

ENGLISH ADVANCED: *JULIUS CAESAR*

William Shakespeare stated, “Men may construe things after their own fashion, clean from the purpose of the things themselves”. It is human nature to view events, personalities and situations subjectively, and hence conflict arises in the challenge to decipher truth from representations of reality. The play *Julius Caesar* (1599) is a performance medium, while Shelley’s *Ozymandias* (1817) is a sonnet; therefore composers manipulate elements of form, feature and language to influence audience responses. A study of these historically based texts allows insight into conflicting public and private personas, motives and the discord between groups of different levels of power, as well as the Aristotelian tragic structure.

Julius Caesar theatrically evaluates public and private personas: Caesar’s conflicting personality is manifested through his ceremonious representation in the public eye: “When Caesar says, ‘Do this’, it is performed”, which illuminates the theatricality and significance of his political guise in comparison to his private persona, emphasised by the nightgown worn in Scene 2, Act 2. Conflicting perspectives arise surrounding the legitimacy of Caesar’s power considering, “He hath the falling sickness,” however the fact that Caesar pointedly juxtaposes his political power with his physical weakness: “for always I am Caesar. / Come on my right hand, for this ear’s deaf” urges audiences to consider the nature of human ambivalence. Shakespeare thus generates insight into the greater philosophical Epicurus/Stoic conflict; Caesar deliberately prioritises the stoic notion of duty over self-indulgent Epicurus philosophies. The play’s explicit mention of portentous omens further distinguishes conflicting personas. Caesar dismisses the Soothsayer’s warning of the “Ides of March”, a term repeated thrice to signify a negative omen, with the assertive, “He is a dreamer. Let us leave him”, prompted by the eyes upon him to appear unfazed. It is this same consideration for public image that causes Caesar to go to the Capitol despite Calpurnia’s prophetic dream, which is rich in visceral imagery and emphatic alliteration: “yawned and yielded up their dead... Which drizzled blood upon the capitol”. The playwright’s development of Caesar through poignant symbolism and language features allows insight into conflict regarding dichotomous individuals.

Shelley’s *Ozymandias* is a polyphonic poem framed from multiple speakers, which allows for a similar exploration of conflicting perspectives of political tyranny through tragic elements. The poet elucidates the central paradigms of Romanticism by creating contention between the initial persona, the figure within the sonnet and the “traveler from an antique land”. *Ozymandias* does not fit a conventional Petrarchan form; this refusal to conform to any specific meter imbues a sense of obscurity within the reader. As Shakespeare coerces characters and audiences alike in *Julius Caesar* through the art of representation, Shelley’s mention of the statue’s creator: “its sculptor well those passions read,” reinforces the notion that there is no absolute truth. The use of synecdoche: “trunkless legs of stone” constructs a contradictory image of the figure described. The self-righteous image of the “king of kings” is evident in the inscription on the statue’s pedestal: “Look on my works ye Mighty, and despair!” which starkly contrasts reality, the statue merely “a shattered visage” due to the erosive processes of time. The “colossal” size of the statue juxtaposes Ramses’ lofty ambition with the statue’s current dilapidated state: “Round the decay”, exemplifying concerns of the composer’s era and hence evaluating the transience of political power. The composer uses blatant conflicting perspectives and multiple voices to transform the statue into a metaphor for the hubris of all humanity, as the monomaniacal inscription demonstrating the great king’s pride has been ironically disproved.

Conflicting motives accentuate binary perspectives on events, personalities and situations. Brutus is driven by Roman honour: “I love / The name of honour more than I fear death” while Cassius’ hyperbolic simile displays envy of Caesar’s power: “Like a Colossus...” Each composer ensures conflicting perspectives regarding protagonists are made known in order to foreshadow chaos. While both texts have historical origins: *Julius Caesar* from Plutarch’s historical recount *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, and *Ozymandias* inspired by Ramses II of Egypt, the composers misrepresent elements of truth to inform audience responses. Where Plutarch’s recount is

chronological, Shakespeare contracts years of history into days, using repetition for dramatic emphasis. The commoners' joy in the first scene, in combination with Casca's hyperbolic recounts: "If Caesar had stabbed their mothers they would have done no less" highlight the plebeians devotion to their leader in contrast to the Tribunes' disdain: "Who else would soar above the view of men / And keep us all in servile fearfulness." The numerous voices in Ozymandias distance the reader from the protagonist, to undermine his true power while highlighting his tyrannical tendencies. Extensive use of alliteration: "boundless and bare"; "lone and level" emphasises the barren landscape surrounding the statue, to suggest that no political leader can hope to have lasting power. Amidst the death that permeates the poem, contrasting images of life give the sonnet a sense of balance, paradoxically giving the "lifeless" stones enduring "passions".

Julius Caesar and Ozymandias generate insight into the nature of conflicting perspectives surrounding events, personalities and situations. All texts explore the dichotomous nature of the human condition that causes inner conflict, as a response to conflicting perspectives within society, through the deterioration of Brutus and Ramses. Composers of these diverse texts effectively employ form, feature and language to manipulate audiences; an effect made all the more poignant due to each texts' historical base.