Again, when we compare this version of Alexander's origins to Plutarch's, with the mystical predictions that Alexander will become a mighty, virtuous king, added with the revenge and deceit of Neptanabus, we can see a deliberate attempt at romance, if not necessarily logical storytelling. When Alexander was born:

Þeo eorþe schok þe see by cam grene

Þeo sunne wiþ drouȝ schynyng schene

Þeo mone hire schewed and by cam black

Þeo þundur made mony acrak (634-37)

Philip considers these unnatural sights ominous and accuses Olympias of producing an evil offspring: "Kyng Phelip saide to þe modur / þou hast born a sori foder" (640-41). Oddly, nothing more is made of Philip's concern. Within a few lines, the poet has Child

Alexander learning all the things appropriate for the son of a king, such as military and courtly affairs, and the reader is quickly moving on to Alexander's Sword in the Stone moment, the taming of Bulciphal (Bucephalus).

Kyng Alisaunder's story of young Alexander taming the ferocious horse of legend is quite like the Bucephalus episode in Plutarch's *Lives*, with one exception: in this version, Philip consults an oracle to learn which of his two sons should be named his successor and is told whichever can ride Bucephalus shall be his heir. Alexander leaps at the challenge:

> Ac Alisaundre leop on his rugge
> So agoldfynch doþ on þhegge
> Hit monteþ and he let him gon
> So of bowe doþ the flon
> Faste he sat and huld þe reyne
> Vp and doun he hit demeyniþ
> And doþ hit turne in ȝerdis leynþe
> And aforced hit by streynthe
> He was bote tweol ȝeir old
> His dedis weore strong and bold (778-87)

Not only does the poet celebrate the twelve year-old Alexander's courage and audacity, but he praises the boy's remarkable physical strength as well. Here we see the "personal valour and personal hardiness" which Cary contends is necessary for the hero of a courtly romance.

In battle, the poet repeats time and again that as a warrior, Alexander has no equal, emphasizing his might and bravery at almost every opportunity. Alexander's first battle, against King Nicholas of Carthage, takes place in the middle of a field, where the leaders of the armies fight one-on-one to decide the victor. This battle serves as our introduction to Alexander the Warrior, he now having graduated from Alexander the Prodigy. Kitchel explains, "Since this is Alexander's first battle, the poet gives it a full-blown treatment: a verbal confrontation between Alexander and Nicholas in which Alexander maintains his aplomb in the face of Nicholas's insults and a long, difficult battle between the two armies," with the final confrontation held back until the end for emphasis (29). Despite the poet's claim that Nicholas is an exceptional opponent, Alexander defeats him with relative ease. As the narrative moves from battle to battle, the poet makes every effort to reassert Alexander's standing as an ideal warrior-king; at almost every occasion, Alexander fights side-by-side with his men, often leading the charge and delivering the first blow. It is this characteristic that most separates Alexander from his definitive enemy, Darius, as Kitchel explains, "[Alexander] therefore stands in contrast to Darius who hangs back until one of his lords accuses him of cowardice." She quotes Darius's dissenter, "He is þe first in vche bataile: / þou art bihynde ay in þhe tayle" (30).

In addition to battlefield valor and fighting ability, the *Kyng Alisaunder* poet makes a determined effort to imbue his portrait of Alexander with the virtue of wisdom. There are too many examples to list, so I will focus on one episode, his second conquest, of Mantona, on behalf of his father Philip, which epitomizes Alexander the Wise. The king receives word from the people of Mantona that they are renouncing their allegiance

to Macedonia and is lost for a wise course of action, an odd moment of hesitation from the man who conquered Egypt. Philip's uncharacteristic indecisiveness allows the poet to accentuate Alexander's preternatural wisdom. Philip defers to Alexander in this exchange:

> Þhe kynges veynes waxen colde
>
> And nuste neuer what he do myȝt
>
> Ac by counsail of his knyȝtis
>
> He tok Alisaundre þis deray
>
> [. . . . .]
>
> To mouþ he [Alexander] set his olifaunt
>
> He blowiþ smert and loude sones
>
> Þeo knyȝtis armed heom at ones
>
> Þey vnderstode þat hit was need
>
> And comen to him armed on stede[.] (1168-71, 1176-80)

Alexander, knowing what to do, steps in to aid his father, and Philip's knights dramatically rally behind Alexander's leadership. The poet takes some liberty here to highlight Alexander's wisdom. If such an accomplished king could struggle with the decision, Alexander must be exceptionally wise to be able to surpass his father at such a young age. Again, this scene is not unique, but a good example of how the poet establishes Alexander the Wise. This depiction is as important as Alexander the Brave, because by combining the qualities of valor and wisdom, two characteristics rarely housed in one person, the poet has created the portrait of Alexander as an ideal knight.

While the poet maintains an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards Alexander throughout the narrative, there are occasions of minor weakness. Some of these occasions seem planted to humanize Alexander; others serve simply to magnify another strength. Some, still, seem to happen by accident. The most common weakness Alexander displays is lack of caution, where he is often *too* eager to jump into the fray. On one such occasion, while traveling in India, Alexander comes across a gated city. Hoping to resupply, he climbs the walls to get a look and is unexpectedly pulled into the city with hooks. Surrounded on all sides and severely wounded, Alexander manages a valiant effort but would have surely been slain had Perdicas not saved him. According to Kitchel, earlier Latin versions have Alexander jumping into the city, rather than being pulled. She hypothesizes that the poet changes the narrative slightly in order to mitigate Alexander's rash behavior, instead emphasizing his valor and tenacity as an underdog (31). Still, one is left wondering, why would the leader of an army appoint himself to reconnoiter a strange city? Here we see Alexander's lack of caution, which serves to demonstrate his valor in the face of innumerable foes and develop his humanizing camaraderie with Perdicas. Typically, when Alexander behaves rashly in the poem, it appears to be because the poet wants to raise the odds for dramatic effect and to make Alexander surmounting those odds more of an impressive feat. Only in one incident does Alexander's rashness fail to highlight a strength. In it, Alexander makes a somewhat bizarre decision to jump into a river in full armor and very nearly drowns. There is no apparent motivation in this action, neither stated nor implied by the poet. At the time, Darius's troops are amassed on the opposite side of the river, so one could make a flimsy argument that Alexander went into the water in order to get a better look. Kitchel

suggests the poet omitted the motivation in order to solve a contradiction later in the poem. In the poet's source, Alexander jumped into the river as a narrative tool to establish his trust in and the ability of his physician, who Parmenion dishonestly attempts to discredit. Parmenion is hanged as a result, but appears later, alive and loyal (35). Regardless, nearly drowning oneself may not be the best way to test a physician. As it stands, Alexander walks away from this incident appearing quite reckless. Such moments, however, are the exception and not the rule; throughout the narrative, the poet takes every opportunity to extol Alexander's might, valor, and wisdom, creating a decidedly one-sided portrait of an ideal knight and king.

The alliterative *Wars of Alexander* exists in two fragments which, taken together, offer a basically complete version, excepting the poem's conclusion. The date of the original is unknown, but scholars generally place it in the first half of the fifteenth century (Kitchel 85). Like *Kyng Alisaunder*, the primary source is the *Historia de preliis*, which circulated widely, in various versions, throughout the Middle Ages, "rivaling the Arthurian romances in the width of its dissemination" (Duggan and Turville-Petre xiii). The poem is not held in especially high regard critically, although scholars do point to the lively descriptions of certain passages and the metrical skills of the poet. As a narrative, Kitchel concludes that it is more of an epic than a romance, rapidly moving through events without the chivalric aspects of *Kyng Alisaunder* (86). The poem does maintain the marvelous elements of the Alexander legend, but the exotic locales and bizarre creatures are distant seconds to the build-up of Alexander's character. Indeed, despite the poet's declared agenda of pure entertainment, the poem reads more didactic and historical

than entertaining. Unlike *Kyng Alisaunder*, *Wars* does not betray Alexander's strengths with even minor human flaws:

> [T]he account of Alexander's feats is straight-forward. The episodes are unified not merely by the presence of Alexander, but by the author's commitment to the portrayal of Alexander as a superhuman. [. . .] Moreover, the individual episodes, as well as serving to offer a clear-cut presentation of the noble qualities of the superhuman hero, center around or reflect back upon the figure of Alexander. He is constantly front and center; all action is designed to bring out the epic nature of the warrior and king Alexander. (Kitchel 88)

The poets of *Kyng Alisaunder* and *Wars* both write to elevate their hero, but they approach that task in very different ways. *Kyng Alisaunder*, as I have discussed, presents Alexander with numerous difficulties which he must overcome. Darius, for example, is a worthy opponent and genuine threat to Alexander, and Alexander must rise up to Darius's level to defeat him. Overcoming such a capable adversary elevates Alexander by making the achievement more impressive. In *Wars*, Alexander is invincible, elevated by the number of men he kills and the ease in which he kills them.

Alexander's taming of Bucephalus in *Wars* illustrates the previous point. In *Kyng Alisaunder*, the poet describes the process as a challenge for Alexander, a challenge he overcomes as a sort of rite of passage. The horse yields to Alexander out of respect for the strength and determination Alexander displays during the ride. In *Wars*, the horse seems to be tamed by the simple virtue of Alexander mounting him. The poet builds up the horse as a challenge by describing the futility in which other men attempted to ride:

> Þare liggez lymmes of laddes, leggel & harmes,

Tharmes thrist owt, thee-banes & shuldres,

Som hanchyd of Þe heued, some Þe handez etyn,

Som Þair riggez owt rytte, & som Þair ribbez rent.

Of Þis wonders he had, & so he wele burd,

And hardly hys awne hand in at a hole puttes. (lines 772-77)

However, the horse almost immediately yields and becomes devoted to Alexander without much of a struggle:

Þen wist Þe wy wele enogh hys wyll alltogeder,

Brades vppe Þe brade ʒate & Þe barre entres,

On Þe rige with hys right hande hym rudely strakez,

Ane he full frely & faire hym faunys & loutez.

Was neuer barslett in band more buxom to hys lord

Þen was Þs blonke to Þis bern, for all his breme teches. (782-87)

Kyng Alisaunder elevates Alexander's virtues, such as courage and determination, by having him overcome great challenges. *Wars of Alexander* elevates Alexander's might by suggesting that nothing can challenge him, even those things proven impossible for other men.

Alexander's battle with Nicholas receives much attention in *Wars*, as it does in *Kyng Alisaunder*. This is Alexander's first battle, and the poet uses it to highlight Alexander's prowess in single combat. As he did in the episode with Bucephalus, the poet does not prolong the combat for the sake of drama. Instead, Alexander dispatches Nicholas with ease:

Þen littid Þai na langir bot laschid out swerdis,

Aithire a blesynand brand brait out of schethe,

Hewis on hattirly, had thorow mailes,

Many starand sanes strikis of Þaire helmes.

Þen Alexsandire in ane ire his arme he vpliftis,

Swythe swyngis out his swerde & his swayfe feches.

Þe noll of Nicollas Þe kyng he fra Þe nek partis

Þat doun he fell fra his fole & fynyst for euir. (924-31)

The heated conversation between the two men which set up the one-on-one battle was over twice as long as the fight itself. Nicholas proves to be barely worthy of Alexander's attention. The poet uses this episode to establish Alexander's dominance in individual combat. This scene is typical of the poet's method of using an episode to highlight a single strength. Once he establishes that strength, he moves on to another scene to establish a different strength, such as ingenuity or tactical acumen.

Alexander's battle with Darius is used to establish his philosophical supremacy. In her study, Kitchel compares the number of lines in *Kyng Alisaunder* and *Wars* devoted to various battle sequences and, in the case of Darius, the letters between the generals leading up to them. The results create an interesting contrast. I will focus only on the three battles against Darius, Alexander's most noteworthy conquest (along with Porus), because they alone place such an emphasis on letters. This emphasis makes Alexander's battles with Darius his most philosophically significant. For the first battle, the poet of *Kyng Alisaunder* spends 330 lines describing the battle and seventy-three lines describing the letters preceding it. The poet of *Wars*, on the other hand, writes eight lines describing the battle versus 236 describing the letters. Similarly, *Kyng Alisaunder* devotes 230 lines

to the second battle and zero lines to the letters, compared to zero and 48 lines, respectively, in *Wars*. The third battle follows suit, with 104 lines describing the battle and thirty-two describing the letters in *Kyng Alisaunder* and fourteen lines describing the battle and forty-four describing the letters in *Wars*. The emphasis of the exchanging of these letters in *Wars* shows that the poet is primarily concerned with the philosophical battle between the kings, rather than the more exciting action taking place on the battlefield. Kitchel explains, "This conflict serves to bring to the fore Alexander as philosopher and moralist, extremely knowledgeable in the nature and workings of pride. The letters not only spell out what pride is, and its connection with fortune, but because Darius has succumbed to this deadly sin, his downfall is traced through the debate" (96).

The confrontation between Alexander and the Athenians provides another interesting contrast between the respective poems. In this episode, both poems address the issue of Alexander's temper. *Kyng Alisaunder*, which offers a more humanizing portrayal, describes both sides as getting increasingly angry as the letters go back and forth. Alexander demands money from the Athenians, they send him an insulting letter in response, and he counters with an angry letter of his own. Eventually, war is avoided once the Athenians agree to send the tribute, but not before Alexander has to be talked down by Demosthenes. *Wars of Alexander*, which seeks to minimize any possible flaws in Alexander, has the Athenians getting angry while Alexander maintains civility. Rather than asking for money, which could be considered greedy, Alexander asks for philosophers. Alexander does become annoyed at the Athenians' initial unwillingness to comply, but he always maintains control of his temper. When he warns them to obey, he is stern, not irate; this reaction makes clear that Alexander is not one to be trifled with,

but he will not be guided by his emotions. This shared episode epitomizes the two poems' treatment of Alexander. Both poems compliment Alexander, in this and most every episode. The difference lies in the degrees to which they are complimentary. *Wars* portrays Alexander as being impossibly close to perfect, both in might and character. *Kyng Alisaunder* portrays Alexander as merely being exceptional in every way, but still human enough to be an engaging character.

The Middle English versions of *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* are too important for me to ignore, in that their Old English predecessors played a part in the shaping of the Alexander romances and other literature of the Middle Ages. However, the Middle English *Epistola* texts are not significant to my thesis, in that they do not take a noteworthy stance on Alexander, positive or negative. In many ways, they read like travel literature, as if Alexander were writing a postcard to Aristotle detailing strange and beautiful sights witnessed on vacation at some exotic, unfamiliar place. Much of the second half of *Kyng Alisaunder* shares the same fascination with the marvelous. Once Alexander defeats Darius, his military exploits are deemphasized – though still present – in favor of otherworldly monsters, exotic tribes, and Porus's fantastic Indian cities and palaces. The narrative of the *Epistola* overlaps the post-Darius narrative of the Alexander romances, and the marvelous aspects of the Old English *Epistola* flavor their descriptions of Alexander's experiences in India and beyond. Elizabeth Ann Flynn's comprehensive study "The Marvellous Element in the Middle English Alexander Romance" describes in detail the various marvels encountered by Alexander in *Kyng Alisaunder*, the prose *Life of Alexander*, and the alliterative romances *Wars of Alexander*, *Alexander and Dindimus*, and *Alexander A*. She only briefly discusses the *Epistola*'s influence on these texts,

explaining that the Old English version had made its way into English vernacular literature by 1000 A.D. Vincent DiMarco and Leslie Perelman, in their preface to their edition, *The Middle English Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, confirm, writing that "it is a fair assumption, then, that the author of [*Kyng Alisaunder*] had independent access to some form of the *Epistola*" and that "the passages in the *Prose Alexander* and the [*Wars of Alexander*] which directly or indirectly derive from the *Epistola* are numerous and significant" (27-29). DiMarco and Perelman also attribute the descriptions of Porus's palace and the various wild beasts to the *Epistola*'s influence (29).

Looking beyond the marvelous in the Epistola and focusing on the nature of the epistolary Alexander's heroism yields less satisfying results. The author seldom references Alexander's kingly qualities, his tactical genius, or his selfless devotion to his men, nor does he emphasize Alexander's epic campaign against Porus. Margaret Bridges attempts to resolve this problem by analyzing the protagonist through three models, the Alfredian hero, the Beowulfian hero, and the virtuous pagan, but is unable to come to a conclusion among the three. The epistolary Alexander fails in the comparison to King Alfred, chiefly because the author makes such a minor effort to highlight Alexander's military exploits. The major exception is the episode in which Alexander sneaks into Porus's camp, disguised, in order to gain intelligence on his enemy's position, an episode which shares a modest similarity to an incident in which Alfred sneaks into a Danish camp for the same reason. Beyond the spy game, there is little material for establishing an intentional link between Alfred and Alexander. The epistolary Alexander also seems to fail as an example of a virtuous pagan, not so much due Alexander's personal weaknesses but, rather, the author's lack of interest in making the connection. The idea

of the virtuous pagan is that a hero, who because of time or geography could not be a Christian, still manages to more or less conform to basic Christian values. The author does not imply that Alexander is an *un*virtuous pagan; he simply declines to consider the virtue or non-virtue of Alexander's paganism in a meaningful way.

The most valid of Bridges's models is the Beowulfian model, which says the Old English *Epistola* closely resembles *Beowulf* in the nature of the hero, his foreign travels, and multiple encounters with marvelous monsters. She continues, "Moreover, the marvelous – considered to be a distinctive feature of the *Epistola* – has often been singled out as the common denominator of all the works anthologized around 1000 AD" (53). The comparison to Beowulf suggests that the hero's greatness is displayed in his courage to face those marvelous encounters and his might to overcome them. If one accepts this premise, there is no shortage of examples in the *Epistola*. One typical example, en route to the city of Porus:

> Therfor at the first spryng or rising of the moone beams, sodainly arrectis serpentis, so named, with sharpe tailes, to shepherdis jugement cald scorpiouns […] Forsoth, in every hour of the nyght under hem holl is the felawship, with unmesurable horned serpentis of variable and dyvers colours distinct, avexed. Sum, forsoth, wern with rede scalis; sum with nailes of while colour; sum to gold shyneng like to biholde hissed and whisteled to al the regioun and to us nat brynggyng in a litel dreede. […] and in our handis we hadden long battis, staves, and speris of the [whiche] weren insette with the most sharpest prikes and stikynge instrumentis; and thus we put to flight thiese pestilent thynges, and with many fuyres theym noied, slow, and brent. (lines 303-21)

Here we have an intense battle with wondrous and deadly creatures. As this passage continues, Alexander's troops fend off such creatures throughout the night, losing fifty men in the process, but, through bravery and might, Alexander's men prevail. In another encounter, Alexander is able to turn away more marvelous creatures with bow and arrow: "From thens we fond the woodis ful of folke cald Cenophals, half hors, half man, which tempted to be wery to fight but, their dartis caste, token hem to flight" (539-42). These two examples epitomize Alexander's encounters with the various strange creatures of the *Epistola*'s mythical India. We can infer from these incidents that the author looks upon Alexander as a brave and mighty warrior, although it is not the author's explicit intent. In the Middle English Alexander romances, Alexander's friends, enemies, and even the poets sing his praises, but in the *Epistola*, Alexander's greatness takes a back seat to the marvelous, much like a modern special effects-driven movie whose spectacle far overshadows its characters.

CHAPTER III

CAESAR AND ALEXANDER IN PLUTARCH'S *LIVES*

Between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a sweeping transformation occurred in the depictions of Alexander and Caesar. As I discussed in the preceding chapter, the epic romances of the Middle Ages largely focused on the exemplary nature of their heroes. Renaissance playwrights, on the other hand, became more interested in the character flaws that made these men more identifiably human. Such a sea change defies a simple, single cause; it would be difficult, however, to overstate the influence that the classics had on the depictions of these two men on the Renaissance stage, once classical writers were translated into French and English in the sixteenth century. The most influential classical representations of Alexander and Caesar, by far, come from Plutarch's definitive *Parallel Lives*. As such, I would like to provide an analysis of the *Lives* of Alexander and Caesar before moving into the Renaissance.

According to C.P. Jones, Plutarch's purpose in writing his *Parallel Lives* was moral simplification, not historical exactitude (73). Nevertheless, he presents nuanced and complicated versions of both Alexander and Caesar that are simultaneously great and flawed. For example, as a leader and military tactician, Plutarch's Caesar was second to none. However, like many men of great power, he was proud and borderline egomaniacal. Plutarch's Alexander can be described in much the same way. At the

beginning of his chapter on Alexander, which directly precedes its sister chapter on Caesar, Plutarch states explicitly his desire to separate the human flaws from the immortal achievements. He writes:

> Nor is it always in the most distinguished achievements that men's virtues or vices may be best discerned; but often an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, shall distinguish a person's real character more than the greatest sieges or the most important battles. Therefore [. . .] we must be permitted to strike off the features of the soul, in order to give a real likeness of these great men, and leave to others the circumstantial detail of their labours and achievements. (464-65)

Plutarch goes to great lengths to point out his subjects' flaws, for the purpose of his audience's moral edification, while avoiding being unfairly or overly critical of men who were, in so many ways, admirable. In that regard, his respective treatments of my subjects are remarkably similar, both in story and tone.

Beginning with Caesar, one can clearly see that Plutarch uses his character's strengths and weaknesses, not only simultaneously, but in concert towards the one didactic goal. In fact, Plutarch demonstrates that Caesar's greatness and his flaws are interdependent qualities, not contradictory. For example, he recounts an episode in which a fifteen-year-old Caesar is abducted by pirates, illustrating the young Caesar's bravery and audacity. Plutarch writes, "Perfectly fearless and secure, he joined in their diversions, and took his exercises among them. He wrote poems and orations, and rehearsed them to these pirates; and when they expressed no admiration, he called them dunces and barbarians. Nay, he often threatened to crucify them" (496). Caesar's courage and confidence deserve admiration, but a cautious admiration; perhaps what we

see here is the seed of arrogance and delusion of invincibility which ultimately lead to Caesar's assassination. We also see the prodigy's intelligence, which will eventually set him apart from all other men of his time.

Plutarch's Child Alexander bears, not surprisingly, a remarkable resemblance to the young Caesar. While greeting Persian ambassadors in the absence of his father, Philip, Alexander is quite impressive, having the presence of a man well beyond his years. After answering a series of Alexander's unexpectedly probing and astute questions, the visitors "were struck with admiration, and looked upon the celebrated shrewdness of Philip as nothing in comparison of the lofty and enterprising genius of his son" (466). Alexander shares more than Caesar's superlative intellect. In a famous episode, recounted by Plutarch here and retold by the epic poets of the Middle Ages, King Philip is presented with a fiery, vicious, yet exquisitely powerful specimen of a horse. Displeased with the horse's temperament, Philip would have sent it away had it not been for the impression the horse left on Alexander. "What a horse are they losing, for want of skill and spirit to manage him!" said an equally spirited Alexander (466). Plutarch continues, "Philip at first took no notice of this; but, upon the prince's often repeating the same expression [. . .] he said, 'Young man, you find fault with your elders, as if you knew more than they, or could manage the horse better.' 'And I certainly could,' answered the prince" (466). Much to the surprise and delight of Philip, Alexander breaks the animal. Here, Alexander demonstrates the same confidence, confidence beyond reason, which Caesar displayed before the pirates. On one hand, one cannot help but admire the young Alexander, but at the same time, this behavior could be seen as the precursor for his pride and arrogance as an adult, qualities not so commonly admired.

Just as confidence (maybe arrogance) is a key descriptor of Alexander and Caesar, so too is charisma. Both men were gifted at inspiring others through their words and presence. More often than not, Plutarch focuses on Caesar's ability to bend a crowd to his will and use public speeches to amass enormous popularity, more of a commendation of Caesar's talent than his character. He says of the up-and-coming Caesar, "[H]is engaging address and conversation carried the hearts of the people. For he had a condescension not to be expected from so young a man" (496). Plutarch says nothing of Caesar's sincerity or genuine concern for the Roman populace, only Caesar positioning himself for ascension to power, and on Caesar's exploding popularity he writes, "But when it was grown to such a height that it was scarce possible to demolish it, and had a plain tendency to the ruin of the constitution, [the Roman aristocracy] found out, when it was too late, that no beginnings of things, however small, are to be neglected" (496). Plutarch doesn't refer directly to Caesar's aim at dictatorship or any sort of potential tyranny, simply the seemingly unstoppable momentum of Caesar's rise. Cicero is ambivalent as well, as Plutarch quotes him, "I perceive an inclination for tyranny in all he projects and executes; but on the other hand, when I see him adjusting his hair with such exactness, and scratching his head with one finger, I can hardly think that such a man can conceive so vast and fatal a design as the destruction of the Roman commonwealth" (496). Plutarch makes a strong case for Caesar's irresistibility as a charismatic speaker and supremely confident leader, his undeniable talent as a politician, but he does not attempt to argue that Caesar was an exceptionally good or moral person.

One of the few judgments Plutarch makes involves Caesar's legendary ambition. The purpose of every military campaign in which Caesar engages is to increase his

personal glory, reputation, or power, while the overall concerns of Rome are of minor importance. Plutarch illustrates Caesar's limitless ambition in one revealing anecdote:

> [We] are told, that when he was in Spain, he bestowed some leisure hours on reading part of the history of Alexander, and was so much affected with it, that he sat pensive for a long time, and at last burst out into tears. As his friends were wondering what might be the reason, he said, "Do you think I have not sufficient cause for concern, when Alexander at my age reigned over so many conquered countries, and I have not one glorious achievement to boast. (499)

Even Caesar, according to Plutarch, felt compelled to compare himself to Alexander and wanted to compare favorably. Not only is Caesar's motivation selfish, his methods are not entirely honorable either; he was a master at manipulating the senate by using the support of Roman commoners and senatorial infighting. Plutarch's description of Caesar's introduction into politics sounds almost Machiavellian:

> Caesar walked to the place of election between Crassus and Pompey; and, under the auspices of their friendship, was declared consul [. . .] He had no sooner entered upon his office than he proposed laws not so suitable to a consul as to a seditious tribune; I mean the bills for a division of lands and a distribution of corn, which were entirely calculated to please the plebeians. As the virtuous and patriotic part of the senate opposed them, he was furnished with the pretext he had long wanted: he protested with great warmth, "That they threw him into the arms of the people against his will, and that the rigorous and disgraceful opposition of the senate, laid him under the disagreeable necessity of seeking protection from the commons." (499)

Caesar's methods aren't indicative of a man who wants to do anything he can to help his country, but a man who will do anything he can to rule his country. Not only is his friendship with Crassus and Pompey insincere, his advocacy on behalf of the plebeians is calculated and cynical, meant "merely to ingratiate himself with the people" (500). Because of Caesar's meteoric rise in popularity, Crassus and Pompey, both vying for supremacy in the senate, were forced to compete for Caesar's favor. As a result, Caesar was catapulted to the top of the Roman food chain. He and Pompey united to weaken the senate for their own benefit, a union which would spell doom for the Roman republic. According to Plutarch, "it was not, what most people imagine, the disagreement between Caesar and Pompey that produced the civil wars, but rather their union: they first combined to ruin the authority of the senate, and when that was effected, they parted to pursue each his own designs" (499). Clearly, Plutarch believes that Caesar is principally concerned with building and perpetuating his own power, rather than working towards a more free and prosperous Rome.

When Plutarch describes Alexander's downfall, he does not seem to be as critical of Alexander as he is of Caesar; in fact, he goes out of his way to not only suggest Alexander died of a sickness, but dispel rumors that he was poisoned. It is worth noting that Caesar rose to power through political maneuvering, an experience which history has proven to be, by its nature, corrupting. Alexander, as a prince and heir to a kingdom, did not have to usurp a ruler or disband a governing body, lobby for influence or pander for public support. For the most part, Plutarch's Alexander stands up remarkably well to the corrupting influence of power. During his education with Aristotle, Alexander displays youthful arrogance and elitism, writing to his teacher, "You did wrong in publishing the

acroamatic parts of science. In what shall we differ from others, if the sublime knowledge which we gained from you, be made common to all the world? For my part, I had rather excel the bulk of mankind in the superior parts of learning than in the extent of power and dominion" (467). He will, of course, prove the last part untrue, but, regardless, his ambition in all forms is impressive. Once he becomes leader of the Macedonian army we see a philosopher-warrior. While certainly capable of cruelty towards the enemy, the cruelty is measured, used for strategy, not revenge. For example, Plutarch writes of the battle at Thebes:

> But when the Macedonian garrison fell down from Cadmea, and charged [the Thebans] on all sides, and most of them cut in pieces. The city was taken, plundered, and leveled to the ground. [. . .] Alexander expected that the rest of Greece, astonished and intimidated by so dreadful a punishment of the Thebans, would submit in silence. Yet he found a more plausible pretence for his severity; giving out that his late proceedings were intended to gratify his allies, being adopted in pursuance of complaints made against Thebes by the people of Phocis and Platœa. (469)

Inflicting suffering upon an entire city to inspire fear in future opponents or to garner the favor of political allies would certainly be frowned upon today, but Plutarch does not judge Alexander too critically. In fact, he concludes the story with an example of Alexander's magnanimity. A high-standing Theban woman, after being raped by a Macedonian captain, was asked whether she was hiding some gold or silver that he might take with him. She replied affirmatively, that she had tossed the treasure into a well. When the soldier stooped to examine the well, she pushed him in and pelted him with

stones until he was dead. Rather than punishing her, Alexander appreciated her spirit, as Plutarch writes, “Alexander, admiring [. . .] the bold action she had performed, commanded her to be set at liberty and her children with her” (469).

In contrast, during a battle with the forces of Darius, Alexander is mildly wounded and exorcises the resulting anger by destroying a surrendering army. Plutarch writes:

> The enemy made no great or long resistance, but soon turned their backs and fled, all but the Grecian mercenaries, who, making a stand upon an eminence, desired Alexander to give his word of honour that they should be spared. But that prince, influenced rather by his passion than his reason, instead of giving them quarter, advanced to attack them (470).

The attack proves that Alexander, while at times magnanimous and usually governed by reason, can still be a slave to his emotions. With this incident, Plutarch reminds the reader that Alexander is human, not a saint, a god, or a super-villain. His flaws are essentially human flaws; Plutarch does not push them beyond the level of the average person. After the battle, Alexander once again shows his magnanimity, not only to the conquered, but to the Greeks who fought alongside him as well. According to Plutarch, Alexander erected statues in honor of the more than 20,000 barbarians he defeated, and:

> that the Greeks might have their share in the glory of the day, he sent them presents out of the spoil: to the Athenians in particular he sent three hundred bucklers. Upon the rest of the spoils he put this pompous inscription, WON BY ALEXANDER THE SON OF PHILIP, AND THE GREEKS (EXCEPTING THE LACEDAEMONIANS,) OF THE BARBARIANS IN ASIA. (471)

Here was see two sides of Alexander: the high-minded leader, who inspires devotion from his followers and respect from his enemies, and the brash, arrogant young prince, who retains the largest portion of the glory himself after dividing the rest between those caught in his colossal wake.

CHAPTER IV

JULIUS CAESAR IN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

The increased interest in the classics during the Renaissance shifted the way writers characterized Caesar. Caesar remained a popular literary figure, appearing as the principal character in multiple Renaissance dramas, but he was treated with more ambiguity than he was in the Middle Ages. For example, Shakespeare's Caesar, the most famous characterization of the dictator, was endowed with great charisma and intelligence, but cursed with excessive pride and ambition. Additionally, the focal point of Caesar's life in English drama became the events surrounding the Roman civil war and his death, rather than his various exploits, both real and mythical, in Britain. This transition, however, did not occur uniformly across all genres of Renaissance literature. The epic poem, a popular form during the Middle Ages, continued many traditions of its medieval predecessors, including its mostly one-dimensional characterization of its heroes. Drama, on the other hand, developed its heroes towards something that more closely resembles the three-dimensional characters we are accustomed to in narrative works today. The distinction is clear in Caesar's case.

In my introduction, I mentioned Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as an example of the "rear guard" in Renaissance literature, based on Spenser's stated intent of inspiring his readership through examples of greatness in virtue. Arthur, Spenser's main

protagonist, certainly fits that description. In terms of characterization and didacticism, *The Faerie Queene* has much more in common with medieval epics than Renaissance drama, but there is one notable exception which is relevant to this chapter: the poet's attitude towards Julius Caesar. Caesar has one significant appearance in the poem, and while it is short, it is also illuminating. In the library of Alma's castle, Arthur finds a book of British history which chronicles Britain's mythical beginnings to Arthur's present day. As Arthur reads the story of Caesar's invasions of Britain, the narrator writes:

> Till the prowde Romans [Cassivellaunus] disquieted,
>
> And warlike Caesar, tempted with the name
>
> Of this sweet island, never conquered,
>
> And envying the Britons blazed fame,
>
> (O hideous hunger of dominion!) hether came. (2.10.47.5-9)

This small section reveals two important points. One, Spenser uses his poem to glorify England, evident in the descriptions "sweet island" and "the Britons blazed fame." Celebrating England, along with providing an exemplar, is one of Spenser's primary goals for *The Faerie Queene*, which makes this poem very similar to non-Alexander epic poetry of the Middle Ages. Two, Spenser has a clearly negative opinion of Caesar and his war-making in Britain. His description of Caesar as envious, as well as Caesar's "hideous hunger of dominion," are much closer to the Renaissance's complex perception of Caesar than the Middle Age's idea of Caesar as one of the Nine Worthies.

One other important example of Renaissance epic poetry featuring Caesar is *The Mirror for Magistrates*. Caesar features prominently in two poems within this collection,

and, like that short section of *The Faerie Queene*, the two poems blend some qualities of medieval and Renaissance literature. In terms of characterization, *The Mirror* has much more in common with medieval epics than with drama of its day. It was rooted in the exemplary tradition of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, which sought "to prove that the mighty of the earth have always fallen" (Budra 17). In 1574, John Higgins added to *The Mirror* the story of the British hero Nennius, who was mortally wounded by Caesar in single combat during Caesar's invasion of Britain. During the fight, Caesar gives Nennius a blow to the head, which eventually kills him, but in the process, his sword gets stuck in Nennius's shield. When the two are separated, Nennius takes the sword and, despite the head wound, kills many Romans, including the tribune Labienus. The British troops win the day, with Caesar retreating from the island, and Nennius, fifteen days later, dies a hero and, as the poet explains in the lengthy title to Nennius's tragedy, an inspiration "to enourageth all good subiects to defende their country from the powre of foraine and vsurping enemies." Like many medieval epics involving Caesar, this story focuses on the small portion of Caesar's career relevant to British history. This is Nennius's story, though. As I have previously discussed, medieval depictions of Caesar were mostly positive, despite the fact that he was an aggressor towards Britain, as if Caesar's greatness transferred to Britain turning him away. Here, Higgins, through the persona of Nennius, describes Caesar as an over-hyped coward. Nennius tells the story of his single combat with Caesar:

> The strokes thou strokst mee, hurt me nought at all:
>
> For why thy strength was nothing in respect,
>
> But thou hadste bathed thy sword in poison all:

Which did my wounde, not deadly els infect. (lines 199-202)

Had dastardly Caesar not poisoned his sword, the blow to Nennius's head would have been a mere flesh wound. Later, Caesar flees from certain defeat, and Nennius makes sport of Caesar's superhuman reputation:

If he had bene a God as sottes him named,

He coulde not of vs *Britaynes* taken foyle:

The *Monarche Caesar* might haue bene ashamed,

From such an Islande with his shippes recoyle,

Or else to flie and leaue behind the spoyle:

But life is swete, he thought it better flye,

Then byde amongst vs *Britaynes* for to die. (241-47)

Nennius's portion of *The Mirror* clearly lacks the reverence for Caesar found in medieval works. Granted, Caesar's might is implied by Nennius's heroism, in that the later is made greater by the former. The significant difference between this story and those from the Middle Ages is that Nennius is the exemplar here, while Caesar is clearly the adversary.

In 1587, Higgins added to *The Mirror* a chapter devoted to and told from the point of view of Caesar himself. Caesar introduces his tale, "[T]ake in thy pen,/First set thy selfe to write my words, and then/A mirror make yet more for Magistrates agen" (14-16). Even Caesar acknowledges his awkward placement among the great men of England, a land in which he was once an enemy invader, saying, "Why I a *Romayne* Prince, no *Britayne*, here / Amongst these *Britayne* Princes now appeere, / As if amongst the rest a *Britayne* Prince I were" (30-32). The incongruity works, however, because Higgins has

Caesar spend as much time, as an outsider, glorifying Britain as he does his own legend. Nearly half of the poem deals with Caesar's exploits in Britain or against British soldiers, an Anglocentric point of view clearly disproportionate to the importance of those exploits in Caesar's overall history. While in Gaul, Caesar hears of an island to the north and the fierce reputation of its inhabitants:

> This lande reported was full fertile for the soyle,
> The wealthie warlike sorte of *Britaynes* stout within,
> Were rather able well to giue, then take the foyle,
> To those which came by warres, their freedom for to win. (113-16)

Rather than describing his achievements in the successful conquest of Gaul, Caesar focuses on the strong impression left by the British fighting alongside his enemy:

> It was reported eke that in my warres in *Fraunce*
> Some *Britaynes* thether came amongst the *Galles* to fight,
> And that for pleasure sake, to try of *Mars* the chaunce,
> And for to haue of *Romayne* warres the sight:
> That they no labour sparde by day nor yet by nighte,
> In campe, in scoute, for hunger, heate, or colde:
> But were in all attempes of armes so stout and bolde,
> As erst I neuer hearde of any nation tolde. (121-28)

In this poem, Higgins accomplishes the dual purpose of celebrating England and teaching a didactic lesson through example. With the story of Nennius, he is able to do both while presenting Nennius as an exemplar, a task that is considerably more complicated with Caesar. In order to accomplish the two purposes, he essentially splits the poem in half,

with the first half celebrating England and the second half educating his audience on the dangers of pride.

Higgins's goal of celebrating England explains the high number of lines devoted to Caesar's battles in Britain. Retelling the unsuccessful invasions of Britain provides an opportunity for Caesar to praise the most fierce and valorous, as the poet would have us believe, army the general ever faced. Enflamed by the British aide to his Gallic enemy, Caesar takes his army into Britain only to be beaten back. Upon landing ashore he found:

> A people stout and strong, enduring chaunces herd,
>
> And desperate, wilde and fearce, and reckless found I then,
>
> Not soone agast with dinte, or fright with fall of men,
>
> [. . . . .]
>
> Though with my *Romaynes* I wagde all my warlike might,
>
> I was not able there, to cause them yeelde or flee[.] (149-51, 57-58)

Not content with merely holding their ground, the British army chased Caesar's forces back to the ocean as Caesar retreated to fight another day:

> They followed harde the chace, with scath and losse we scapt,
>
> And shipt, we hoysed sayles, to *Fraunce* we made retyre:
>
> Where for armie newe, another roade we shapt,
>
> If winter colde were past, to come agayne another yeere[.] (169-72)

Caesar attempts two more invasions to much the same result. We continue to see the brave and mighty British soldiers repel the famous and otherwise enormously successful Roman general, incorporating Caesar's glorious reputation into the history of the British people.

The second half of the poem describes the civil war between Caesar and Pompey and concludes with a pointed self-critique regarding Caeser's assassination. Unlike the death of Nennius, which Higgins treats as a tragic fall of an exemplar, Caesar's death is a cautionary tale against the dangers of pride. Caesar warns, "You Princes all, and noble men beware of pride, / And carefull will to warre for Kingdomes sake" (385-86). Caesar seems to confess that he deserved his fate in the last stanza of the poem:

> But sith my whole pretence was glory vayne,
>
> To haue renowne and rule aboue the rest,
>
> Without remorce of many thousands slayne,
>
> Which, for their owne defence, their warres addrest:
>
> I deeme therefore my stony harte and brest
>
> Receiu'd so many wounds for iust reuenge, they stood
>
> By iustice right of *Iove*, the sacred sentence good,
>
> That who so slayes, hee payes the price, is bloud for bloud. (401-08)

This conclusion, so different than the medieval interpretations of Caesar, serves as a precursor for the attitudes Elizabethan playwrights will have for Caesar. It also signals the introduction of Plutarch into the popular culture, as Caesar admits, "What neede I more of these impertinent recite, / Sith *Plutarch* hath at large described it all to thee" (59-60).

By considering the Nennius poem and the disparate halves of the Caesar poem together, we see that *The Mirror for Magistrates* is in many ways a transitional piece between medieval and Renaissance literature. On one hand, it represents a change in attitude toward Caesar, who falls somewhere between a flawed or villainous character, as

opposed to an exemplary figure, a trend we see continued in Renaissance drama. On the other hand, its one-dimensional characterization of Nennius greatly resembles the characterization of heroes in medieval epics. Higgins makes no attempt to explore the complexities of Nennius the man; Nennius the "mirror" is revered for the singular achievement of standing up to a famed, formidable enemy to protect his homeland. Likewise, both the medieval and Renaissance conceptions of tragedy are on display; Nennius's tragedy is simply a fall of a great warrior, while Caesar's tragedy is the fall of a tragically flawed warrior. The poems also bridge the historical gap between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; Nennius's story and the first half of Caesar's are very similar to the version of Caesar's history found in medieval works, which focused on Caesar's experiences in Britain, while the second half of Caesar's story comes directly from Plutarch, as does the theme of excessive pride utilized by Elizabethan playwrights.

Unlike *The Mirror for Magistrates*, *The Faerie Queen*, and the poetry of the Middle Ages, Renaissance drama involving Caesar focused primarily on the Roman civil war and Caesar's downfall during the formative days of the Roman Empire. Additionally, Renaissance drama made Caesar the star of several shows, not merely relegated to the status of a supporting character. A partial explanation for these changes could be that Caesar's faults and his death, not his exploits in Britain, fit the mold of tragedy and tragic heroes that were *en vogue* at the time, or it could be that Elizabethan theater-goers valued more realistic, three-dimensional characters, with mixtures of strengths and weaknesses. Such a change in tastes could partially explain the explosion of Caesar on stage; however, it does not explain the more detailed and accurate biographical information or the change in setting from Britain to Rome. Part of the rebirth of knowledge in Renaissance England

included the translation and widespread reading of Plutarch's *Lives*. *Lives* was translated into French during the reign of Henry II in 1558 by Jacques Amyot and from French into English in the time of Queen Elizabeth, around 1578, by Sir Thomas North. This classical work features a more complex Julius Caesar than the one featured in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* or *The Monk's Tale*.

Plutarch's realistic depiction of Caesar is clearly not an ancestor of the Caesar found in English writing of the Middle Ages. His is not the two-dimensional, nearly flawless Caesar of the "Nine Worthies," but rather a more human mixture of good and bad qualities. The classical Caesar was intelligent, powerful, charismatic, and courageous, yet capable of being controlled and brought down by his pride, ambition, and arrogance. He was publicly selfless, but for selfish reasons. He loved his soldiers, but put their lives in danger for his personal glory. He was fiercely loyal to his friends, but faked friendships for political purposes. This mixture of good and bad humanized Caesar, making him an appealing subject for Renaissance writers in a time when public interest in the classics had reemerged. Unlike the pristine version of Caesar as a "Worthy," Plutarch provided fully-rounded portraits of Caesar and other important historical figures, preserving a balance between intimate, personal detail and the roles played by these men as political forces. As a result, ancient Rome, the tumultuous Rome of Julius Caesar in particular, became a popular subject for Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights.

The earliest surviving Renaissance dramatization of Julius Caesar is the anonymous *Tragedy of Caesar and Pompey*, better known as *Caesar's Revenge*. The historiographical play is neither a celebration nor unequivocal renunciation of Caesar;

rather, it had a specific didactic intention of demonstrating the evils of ambition and the dangers of civil strife and rebellion (Yu 18). The play's scope extends from Caesar's victory over Pompey in 48 B.C. to the defeat of Brutus and Cassius by Anthony and Octavian six years later, and in reality it can hardly be said that this is truly Caesar's play. Jacqueline Pearson contends that the play "paints a very complex political canvas: neither Caesar, nor Pompey, nor Brutus has clean hands politically" (103). Indeed, while Caesar is the closest character to a true protagonist, he is just as culpable in his downfall as any other character. The impressive catalogue of famous figures includes the six mentioned above, Cornelia, Cleopatra, and the younger and older Cato, and each character is given his or her due. The play's ambitious scope, in terms of time elapsed and number of characters, makes dramatic unity and character development difficult. However, it should be noted that the play looks more like an attempt at a historical chronicle than the archetypal stage drama (Pearson 103). To that end, the scenes focus on historical events, not on developing a narrative thread or examining one, two, or three characters.

Unlike *The Faerie Queene* and *The Mirror for Magistrates*, which focus their didacticism on individual virtue, the didactic intent of *Caesar's Revenge*, as stated by the chorus Discord, is to bring attention to the fratricidal nature of civil war. The playwright stresses the gruesome consequences of war throughout the play, as when Anthony foreshadows the Roman-on-Roman carnage at the battle of Philippi:

> The toyling husband-men in time to come
> Shall with his harrow strike on rusty helms,
> And finde, and wonder, at our swords and speares,
> And with his plowe dig up brave Romans graves. (4.3.2050-53)

Cassius makes a similar prediction:

> The ground not dry'd from sad Pharsalian blood,
>
> Will now be turned a purple lake:
>
> And bleeding heapes and mangled bodyes slayne,
>
> Shall make such hills as shal surpasses in height
>
> The Snowy Alpes and aery Appeninies. (5.1.2124-28)

This themes of horror and fratricide dominate the plot, which is the playwright's stated intent. As a result, the portrayal of Caesar is often contradictory, changing from scene to scene to suit the playwright's overall goal. Still, his inconsistencies resemble the balanced versions of Caesar presented by Plutarch. For example, he enters the play as an aggressive general, urging his men to pursue Pompey's retreating army:

> Follow your chase, and let your light-foote steeds
>
> Flying as swift as did that winged horse
>
> That with strong fethered Pinions clove the Ayre,
>
> Or' take the coward flight of your base foe. (1.2.179-82)

This image of Caesar as a charismatic, inspiring troop leader mirrors the classical representations of Caesar almost exactly, as does the image of Caesar showing mercy in victory. At the end of scene 2, after defeating the bulk of Pompey's forces, Brutus disparages Caesar's victory and asks to be killed along with his comrades. Caesar immediately forgives Brutus, saying "T'was not 'gainst thee this fatall blade was drawne / Which can no more pierce Brutus tender sides / Then mine own heart" (1.2.194-96). Additionally, the playwright includes the dramatization, featured in Plutarch's *Lives*, of Caesar weeping at the sight of the slain Pompey. At the end of the battle, Caesar issues a

self-indictment, lamenting the life lost for two men's personal glory. This self-indictment compares favorably to Pompey's speech earlier in the play, where in anticipation of the upcoming battle, he expresses concern only for his personal reputation. Caesar's leadership, mercy, and self-awareness displayed in the opening act create a positive image of Caesar, but as the play moves on, Caesar's image is tarnished when the didactic intentions of the play necessitate it.

The first time Caesar appears in a purely negative light is when he begins his affair with Cleopatra. The playwright makes it clear that their relationship is primarily, almost exclusively, sexual. In this way, Caesar compares unfavorably to Pompey, whose relationship with Cornelia is meant to be regarded as one of genuine love. Pompey says to his wife:

> Tis for thy weale and safty of thy life,
>
> Whose safty I preferred before the world,
>
> Because I love thee more then all the world,
>
> That thou (sweete love) should'st here remaine behind
>
> Till proof assureth Ptolomynes doubted faith. (1.5.361-65)

Pompey speaks beautifully about his honest devotion to his wife. His words of affection stand in sharp contrast to Caesar's words of infatuation, which indicate Caesar's inability to resist the tempting beauty of Cleopatra, not to be confused with love:

> O how those lovely Tyranizing eyes,
>
> The Graces beatious habitation,
>
> Where sweet desire, dartes wounding shafts of love:
>
> Consume my heart with inward burning heate. (1.6.489-92)

Caesar's vulnerability toward sexual passion is not a trivial matter; his rash and libidinous nature leads him to make grandiose promises to Cleopatra, offering kingdoms the way a regular suitor may offer a woman jewelry or flowers. Such behavior conflicts with the idea of Caesar as a serious-minded, tactical and political genius.

Caesar's Revenge makes Caesar's ambition, more so than his libido, his dominant weakness, a weakness thoroughly chronicled by Plutarch. The greatest problem with Caesar's ambition is his desire for monarchic authority; in fact, he seeks the sort of authority that dwarfs kingship. Caesar himself admits:

> Content you Lordes for I wilbe no King,
>
> An odious name unto Romaine eare,
>
> Caesar I am, and wilbe Caesar still,
>
> No other title shall my Fortune grace:
>
> Which I will make a name of higher state
>
> Then Monarch, King or worldes great Potentate.
>
> Of Jove in Heavan shall ruled bee the skie,
>
> The Earth of Caesar, with like Majesty. (3.4.1456-63)

This would not be the only occasion in Renaissance drama in which Caesar compares himself to a god. Caesar's pronouncement represents more than mere offensive hubris, but a real danger to the Roman Republic, giving the conspirators legitimate grounds for assassination. Caesar even admits in this passage that the word *king* is odious to the ears of Romans; should he not then see his desire to become greater than a king even more odious? While the play's chorus openly condemns assassination as a practice, Caesar nevertheless opens himself up to enormous criticism, even vitriol, an aspect of Caesar

which escaped the writers of the Middle Ages but was forefront in the minds of classical and Renaissance writers.

Like *Caesar's Revenge*, George Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* portrays a complicated and seemingly inconsistent characterization of Julius Caesar. Also like *Caesar's Revenge*, *Caesar and Pompey* had an explicit didactic intention, although Chapman's message is different. The epigram "Only a Just Man is A Free Man," taken from Plutarch, is printed on the play's title page, and everything in the play serves to illustrate it, including Chapman's characterization of Caesar. Chapman makes Cato, not Caesar, the protagonist of the play; in fact, Chapman paints Caesar as a Machiavellian villain bent on the control of Rome and the destruction of the Republic, with Cato a noble defender of Rome. James O'Callaghan agrees, arguing that Chapman "leaves no doubt of Caesar's criminal ambition" and that "there is no question in Cato's mind that Caesar is an outlaw and a tyrant despite his professions of patriotism" (320). Caesar validates this opinion in the second scene of the play, where he supports Metellus's proposal to have Pompey's army admitted into Rome, secretly looking for justification to move in his army. The conniving Caesar says in an aside, "Move you for entr'ing Pompey's army; / Which if you gain for him, for me all justice / Will join with my request of entr'ing mine" (1.2.1-3). This is Caesar's entrance into the play, so Chapman depicts him as a villain from the start. To do so, however, Chapman had to distort some historical facts, as Jeffrey Yu explains, "While Caesar supported Metellus' proposal, he was not yet in command of Gaul and, therefore, did not possess the ulterior motive Chapman gives him" (71).

Throughout the play, Chapman gives Caesar moments of attractiveness, but the odor of political motivation constantly lingers. In one moment of magnanimity, after being initially defeated by Pompey, Caesar corrects a soldier who blames Fortune for the loss, "It was not Fortune's fault, but mine, Acilius," a line reminiscent of Shakespeare's Cassius (2.3.10). Here, Caesar compares favorably to Pompey, who, in Chapman's play, avoids personal responsibility for the losses he suffers in subsequent battles. Additionally, Caesar shows clemency to a captured Pompeian soldier, Vibius, by releasing him "ransom'd with my love" (2.3.56). He sends Vibius off with a peace offering for Pompey, but later hints that the offering was false, an effort to buy time to prepare for the next round. He says to Antony, "In mean space, I'll prepare/For other issues in my utmost means," feeding the suspicion that he is a scheming Machiavel (2.3.83-84). Later, as in *Caesar's Revenge*, Caesar pardons Brutus after defeating Pompey's army. The incident highlights Caesar's mercy, but also exposes his political maneuvering. The terms for Brutus' life:

> Only requite me, Brutus; love but Caesar,
> And be in all the powers of Caesar, Caesar.
> In which free wish I join your father Cato;
> For whom I'll haste to Utica, and pray
> His love may strengthen my success to-day. (4.4.43-47)

This passage reveals Caesar's ulterior motive for clemency: to strengthen his political situation by acquiring the support of two important and well-respected Romans. During the third act, Caesar had a number of potentially sympathetic moments, but he undermines those moments with his conditional pardon of Brutus and the following

speech over Cato's death, which expresses regret, not over the loss of a friend, but the loss of a would-be useful ally:

> Too late, too late, with all our haste! O Cato,
> All my late conquest, and my life's whole acts,
> Most crown'd, most beautiful, are blasted all
> With thy grave life's expiring in their scorn,
> Thy life was rule to all lives; and thy death
> (Thus forcibly despising life) the quench
> Of all lives' glories. (5.2.179-85)

Caesar knows that without Cato, he will not be able to achieve the legitimacy he needs to shed the label of tyrant; that is his first and only concern at the news of Cato's death, despite the hand of friendship he extended to Cato earlier. Throughout the play, Caesar's political maneuvering undercuts his good deeds and statements, and while Chapman alters the history of the play's events, his interpretation of Julius Caesar is justified by his primary source, Plutarch, even though Plutarch does not emphasize Caesar's politicking to the degree Chapman does.

The most well-known tragedy of Caesar belongs, of course, to Shakespeare, and the subject was an interesting choice for the playwright. *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* followed Shakespeare's series of English historical plays, from Henry VI to Henry V, so perhaps an exploration of Roman history seemed natural and sensible. Julius Caesar had already been the subject of several plays, but Shakespeare manages, nonetheless, to take the story a dramatic leap forward by using a far less didactic approach than earlier writers, such as Chapman or the anonymous author of *Caesar's Revenge*. He neither

condemns nor condones the assassination of Caesar. Rather than using his characters to make a point, Shakespeare makes his characters the point and reveals truths about human nature through them. T.J.B. Spenser asserts that Plutarch, specifically Sir Thomas North's English translation, serves as Shakespeare's source of Caesar's biography, as well as a model of characterization technique:

> But although Shakespeare may have seen the weakness of Plutarch's scheme of putting a life of a Greek alongside a life of a Roman, careful study of his plays in relation to Plutarch's narrative shows how much Shakespeare respected Plutarch's powers of characterization by significant detail. Yet when we consider the impact of Plutarch upon Shakespeare, we need to remember that the world's literature was then much more limited [. . .] in an age when there were no great novels Plutarch could pass as skillful in the description and delineation of character. (12)

Albert Cook agrees that Shakespeare borrowed characterization technique, as well as biographical information, from Plutarch. He writes, "[Shakespeare] began to draw on Plutarch in such a way as to combine tragedy and history on the basis of increasingly complex character" (32). Unlike *Caesar's Revenge* and *Caesar and Pompey*, *Julius Caesar* deals only with the events leading up to and the immediate aftermath of Caesar's assassination, so the moral questions fall more on the conspirators than Caesar himself. The degree to which Shakespeare is critical of Caesar depends upon the answer to the question: was Caesar's assassination justified? Shakespeare undoubtedly places part of the responsibility on Caesar, and his characterization of Caesar is basically consistent with the previous two plays, if not as pointed. Perhaps Caesar escapes harsher criticism because, as is commonly believed, the play really belongs to Antony and Brutus, being

Caesar's in name only. There is no single culprit or hero. Confronted with the Renaissance conception of Caesar, the Caesar of Plutarch, Shakespeare resists imposing one didactic theme on his material and, instead, makes the very ambiguity of Caesar and his assassination the focus of the play (Yu 132).

Since Shakespeare gives Caesar a relatively small amount of stage time, especially for a titular character, much of what the reader gathers about Caesar comes from the conversations between other characters. To what extent those characters are reliable is open to interpretation. The familiar opening scene of the play features the two tribunes Flavius and Marullus chastising citizens for celebrating Caesar's triumph over Pompey. Flavius remarks to Marullus:

> These growing feathers pluck'd from Caesar's wing
> Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
> Who else would soar above the view of men
> And keep us all in servile fearfulness. (1.1.72-75)

These lines foreshadow the predominant question involving Caesar in this play, the question which Brutus is faced with answering: will Caesar parlay his popularity into tyrannical control over Rome? As a Pompey loyalist, Flavius is certainly biased, but his concern nevertheless has merit. Shakespeare intentionally leaves the question unanswered by omitting the fact that by this point Caesar had been appointed as a perpetual dictator, an office Plutrach refers to as "a complete tyranny" (514). Marullus does question how Caesar's accomplishments benefit Rome, dressing down the commoners, "Wherefore rejoice? What conquests brings he home? / What tributaries

follow him to Rome, / To grace with captive bonds his chariot wheels?" (1.1.32-34). Here, Shakespeare is clearly channeling Plutarch's words:

> His was the last of his wars; and his triumph on account of it gave the Romans more pain than any other step he had taken. He did not now mount the car for having conquered foreign generals or barbarian kings, but for ruining the children, and destroying the race of one of the greatest men Rome had ever produced, though he proved at last unfortunate. All the world condemned his triumphing in the calamities of his country, and rejoicing in things which nothing could excuse, either before the gods or men, but extreme necessity. (514)

Still, Shakespeare stops short of condemning Caesar before the main action of the play by avoiding any mention of the horrors of the civil war preceding the play's opening act, focusing instead on the possible future misdeeds of Caesar.

In the next scene, Casca describes an incident in which Caesar is offered the crown three times, each time refusing, which Casca refers to as "mere foolery" (1.2.232). He considers the event a transparent political ploy, and laments that the spectacle was effective in winning the hearts of the crowd, construing Caesar as a would-be tyrant cynically taking advantage of the Roman populace's fickle and gullible nature. The action occurs offstage, so here again Caesar is defined by the perception of another. Like Flavius and Casca, Cassius holds Caesar in low regard, but his disdain and suspicion are driven more by personal antipathy than patriotism. Brutus, on the other hand, faces a difficult dilemma concerning Caesar and his impending dictatorship. In Shakespeare's play, Brutus has great affection for Caesar and is torn between his love of Caesar and his love of Rome. Like Flavius, Brutus refers to the potential tyranny of Caesar:

I know no personal cause to spurn him,

But for the general. – He would be crowned.

How that might change his nature, there's the question.

[. . . . .]

And therefore think him as a serpent's egg

Which, hatched, would, as his kind grow mischievous,

And kill him in the shell. (2.1.10-34)

Brutus is considering killing Caesar for what he may do, not what he has done. Again, Plutarch had already given the conspirators enough justification for assassination, but Shakespeare keeps the justification hypothetical, heightening the ambiguity of Caesar's character, as well as Brutus's. Brutus commits to the conspiracy, but is conflicted by what he must do. To reconcile his patriotic duty, as he sees it, he distinguishes between Caesar the potential despot and Caesar the man:

We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,

And in the spirit of men there is no blood.

O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit,

And not dismember Caesar! But, alas,

Caesar must bleed for it. (2.1.167-71)

In this speech, the spirit of Caesar is the inevitable tyranny of Caesar's total rule and Caesar is the man whom Brutus loves. The "spirit of Caesar," once again, is merely a possibility at this point.

As for Caesar himself, he gives no definitive evidence that he has designs on becoming a king or a tyrant. At the race of Lupercal, Caesar's first appearance in the

play, Antony and Casca respond to him as if he were king, but Caesar does not say anything himself that indicates a particular self-importance. He does, however, remind Antony of his responsibilities in the race:

> Forget not, in your speed, Antonius,
>
> To touch Calphurnia; for our elders say,
>
> The barren, touched in this holy chase,
>
> Shake off their sterile curse. (1.2.6-9)

Caesar's desire to father a child could be interpreted as a desire to establish a monarchic dynasty. Shakespeare leaves this ambiguous, but since Plutarch makes no mention of Calpurnia's barrenness and a Renaissance audience would have readily understood the implication, it is likely that Shakespeare is trying to introduce Caesar's dynastic ambitions.

Also in this scene comes the soothsayer's first warning to beware the ides of March. Caesar's dismissal of the warning could be read in two ways: proud confidence or arrogant hubris. Arrogant hubris makes sense, given his propensity for referring to himself in the third person as "Caesar," indicating that he has, in his eyes, become the symbol for which his name would come to stand, a product of his growing self-immortalization. Caesar's grandiose self-image becomes more evident as other warnings present themselves. For one, Caesar reads Cassius perfectly, saying that his lean and hungry look makes him dangerous, but he fails to act on his own warning. He proclaims to Antony:

> Would he were fatter! But I fear him not;
>
> Yet if my name were liable to fear,

I do not know the man I should avoid

So soon as that spare Cassius. (1.2.197-200)

He seems, here, to have fallen victim to his own aggrandized image. Later in the play, Decius capitalizes on this vulnerability, convincing Caesar to ignore Calpurnia's dream vision and the priest's sacrificial omen by taking advantage of Caesar's pride and fear of being perceived a coward. Somewhat ironically, the pressure to maintain his superhuman reputation facilitates his mortality.

The imperious Caesar returns for the assassination scene, now more arrogant than ever before. When Metellus Cimber kneels before Caesar to appeal that his brother's banishment be rescinded, Caesar scorns the supplicant as less than a man, presenting himself as infallible:

I spurn the like a cur out of my way,

Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause

Will he be satisfied. (3.1.46-8)

When Brutus and Cassius make the same appeal, Caesar's arrogance grows as he elevates himself to celestial status:

I could be well mov'd, if I were as you;

If I could pray to move, prayers would move me;

But I am constant as the northern star,

Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality

There is no fellow in the firmament. (3.1.58-62)

This Caesar no longer feels the need for political politeness or, at least, a token pretense of humility. His regal presence has become a divine one and justifies the conspirators'

belief that his assassination is necessary for the good of the Republic. However, Shakespeare does not make the definitive case that Caesar deserved to die or that his assassination was the best thing for Rome. We must remember that Brutus is plagued through the play by naiveté and bad judgment, and Cassius admits to personally disliking Caesar. The two are not rewarded for their participation in the conspiracy, and the Roman Republic is dissolved anyway under the rule of Antony and Octavius. Furthermore, as Caesar privately becomes his authoritarian public image, he elicits empathy as well as condemnation. Joseph Chang writes that *Julius Caesar* is the "dramatic representation of the ironic discrepancy between man's desired and created realities" (63). Just as Caesar's assassination leads to civil war and the destruction of the Republic, the very outcome Brutus was hoping to prevent, Caesar's divine posturing exposes his foibles and ultimately dooms him. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, as powerful as he is, pays for his moral shortcomings and character flaws, just like the average human. Unlike Chapman and the author of *Caesar's Revenge*, who are most interested in advancing their didactic themes and, therefore, portray Caesar as a basically static figure, Shakespeare allows Caesar to be affected by events and other characters in the play, to suffer from the cruel and ironic twists of fate, giving him a more recognizable humanity.

CHAPTER V

ALEXANDER THE GREAT IN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

"Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of/Alexander till a' find it stopping a bunghole." These words, spoken by Hamlet (5.1.203-04) in Yorick's graveyard, provide a glimpse of the trajectory dramatic representations of Alexander took moving from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. Like Caesar, Alexander is brought down to earth by Renaissance writers, although he does largely escape the pointed criticism Caesar suffered. Hamlet explains to Horatio his logic behind the above lines:

> Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexan-
> der returnith to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we
> make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was
> converted might they not stop a beer barrel? (5.1.209-12)

Hamlet understood that Alexander was still only a man, despite being one of most successful and admired military leaders in the history of the world. Likewise, Renaissance writers seemed to lose the awe for Alexander found in the Middle English romances. It may be more accurate to say that they have also lost much of the interest, as Luann Kitchel explains, "The Middle Ages, in fact, bring to a close the literary interest in the Alexander legend, at least in England" (1). Alexander's weaknesses are certainly more emphasized in the Renaissance than the Middle Ages, but he doesn't approach the level of villainy of Hoffman's Caesar or the level of arrogance and ambition of

Shakespeare's. The greatest change for Alexander between the two eras is his fall in prominence; like an aging film star, Alexander dropped from leading-man status to largely cameos and bit parts. His life was perfectly suited for the epic romance, a form much *en vogue* in the Middle Ages, but as the Aristotelian tragedy swept the Renaissance stage, Caesar, with his neatly intertwined flaws and death, became a natural fit. Alexander's biography did not fit the tragic form or the form of the courtly romance. For this reason, perhaps, the attention given to Alexander slipped greatly.

The most well-known Alexander Renaissance drama is probably John Lyly's light, romantic comedy *Campaspe*, written in 1584. As the title suggests, Alexander is not the true star of the play, despite being its most well-known character. The play is formally titled *A most excellent comedy of Alexander, Campaspe, and Diogenes*, though, in reality, it is the story of two lovers, Campaspe and the painter Apelles, with Alexander primarily serving as the obstacle between them. Despite the strenuous objections of his compatriot Hephestion, Alexander falls for the beautiful Theban captive Campaspe and, after declaring his love for her, commissions Apelles to paint her portrait. Over the course of painting her picture, Apelles falls in love with Campaspe, she falls in love with him, and the two resolve to ignore their feelings out of fear of the king's retribution. Naturally, things work themselves out by the play's end.

A common criticism of *Campaspe* is that it lacks dramatic intensity, which is true. There are no battles, sword fights, or menacing conspirators threatening the happy outcome of the plot, and Alexander, the obstacle, cannot fairly be called a villain. The one source of dramatic irony in the play rests in Apelles's plan to set up additional meetings with Campaspe by damaging the portrait after each painting session. As Joseph

Houppert explains, Lyly "sacrifices dramatic irony for more obvious comic devices – puns, quibbles, slapstick, and caricature" (56). As such, the audience never really sees Alexander as a threat, and, despite the fear of the lovers, Alexander never approaches the tyranny of Hoffman's Caesar. In his worst moments, Alexander's arrogance and lack of self-awareness could be compared to Shakespeare's Caesar, but the levity of the play reassures that these are not tragic flaws.

Campaspe begins with a description of Alexander as an impeccable, ideal ruler, but quickly reveals weaknesses that make him human. The play opens with Alexander's armies having just taken Thebes, and it is clear that Alexander is beloved and respected by his men. Clitus, one of Alexander's officers, remarks to a peer, "Parmenio, I cannot tel whether I should more commend in Alexanders victories, courage, or curtesie" (1.1.1-3). Parmenio agrees, "Clytus, it becommeth the sonne of Phillip to be none other than Alexander is: therefore seeing in the father a full perfection, who could have doubted in the sonne an excellencie" (1.1.13-16). Their short exchange of exposition contrasts sharply with the first scene of *Julius Caesar*, in which Flavius and Marrulus deride Caesar for the flaws which become the dominant themes of that play. Here, Clytus and Parmenio sing praises to Alexander, which characterizes Alexander's depiction in most of the first act. As Phil Dust writes:

> Alexander is credited with courage, courtesy, respect for maidenly virtue, mercy, mildness, in other words with that greatest of Aristotelian political virtues, magnificence. Euphuism is heaped on euphuism as Hephestion describes the conqueror's care to govern in peace as equal to his prowess in war. And peace is

> especially equated with the nurturing of philosophy. Lyly is presenting Alexander as striving to be the philosopher-king of Plato's *Republic.* (80)

The philosopher-king is undermined, however, one act later, when Alexander admits to Hephestion, "I loue I loue *Campaspe*, a thing farre vnfit for a Macedonian, for a king, for *Alexander*" (2.2.489-90). As powerful as Alexander is, he suggests here that he is powerless against the forces of love. Hephestion believes strongly that love is a dangerous, feminine emotion, especially for a ruler, and appeals to Alexander's sense of reason in this anti-romantic speech:

> I cannot tell *Alexander*, whether the reporte be more shamefull to be heard, or the cause forowfull to be beleeued? What, is the sonne of *Phillip*, king of Macedon become the subject of *Campapse*, the captiue of *Thebes*? Is that minde, whose greatnes the world coulde not containe, drawn within the compasse of an idle alluring eie? Wil you handle the spindle with *Hercules*, when you shuld shake the speare with *Achilles*? Is the warlike sound of drumme and trumpe turned to the softe noyse of lire and lute, the neighing of barbed steeds, whose loudness filled the ayre with terror, and whose breathes dimmed the sunne with smoake, conuerted to delicate tunes and amorous glaunces? (2.2.498-510)

Alexander responds that reason is beside the point. Lyly suggests here that Alexander the Great is just as vulnerable to Cupid's arrow (or the temptation of flesh) as the average man, just as Hamlet suggests that the world-conqueror is as mortal as the average man.

Hephestion raises the objection which lies at the heart of the play: Alexander cannot be at once strong enough to extend his empire across the globe and weakened by an emotional dependency to a woman far beneath his station. Hephestion complains,

“Though she haue heauenlye gifts, virtue and bewtie, is she not of earthly metal flesh and bloud? You *Alexander* that would be a God, shewe your self in this worse then a man, so soone to bee both ouerseene and ouertaken in a woman, whose smooth words wounde deeper then sharpe swords” (2.2.544-50). Alexander seems to be attempting something unnatural and in doing so reveals his arrogance and potential tyranny. He replies, “Yeelde *Hephestion*, for *Alexander* doth loue, & therefore must obtaine” (2.2.577-78). By play’s end, Alexander will come to agree with his trusted friend, but in this scene we see an Alexander accustomed to getting what he wants. At his moment, there seems to be little hope for Campaspe and Apelles as Alexander settles fully into his role as the primary obstacle for the play’s love story. The following exchange appears to doom the young couple and creates the most unflattering image of Alexander that the play offers:

> HEPHESTION. Suppose she loues not you, affection cometh not by appointment or birth, and then as good hated as enforced.
>
> ALEXANDER. I am king, and wil commaund.
>
> HEPHESTION. You may, to yeelde to luste by force, but to consent to loue by feare you cannot.
>
> ALEXANDER. Why, what is that, which *Alexander* maye not conquer as he list?
>
> HEPHESTION. Why, that which you say the Gods cannot resiste, Loue.
>
> ALEXANDER. I am a conquerour, shee a captiue, I as fortunate, as she faire: my greatness may answere her wants, and the giftes of my minde, the modeste of hers: Is it not likely then that shee should loue? Is it not reasonable?

Alexander has fallen into his own trap; reason would be beside the point for Campaspe too. When Hephestion points out the flaw in Alexander’s argument, Alexander orders

him silent and ends the discussion. Alexander's belief that he can command Campaspe to love him is as foolish as it is arrogant, as is his assumption that he can conquer her with force like an opposing army. Hephestion speaks reason, but like a petulant, spoiled prince, the king brushes the advice aside. Additionally, Alexander's idea of love demeans true love; he neither respects the object of his love nor is interested in her ultimate happiness. John Dover Wilson labels Alexander's feelings as positively as one can, writing, "The love of Alexander is certainly unemotional, not to say callous," speculating that "the great monarch's equanimity was a veiled tribute to the supposed indifference of the virgin Queen to all matters of Cupid's trade" (101). On the other hand, one could argue that Alexander's feelings towards Campaspe do not resemble love as much as lust. Houppert refers to the "erotic impulse" at the center of Roman comedies which is present in this play: "boy sees girl, boy wants girl, boy cannot have girl (at least not immediately)" (54). This erotic impulse proves problematic for the story, however, because sexual fulfillment is not the solitary goal of Elizabethan comedy. Without a marriage, the comedy would be incomplete, and both Alexander and the audience know a marriage between Alexander and the commoner Campaspe would be impossible. If Alexander were to pursue her in this manner, it would be an inappropriate waste of time and focus.

Hephestion is well aware of and concerned about the pointlessness of Alexander's current distraction, but Alexander clearly has no grand romantic notions. In the next act, in response to Hephestion's chiding that his love is affecting his reason, Alexander brags that he is not "so farre in loue with *Campaspe*, as with *Busephalus*, if occasion serue either of conflicte or of conquest" (3.4.844-46). Evidently, he loves Campaspe no more

than he loves his horse and seems to think of her merely as a thing to be possessed. This statement reinforces the impression that Alexander is more likely feeling lust than love, and that he would be willing to force her submission for such a common emotion does hint at something tyrannical. However, it is also possible that his interest in Campaspe is nothing but a passing fancy which he can dispose of when it becomes inconvenient. Upon Hephestion's concerns that Alexander could be distracted from conquering Persia, Alexander objects, "I confesse the labours fit for *Alexander*, and yet recreation necessary among so manye assaultes, bloudie woundes, intolerable troubles: give me leave [. . .] And doubt not but *Alexander* can when he wil throw affections as farre from him, as he can cowardice" (3.4.855-60). The happy resolution of this plot depends upon the later statement being true.

When Alexander returns in act 5, scene 4, he is aware of Apelles' love for Campaspe and decides to magnanimously step aside and permit the happy union. This decision seems odd, given that it is an almost complete reversal of the character presented thus far. One of the weaknesses of the play is the unsatisfying motivation for the reversal, which seems to come from practically nowhere. Alexander could have realized that a relationship with Campaspe would be impossible, that a romance would conflict with his duties as a ruler, or that he could not in good conscience stand in the way of true love; none of these possibilities, however, are presented in the play. Instead, we have two short, vague conversations and our imaginations. In the beginning of the scene, Alexander asks Hephestion what his attitude is towards love. Hephestion replies that love is "a word by superstition thought a God, by vse turned to an humour, by self will made a flattering madnesse (5.4.1483-85). He then asks Diogenes, who mocks women

and love with clever wordplay but says little else. These two conversations do not adequately explain Alexander's change of heart, but Lyly gives us nothing else by way of explanation. When Apelles enters the scene, Alexander asks him directly if he loves Campaspe, which he denies out of fear. Alexander sees through this and resolves to make the match, declaring, "*Campaspe*, for the good qualities I know in *Apelles* and the virtue I see in you, I am determined you shal enioy one the other. Howe saye you *Campaspe*, would you say, I?" Campaspe consents with concealed happiness and, most likely, great surprise, "Your handmaid must obey, if you commaund" (5.4.1159-63). Her response, specifically her use of the word *commaund*, gives Alexander an opportunity to reveal what he learned, somehow, about love through the course of the story. He says, "I will not enforce mariage, where I cannot cõpel loue" (5.4.1566-67). Even the man who could conquer the world cannot compel someone to love. Although he is ostensibly speaking about Apelles, he knows it is he who Campaspe cannot be compelled to love.

Alexander's inability to force affection from Campaspe is not the only example of monarchial impotence on display. Diogenes is thoroughly unimpressed by Alexander's accomplishments and power, declining an invitation to come see Alexander and then behaving dismissively of Alexander when the king encounters him in the street. Alexander seems amused by Diogenes, but what choice does he have? Punishing the philosopher would not change the fact that, ultimately, the king has no power in the intellectual arena. Likewise, Alexander is impotent in the artistic arena, upstaged handily by Apelles when he attempts to match the artist at his own craft:

> ALEXANDER. Lend me thy pencil *Apelles*, I wil paint, and thou shalt iudge.
>
> APELLES. Here.

ALEXANDER. The coale breakes.

APELLES. You leane too hard.

ALEXANDER. Now it blackes not.

APELLES. You leane too soft.

ALEXANDER. This is awry.

APELLES. Your eie goeth not with your hand.

ALEXANDER. Now it is worse!

APELLES. Your hand goeth not with your minde. (3.3.928-38)

At the conclusion of this exchange, Alexander asks how well he had done and Apelles responds, "Like a king" (3.3.943). Leah Scragg explains that Alexander has the "capacity to dictate but not create. Though he has the power to commission the portrait of Campaspe, and thus to enlist the creative arts [. . .] his own attempts to draw are a failure, pointing once again to an area of experience into which political power is unable to extend" (69). As with Diogenes, Alexander concedes this limitation with no more protest than passive-aggressively dismissing Apelles craft, remarking that he would "rather be setting of a battle than blotting of a board" (3.3.941-42).

Alexander's reactions to Diogenes and Apelles in those situations may offer an explanation as to why he suddenly and magnanimously forfeits Campaspe to Apelles: what choice does he have? The lovers are justifiably afraid of Alexander's power but love each other anyway. Campaspe knows the king wants her but, regardless, allows herself to love Apelles. Apelles continually damages Campaspe's portrait to ensure further meetings, knowing he could be killed if Alexander discovers it. Alexander's monarchial power means nothing more in the arena of love than it does in the arenas of

philosophy and art; therefore, his magnanimity "constitutes a notable example of the strategy of containment, in that he appropriates a situation beyond his control to the legitimization of his position and the construction of the Alexander myth" (Scragg 68). Alexander further undermines the magnanimity of his gesture with an unmistakably rude and bitter farewell to the couple:

> Well, enioy one another, I giue her thee frãckly, *Apelles*. Thou shalt see that *Alexander* maketh but a toye of loue, and leadeth affection in fetters, vsing fãncie as a foole to make him sport, or as a minstrell to make him merry. It is not the amorous glaunce of an eie can settle an idle thought in the heart, no no, it is childrens game, a life for seamesters and schollers, the one pricking in cloutes haue nothing els to thinke on, the other picking fancies out of books, have litle els to maruaile at. Go, *Apelles*, take with you your *Campaspe*. *Alexander* is cloied with looking on that, which thou wondredst at. (5.4.1586-97)

Would not a magnanimous Alexander have congratulated the couple for their happiness and accepted defeat with quiet grace? Instead, he belittles love as a quaint enterprise for those with nothing else better to do and proudly claims to have lost interest in Campaspe; true or not, he knows he could never truly have her.

With *Campaspe*, Lyly demonstrates two shifts in attitude towards Alexander the Great in British literature. Between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Alexander had lost some of his luster. First, while *Campaspe*'s Alexander is no villain or fool, he resides several notches below the idealized general-warrior-king of the Middle English Alexander romances. While elements of Alexander's human flaws were present in the romances, they were never as prominent as in *Campaspe*. Still, those flaws were

balanced with a respect for Alexander that was largely lost for Julius Caesar; Alexander's flippancy towards love, his possessiveness towards Campaspe, his occasional arrogance and churlishness, and his impotence in art, philosophy, and love do not overshadow the qualities that make him a great general and king. In fact, Lyly goes out of his way to suggest the qualities of a great artist or lover and a great king or general may be mutually exclusive. Second, while the Middle English romances focused entirely on Alexander and never strayed, *Campaspe* is really the story of two young lovers, with Alexander serving as the complication threatening to keep them apart. As Houppert writes, "He serves as a frame, not as the central figure of the play. A frame exists for the sake of the picture, and Alexander exists for the sake of other characters" (58). The audience is rooting against Alexander in this case, even if he is generally admired. In actuality, Alexander's role could have been filled by nearly any ruler; there were aspects of the story specific to Alexander's life – his interactions with Diogenes and his impending conquest of Persia, for example – but in regards to the play's central conflict, Alexander's involvement is fairly generic. This minor role, relative to those of Renaissance Caesar, represents the most significant on-stage depiction of Alexander the Great in Renaissance British drama.

While *Campaspe* represent the lone major Renaissance drama featuring Alexander prominently, he does make a notable cameo in Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*, which further illustrates the diminishing esteem Elizabethans held for not only Alexander, but the rest of the Nine Worthies. John S. Pendergast argues that "there is no doubt the *LLL* is Shakespeare's most 'contemporary' play in the sense that it reveals a great deal about the attitudes and habits of Shakespeare's England. Most of these

attitudes are centered around the pedagogical and linguistic habits of Shakespeare's contemporaries" (31). Those pedagogical habits are most relevant to my purpose. Shakespeare probably had a more specific audience in mind for *LLL* than his other plays that debuted in a regular theater. It is generally accepted that *LLL* was originally played for a small audience of university-educated aristocrats who would be familiar with the type of exemplary literature treasured by Philip Sidney, who believed that noblemen internalized lessons of virtue best when they were accompanied by inspiring historical examples of virtue, such as the Nine Worthies satirized in *LLL*. In fact, the entire concept of the Nine Worthies tradition and such explicitly didactic literature is satirized by Shakespeare in the mock-pageant presented in the last scene, put on by commoners for an unappreciative, misbehaved audience of un-worthy nobles. The target of Shakespeare's satire is Navarre's court, as Judith Perryman suggests, "All through the preceding part of the play the five people who put on the show of the Worthies have been, to some extent, the comic counterparts of the king and his lords by caricaturing the flaws and pretensions of the 'academe' [. . .] impersonating the vices of the court, holding them up, as it transpires, to ridicule" (157-58). Yet, it is the ridicule directed towards the players by the court that makes the worst impression.

Before the pageant, the young nobles undergo a humiliating masque, devised by the young women of the court for their amusement, in which each man is steered towards the wrong lady. When the pageant begins, the gentlemen are more than happy to transfer their humiliation onto the players in the form of constant interruptions and heckling. When Costard enters as Pompey (not one of the traditional Nine), Berowne and Boyet immediately interrupt, refusing to take the illusion of the pageant seriously.

Shakespeare's motive for substituting Pompey for Caesar is uncertain, but the interchangeability of the men does suggest a diminishment of the Worthies. John Hawley Roberts admits, "Indeed, it would be difficult to say just why Shakespeare did include them. It is true, as a study of the references to the Nine Worthies will show, that the personnel of the group changed from time to time" (298). Pendergast suggests that the inclusion of Pompey was deliberate because it provides additional opportunity for the mocking of the king's academe by way of a three-fold pun. The first is Costard mistakenly referring to Pompey as "Pompion," a word meaning *pumpkin*. The second is the closeness of Pompey's name to *pomp*, as in excessively ceremonious. The third is a possible reference to a pomewater, a type of apple, connected to Costard, a fool, whose name is also a word for a large apple. All three puns point to the deflation of things inflated. Pendergast summarizes, "By leading with Pompey, Shakespeare successfully deflates the entire tradition as well as the players" (125).

Eventually, the audience allows Costard to finish his presentation. Nathaniel, on the other hand, is tortured during his portrayal of Alexander, the second worthy to be introduced. He begins with a customary description of Alexander, "When in the world I lived, I was the world's commander; / By east, west, north, and south, I spread my conquering might" (5.5.559-60). According to Pendergast, Alexander's appearance "reminds the audience of the king's description of his academe members as 'brave conquerors' conducting war against their 'own affections.' Again, by this point in the play, the young men are no longer conquerors but lovestruck" (125). The young men, however, pay no attention to the worthiness of Alexander and see Nathaniel's performance as merely an opportunity for jest. Three lines into his speech, when

Nathaniel announces that he is "Alisander," Boyet calls out, "Your nose says, no, you are not; for it stands too right" (5.2.561). Unlike most depictions of Alexander, which focus on his many strengths and accomplishments, Boyet makes a joke about Alexander's minor physical shortcoming. Berowne, not to be outdone, follows Boyet, "Your nose smells 'no' in this, most tender-smelling knight," a reference to Plutarch's claim that Alexander had a strong body odor (5.2.562). Nathaniel, disrupted, has to restart his speech, but cannot get past the first line before Berowne rudely forces him to leave the stage. Costard rebukes Nathaniel's performance, saying that Nathaniel's lion, a symbol of Alexander, sits upon a privy rather than a thrown. This mockery says more about Shakespeare's opinion of the court than his opinion of Alexander, but if this disrespect is at all typical of young nobility, it would be safe to assume that Elizabethans had lost interest in hearing stories about such ancient heroes as the Nine Worthies.

Shakespeare, England's greatest dramatist, did not write an Alexander drama, despite an abundance of source material and a clear interest in the classics, possibly because he did not see Alexander's life as a suitable subject for comedy or tragedy. In the comedy *Campaspe*, Alexander was nothing more than the obstacle standing between the play's lovers, and Plutarch, Shakespeare's primary source for *Julius Caesar*, suggests the cause of Alexander's death to be an unnamed sickness, not poison or murder or anything else that might be useful for the construction of a tragedy. Scholars have suggested, however, that Shakespeare's history *Henry V* is Shakespeare's Alexander play. Circumstantial evidence lends logic to the claim; Shakespeare would have certainly not only been familiar with Plutarch's Alexander, but would have very likely had it fresh on his mind when writing *Henry V*. In Plutarch, Alexander and Caesar are placed

together in a complementary pair, with Alexander placed directly in front of Caesar. Shakespeare wrote *Henry V* in 1599, the same year he wrote *Julius Caesar*, and is canonically placed directly before *Caesar*. As has been amply documented, Shakespeare was intimately familiar with Plutarch's *Caesar*, the companion to Plutarch's *Alexander*. Ronald Berman connects the dots, while adding to the chronological evidence, "In 1599 then, Shakespeare wrote two plays on heroic subjects, one of which came from Plutarch. It would have been inextricably linked with its companion life. And, *Henry V*, besides using the Alexander story thematically, makes explicit leading references to that story" (533). If indeed Shakespeare intended to link Henry to Alexander, he would not have been the first. Thomas Hoccleve makes a similar comparison in *Regiment of Princes*, which he dedicated to young Henry when he was still a prince. As I have previously established, there was a long medieval tradition of Alexander embodying the talent, philosophy, and achievements of an ideal prince which Hoccleve chose to pass on to young Henry and Shakespeare taps into for his ideal king, Henry V.

Plutarch's *Alexander* and Shakespeare's *Henry V* both begin with a disclaimer, or an apology of sorts. Plutarch asks his audience "for indulgence though we do not give the actions in full detail and with a scrupulous exactness, but rather in a short summary; since we are not writing Histories, but Lives" (464). Shakespeare echoes Plutarch, asking his audience to forgive the limitations of his medium:

> But pardon, gentles all,
>
> The flat unraised spirits that hath dared
>
> On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
>
> So great an object. Can this cockpit hold

> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
>
> Within this wooden O the very casques
>
> That did affright the air at Agincourt? (Prologue.8-14)

Both writers "know the spectacle of history, yet both call on the imagination to recognize something beyond mere movement and sequence" (Berman 533). Their purpose is to arrive at the dramatic truth of their characters; the historical truth of their deeds is merely a means to that end.

The similarities between Shakespeare's and Plutarch's apologies and purpose extend to the depictions of their respective protagonists. As I've mentioned in previous chapters, Plutarch is far kinder to Alexander than he is to Caesar, although, like any truthful examination of a human being, Plutarch's Alexander is not above the corrupting influences of power. Judith Mossman writes, "Plutarch's character of Alexander [. . .] has been considered one of the biographer's most straight-forwardly heroic portraits. This, in fact, is an oversimplification. Plutarch certainly hymns Alexander's heroical, epical qualities, but he also takes the opportunity to portray the king's darker side" (58). Throughout the *Alexander*, the king becomes progressively more violent and superstitious as his considerable power continues to influence him. Still, one inevitably leaves the story with a clear sense of Plutarch's admiration of Alexander. Likewise, Shakespeare is forthright in his praise of Henry, calling him "the mirror of all Christian kings" (2.Chorus.6). A dissenting argument does exist, which suggests that Shakespeare's praises of Henry are ironic, and that Shakespeare is, in fact, highly-critical of the violence done by Henry, specifically at Henry's threats following the battle of Harfleur. I have always dismissed this interpretation as an example of the bad practice of

applying our modern moral sensibilities to centuries-old texts. Mossman also disagrees with this interpretation, as she explains, "I find it hard to imagine an ironic reading of the play that would satisfactorily explain why Shakespeare would have wanted to subvert Henry; I am also uncertain about what sort of play one is left with if one assumes that *Henry V* sets out to denigrate its central character" (58). Therefore, I am proceeding under the assumption that the words of Shakespeare's Chorus are sincere.

Shakespeare makes a direct comparison between Henry and Alexander early in the play, in which the writer references the famous story of Alexander cutting the Gordian knot. Addressing Henry political acumen, Canterbury says of the newly-crowned king, "Turn him to any cause of policy, / The Gordian knot of it he will unloose" (1.1.45-46). Here, Henry could be seen as superior to Alexander; what Alexander must cut, Henry, through his political skill, can smoothly untie. Henry himself makes a direct comparison to Alexander in his speech at Harfleur:

> On, on, you noblest English!
>
> Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof,
>
> Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
>
> Have in these parts from morn till even fought,
>
> And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument.
>
> Dishonour not your mothers; now attest
>
> That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you. (3.1.17-23)

Henry successfully rallies his men using the courage and war-time audacity of Alexander while channeling Alexander's own talent in motivating his soldiers, chronicled throughout the *Alexander*.

The third direct reference to Alexander, the longest and most significant, compares Alexander's killing of Cleitus to Henry's rejection of the comic giant John Falstaff and comes from the mouth of Fluellen, a comic figure in his own right:

> I think it is e'en Macedon where Alexander is born. I tell you, Captain, if you look in the maps of the 'orld, I warrant you sall find, in the comparisons between Macedon and Monmouth, that the situations, look you, is both alike. [. . .] If you mark Alexander's life well, Harry of Monmouth's life is come after it indifferent well, for there is figures in all things. Alexander, God knows, and you know, in the rages, and his furies, and his wraths, and his cholers, and his moods, and his displeasures, and his indignations, and also being a little intoxicates in his prains, did, in his ales and his angers, look you, kill his best friend, Cleitus. (4.7.22-38)

Here, Fluellen alludes to one of the more negative moments of the *Alexander*, in which Alexander kills his friend in an intoxicated rage, an action for which Alexander feels immense guilt. Gower responds that the comparison is not apt; Henry did not kill Falstaff. Fluellen responds:

> I speak but in the figures and comparisons of it. As Alexander killed his friend Cleitus, being in his ales and his cups, so also Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and his good judgments, turned away the fat knight with the great-belly doublet. He was full of jests, and gipes, and knaveries, and mocks. I have forgot his name. (4.7.41-49)

The fact that Fluellen forgets Falstaff's name underscores his own comic nature and indicates the important change of Prince Hal into King Henry. Henry is an altogether different person than the party-loving Hal, and the rejection of Falstaff is a necessary

symbol of Henry's rejection of everything Falstaff represented in Hal. Falstaff fades into oblivion as Henry ascends towards greatness, moving further and further from his former self.

The comparison between Alexander's killing of Cleitus and Henry's rejection of Falstaff is complicated. When Alexander kills Cleitus, it is certainly one of his worst moments, but it isn't as simple as he getting drunk and losing his temper; there is a definite sense of something supernatural at work, not only in Alexander's rage but Cleitus's uncharacteristically disrespectful and antagonistic attitude which incites Alexander's rage. Afterward, Alexander's grief is powerful, "He passed that night and the next day in anguish, inexpressible; and when he had wasted himself with tears and lamentations, he lay in speechless grief, uttering only now and then a groan" (486). The incident is important (albeit costly to Cleitus) because it humanizes Alexander, a stated goal of Plutarch. Henry's rejection of Falstaff, however, has the opposite effect. In a sense, it dehumanizes Henry. The responsibility-shirking Hal has a reality to him that is easier to identify with than the ideal Christian king represented in Henry, and there is an element of tragedy in his rejection of Falstaff, even if Henry does not literally kill him, as Alexander does Cleitus. Judith Mossman speculates, "The Alexander comparison is not straightforward: on the one hand, it might imply that kingship is so harsh that kings cannot retain their morality; on the other, that kingship requires acts that take their toll on the monarch as well as on others" (72). Alexander's killing of Cleitus may suggest the former, while Henry's less appalling act may suggest the later.

Mossman list two other important similarities in character, aside from the play's direct references, between Alexander and Henry, similarities that, when viewed side by

side and taken together with what I have presented in the previous few paragraph, leave little doubt that Shakespeare's comparison was intentional. The first is the love of honor (65). Plutarch writes:

> Accordingly, whenever news was brought that Philip, had taken some strong town, or won some great battle, the young [Alexander], instead of appearing delighted with it, used to say to his companions, "My father will go on conquering, till there be nothing extraordinary for you and me to do." As neither pleasure nor riches, but valour and glory were his great objects, he thought, that in proportion as the dominions he was to receive from his father grew greater, there would be less room for him to distinguish himself. (466)

Likewise, Henry dismisses pleasure and riches in favor of honor:

> By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
> Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
> It earns me not if men my garments wear;
> Such outward things dwell not in my desires:
> But if it be a sin to covet honour,
> I am the most offending soul alive. (4.3.24-29)

Mossman's other parallel is the "determination to conquer." As she observes, Henry expresses this determination in a distinctly Plutarchan way, "phras[ing] his desire for glory in terms of the kind of tomb he will earn" (66). He says that he will either conquer France:

> Or lay these bones in an unworthy urn,
> Tombless, with no remembrance over them:

Either our history shall with full mouth

Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave,

Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth,

Not worshipp'd with a waken epitaph. (1.2.228-33)

Mossman and others scholars go further in delineating the similarities between Alexander and Henry, but it suffices my purposes to stop here and say that there is clearly a connection. Having established that, what may we glean about Shakespeare's opinion of Alexander from his depiction of Henry? For one, Shakespeare greatly appreciated Alexander's talent as a politician. The fact that Henry compares favorably to Alexander in this regard does not diminish Alexander, but makes Henry all the more great. The comparison alone is complimentary. Two, Shakespeare approved of Alexander's drive to conquer. Despite our contemporary misgivings, Shakespeare comes nowhere close to condemning this quality in Henry. In fact, his ambition, audacity, and achievement as a military leader are inseparable from his greatness. Three, Alexander is capable of moments of moral weakness, susceptible to the corrupting effects of power and the pressures of immense responsibility.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Over the last four chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate two distinct shifts between medieval and Renaissance literature as a whole by analyzing the treatment of two specific ubiquitous and larger than life characters, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. While there are several appearances of the two men I have omitted and various genres of literature I have not dealt with, I believe that a side-by-side comparison of the Alexanders and Caesars of medieval epics and Renaissance drama yields profound and myriad results. Indeed, we see the literary *Zeitgeist* move in several ways, including the change in the taste of audiences, understanding of the word *tragedy*, attitudes towards Alexander and Caesar specifically, as well as characterization in general.

The medieval epic and the Renaissance drama were the dominant literary forms of their respective eras, a fact which helps us understand the appetites of their audiences. As I have mentioned, Alexander was a much larger figure than Caesar during the Middle Ages, despite their equal claim as members of the Nine Worthies. The reason lies in their biographies. Alexander's life, which took him across the globe, introduced him to exotic peoples and animals, and provided him several opportunities for battlefield heroics, made him a natural fit for an epic romance. As a result, we see several long works focused entirely on Alexander, such as the five Alexander epics and the *Epistola.* Caesar's life,

of course, was also full of adventure and achievement, but lacked the exoticism of Alexander and the element of the marvelous that accompanied it. Therefore, we see mostly brief appearances of Caesar, where he is used as an example towards some larger purpose, such as in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages,* where he appears as a member of the Nine Worthies, or in Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, where he is commended for being compassionate in his defeat of Pompey. As the *Zeitgeist* moved from epic romance to drama between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the prominence of each man is reversed. Caesar is the subject of several Renaissance dramas, while Alexander is only featured prominently in *Campaspe*, and then only as a secondary character.

Caesar's rise during the Renaissance could have been aided by the change in the meaning of *tragedy* between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when writers ceased thinking of a tragedy as a simple fall of a great man, such as in Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale*, and adopted the classical definition involving tragic heroes and tragic flaws, as Shakespeare does in *Julius Caesar*. Alexander's excellence and early death fit the criteria for a medieval tragedy, but his death was not directly related to any particular character flaw, eliminating him from the idea of tragedy shared by Aristotle and Shakespeare. However, just as Alexander's biography was perfectly suited for the epic romance, Caesar's biography was perfectly suited for the role of tragic hero. He was a man of greatness, excellent in most respects, but suffered the tragic flaws of arrogance and pride and was assassinated as a result. Portrayals of Caesar fell somewhere between villain and victim, but even the most flattering portrayals presented a flawed Caesar. Indeed, Renaissance playwrights were much harsher on Caesar than Alexander. *Campaspe*'s Alexander was flawed, sure, but comically flawed. The high level of esteem

and reverence Alexander enjoyed during the Middle Ages had certainly diminished by the Renaissance, but portrayals remained positive on the balance. Renaissance playwrights were also much harsher on Caesar than were the poets of the Middle Ages.

The mostly likely cause of the shift in attitudes towards Caesar was the introduction of Plutarch's *Lives,* which was not available to medieval writers, into Renaissance England's popular culture. Plutarch depicted both Alexander and Caesar in a mostly positive light, but he clearly saw faults in Caesar that he did not mention with Alexander. Shakespeare's themes of arrogance and pride in *Julius Caesar* seem to come directly from Plutarch, whose humanizing portrayal of Caesar seems in some ways a critique. Plutarch humanized Alexander also, but was far less critical. Plutarch's popularity during the Renaissance certainly influenced attitudes towards the two men, so, naturally, Renaissance writers using *Lives* as source material were more critical of Caesar than Alexander. Renaissance writers also, possibly, used Plutarch as a source of inspiration in their more humanized characterizations of Caesar and Alexander, which featured fuller, more three-dimensional characters than the works of Middle English writers. T.J.B. Spenser suggests that Shakespeare learned characterization from Plutarch. While I can write with certainty that Shakespeare borrowed biographical information from Plutarch, I am not sure that Shakespeare's power of characterization, one of the playwright's greatest strengths, can be narrowed down to one source. There is, however, enough circumstantial evidence to give credence to Spenser's claim and at least make for an interesting discussion. In any case, despite holdovers like Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney, the idea of the exemplar was largely on its way out, and in its place stood, on stage, the more complex, recognizably human protagonist, a mixture of good and bad

qualities who delivered the author's message through mistakes and faults instead of by example alone.

As we move into the Restoration, we see that the Renaissance was a definite turning point in narrative literature, in that these changes I have described persisted and evolved. Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens*, written in 1677, is a perfect example. In it, we see the continued fall of Alexander's reverence, the classical idea of tragedy, and the three-dimensional characterization of Plutarch and Shakespeare. While the Alexander of Lyly's comedy *Campaspe* suffered some minor flaws, the Alexander of Lee's tragedy was a much more seriously flawed character, as Philip Dust writes, "Far from the heroic allegory of Lyly, Lee's version of the Alexander myth is highly critical" (83). In fact, Dust describes Lee's Alexander as a drunken "degenerate" who succumbs to his desire for Statira, bending to her completely, although he is already married to Roxanna; fails to punish his villainous former wife, out of weakness, when she murders his then current wife Statira; and kills his oldest friend, Clytus, while "inflamed with wine" (83). Alexander's death fits the classical model of tragedy, as he is poisoned by Roxanna, jealous of his weakness for and dependence of Statira. Alexander's main tragic flaw is his inability to stand up to or overcome his feelings for all the women in the play, even Roxanna after she murders Statira. At the same time, Alexander is a sympathetic character, showing Lee's desire to characterize Alexander much like Shakespeare characterized Caesar, as recognizably human. Lee's Alexander isn't evil, but insecure and overly dependent on others, choosing love over his duties as king. Lyly's Caesar, on the other hand, chose to relinquish his claim on Campaspe and fully devote himself to his military conquests. As Dust notes, audiences greatly favored Lee's interpretation:

"Lyly's play of a noble young Alexander rejecting love for the glories of political conquest did not continue to remain popular on the stage. But Lee's play about a degenerate Alexander predominated on the English stage for two hundred years" (83).

Interestingly, many of the changes in structure and characterization evident in Renaissance and Restoration drama crossed over to the epic poem, most notably Milton's 1667 epic *Paradise Lost*. The purpose, scope, and structure of *Paradise Lost* resembles Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, but would Philip Sidney approve of Milton's anti-hero Satan or his flawed protagonist Adam as ideal vehicles for the poet's didactic intent of justifying the ways of God to Men? Satan is the most vivid character in the poem, charismatic and brilliant, with an oversized ego serving as both his greatest strength and weakness. The epic convention of large-scale war is represented in the poem by the large-scale war Satan wages against Heaven, but Satan is certainly not an exemplar. Adam begins the poem as a near exemplar, endowed with moral strength and intelligence; however, his weakness, his overwhelming attraction to Eve, leads him to the Fall. Because he would rather follow her into doom than live without her, Adam deliberately chooses to damage his relationship with God after Eve eats from the Tree of Knowledge. Adam and Satan are both flawed and are the most intriguing characters the narrative offers. The infallible characters of the angels, God the Father, and God the Son are, by comparison, far less interesting or well-developed. Milton's masterpiece shows a convergence of the conventions of epic poetry present during the Middle Ages, the didacticism of Spenser and Sidney, and the complex characterization and classical idea of tragic hero exemplified by Shakespeare.

As the *Zeitgiest* continued to evolve through the Restoration and beyond, the shifting characterization and narrative techniques emerging in the Renaissance never disappeared. Indeed, even today the influence of Shakespeare and his contemporaries abound in modern plays, novels, and film. The Romantic and Victorian periods ushered in the era of the novel as the dominant narrative literary form. While Charles Dickens did not tend towards the tragedy as Shakespeare did, instead often writing about the downtrodden overcoming social or economic oppression, he is lauded for writing vivid, believable personalities. Sydney Carton and Ebeneezer Scrooge, for example, were complex, flawed characters, though not tragic heroes; Carton's sacrifice at the end of *A Tale of Two* Cities cannot be accurately describe as tragedy, and Scrooge is saved following a lifetime of bad behavior in the last act of *A Christmas Carol*. Jane Austin's Elizabeth Bennett and Emma Woodhouse were equally complex and vivid comedic heroines, even if their narratives lacked the emotional heft of Renaissance and Restoration tragedy. Still, the appeal of the tragedy has endured to this day, along with the necessity for three-dimensional, realistic characters. Some of the most iconic characters of the last hundred years clearly share a lineage with Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and Milton's Adam: Arthur Miller's Willy Loman dies a poor man's tragic hero, with layers of self-deception leading to an unnecessary suicide; Orson Welles's Charles Foster Kane, a powerhouse of megalomania, dies superrich, miserable, and alone despite having filled Xanadu with half the world; F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby dies a brilliant, talented young man whose essential goodness is undermined by his desire for wealth and the single-minded pursuit of a superficial lifestyle that is ultimately beneath him. Even George Lucas's Anakin Skywalker can be seen as a descendant of Shakespeare's

Macbeth. By tracing a line from Plutarch, to Shakespeare, to Milton, to Dickens, all the way to *Star Wars*, we can see the *Zeitgeist* moving consistently and distinctly.

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VITA

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Master of Arts

Thesis: JULIUS CAESAR AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT: TRACING THE *ZEITGIEST* FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE RENAISSANCE

Major Field: English

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Title of Study: JULIUS CAESAR AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT: TRACING THE *ZEITGEIST* FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE RENAISSANCE

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Scope and Method of Study:

This study examines literary examples of Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great, specifically their appearances in medieval epic poetry and Renaissance drama, and compares the two time periods considering the attitudes towards the characters, the dominant narrative forms of the periods, the changing conception of tragedy, and the increasingly complex methods of characterization.

Findings and Conclusions:

During the Middle Ages, writers tended to treat their characters as exemplars. The Nine Worthies tradition, which included Alexander and Caesar, epitomized this trend. In most cases, Alexander and Caesar were written as one-dimensional, basically flawless characters, considered great largely for their accomplishments, not their virtue. Medieval writers were much more interested in Alexander, probably because his biography was perfectly suited for the most popular narrative form, the epic romance. Also, Alexander's early death appealed to writers of tragedy, because the medieval conception of tragedy was simply the fall of a great man. Caesar, on the other hand, had smaller appearances, usually as an example in some larger work. In the Renaissance, interest in the two men reversed. Drama, especially tragedy, was the dominant narrative form. The Renaissance return to the classics brought about an emphasis on the Aristotelian definition of tragedy and a great interest in Alexander and Caesar's most notable biographer, Plutarch. Caesar's life, as described by Plutarch, was perfectly suited for an Aristotelian tragedy, as his death by assassination was directly tied to flaws in his character. Plutarch insisted, however, that Alexander's death was merely by sickness, not a result of a tragic flaw. Therefore, Caesar rose in prominence on the Renaissance stage, with Alexander falling into the background. Additionally, the simple, one-dimensional exemplar, which was popular during the Middle Ages and loved by certain Renaissance poets such as Edmund Spenser and Phillip Sidney, gave way to more complex, three-dimensional characters. Alexander and Caesar were both looked at more critically, some writers seeing them as basically good but flawed men, some seeing them as villains, and many finding them somewhere in between.

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