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“THIS WAS A MAN”: JULIUS CAESAR’S
SOCIOCENTRIC TRANSFORMATION
AS A HERO

JACK R. BERGSTROM

"καὶ σὺ, τέκνον"? These were the last words spoken by Julius Caesar before twenty-three stab wounds put him to death. Some say he should have seen this betrayal coming, as his cows were said to have been weeping that morning, a bird flew into the Theater of Pompey carrying a sprig of laurel and was eaten by a larger bird, and his wife had had a foreboding dream the night before. These omens were no match for Caesar's confidence. He wielded an empire; how could a Senate meeting turn into a massacre? As he asked Brutus, "You, too, my child"? Caesar was met with a final dagger to the groin.

Julius Caesar's demise was monumental. Not only was a mere individual murdered, but a figure of power, a monument, was thrust from his throne atop the Roman empire and executed at the feet of an old enemy's memorial. Caesar's death signified the end of a dictatorship overflowing with the conquering of nations, killing over two million people and fighting at least

fifty battles. Despite the tragedy that this powerful leader brought upon civilization, his military and humanitarian accomplishments deemed him a hero among Roman citizens and named him an influential figure in politics and many other issues currently in society. The tragic death of this figurehead exemplifies the significance of his presence within his era. His death was that of a martyr, more of an event and execution than that of a killing, even glamorized by the likes of Shakespeare himself. Julius Caesar's status as a hero to some, and villain to many, will forever remain a true story of power's hand in heroic transformation.

This chapter explores the life, perils, and achievements of Julius Caesar. My central focus is on offering an analysis of how events throughout his journey influenced his heroic transformation. Drawing from many different articles and relevant sources, I will examine the effect of different factors on heroic transformation, assessing Caesar's responses to each factor and the ultimate outcomes of these actions.

A HERO'S BEGINNING

According to Allison and Goethals (2017), "Early human societies recognized the value of initiation rituals in promoting the transition from childhood to adulthood" (p. 381). Today, these rituals are prevalent in a child's development. Through Jewish tradition, a son's Bar Mitzvah marks the transformation of an individual's journey from adolescent to adult. Just as this culture has traditional ceremonies to celebrate one's coming of age, tribes throughout Africa and Australia have performed rites and rituals to and for their young men. One ritual performs tortuous acts involving wooden splints and pulleys to raise a boy into the air. Once unconscious and reawakened, he sacrifices his pinky finger. The pain and suffering he endures is a sign that the young male is now ready to become a man.

Despite the obvious differences between Western society's initiation rituals and those of other societies, there is a strong connection focusing on obstacles each child must overcome to earn the respect he needs to be viewed as an adult. Some may point out that owning a car, working a full-time job, or losing

one's virginity are all signs of adulthood; however each of these has its own merit. They are stepping stones in life which grant more responsibility.

Similarly, our hero's journey does not begin at birth. Julius Caesar encountered many different blockades on his road to heroism. Circumstances surrounding his birth and family of origin were complicated. His father was the husband of the current Roman republic's leader's sister, making our hero's family very influential. During his childhood, Marius, the leader, was involved in many discords, starting with a civil war brought upon him through the disagreement of a general named Sulla. As Marius was driven out of the empire, Sulla went on to fight and claim victory over a sworn enemy of Rome. His success did not sit well with Marius, who went back to his land, murdered all Sulla's comrades and claimed his seat as consul, soon after dying of natural causes. This, along with Julius's father's death, and the return of Sulla from battle left Julius's family extremely vulnerable.

Although granted a prestigious education and a wife named Cornelia with whom he had a child, Julius never truly enjoyed any security. Sulla's return gave him the status of dictator in which he exercised his power to exterminate all the supporters of Marius. Julius, however, was granted a much easier punishment: divorce his wife. This did not sit well with the young hero, who disobeyed his orders, an act of defiance which Sulla respected. Sulla repealed his initial order, stating that "in this young man there is more than one Marius."

Met with his first initiation into adulthood, Julius Caesar triumphed over his first of many enemies, denying temptation to take an easy path and a quicker means out of harm's way. He did not have an effortless early life, and soon, the young man would have his call to adventure through external pressures. Sent as a missionary to King Nicomedes IV of Bithynia, Caesar encountered two bands of pirates from which he paid ransom to escape. After the second account, he sent ships after the villains to crucify them. The many obstacles that our young hero overcame reinforced his reputation of strength and determination. His unwavering charisma had been jousting, each time remaining victorious.

As Allison & Goethals (2017) argue, “While the transformed hero enjoys union with the world she remains an autonomous individual who can establish her own path in the world that is unfettered by the patho-adolescence all around her” (p. 394). Caesar was not one to falter in the face of the fear. Villains were looked upon as games that he would win and notch into his belt after every victory. His rejection of authority and decimation of his foes reflected individualistic growth ideologies young Caesar possessed. The thirst for knowledge was not outshone by the power-inducing behaviors he presented. A hero must thrive to benefit society to earn that status while still acting individually, and this is the path that Julius Caesar began to carve for himself.

After his assassination of the pirates, Caesar continued his studies, furthering his education and drive to become a more informed leader. The senseless acts of violence were tests which influenced him to make change, in a way mentoring Julius. His reputation proceeded to grow as he was halted from learning by Mithridates of Pontus when he attacked Asia Minor. Standing for his own nation and the pride of his homeland, Julius created a militia on his own dime to hold off the destruction of small towns. This not only protected the people but also gave the official commander of Rome the time to destroy the threat. Caesar’s noble act was not one of a bystander watching villages burn, but one of great heroism, selflessly contributing to society from which only the union could benefit.

With his war hero status, Caesar quickly grew in popularity and rose through the ranks of politics, becoming high priest and further establishing trust with the people of the Roman republic through his denouncement of the death penalty. This issue was brought about by Catilina and others who attempted to overthrow the government. As Caesar grew older, his wisdom and knowledge grew exponentially. His very humane opposition of capital punishment was seen as a step in the right direction, that of internal maturation and development. Popular policy was one of Julius’s many strengths, revealing his motive to benefit the people and the state using his heroic status.

His well-known reputation had preceded him when Caesar had finally run out of money, spending too much of his budget on praetorship and pontificate.

Hoping to gain a popular politician by his side and helping a hero get back on his feet, Marcus Licinius Crassus paid off all of Caesar's debts and appointed him the governor of Baetica. In this new position, along with a new-found ally, he obtained much more power. As an autonomous being, Caesar performed many acts to aid humanity around him, but the introduction of power and political gain would soon catalyze a new approach to his mental transformation.

THE HEROIC TEST

Overall, Caesar's whole career succeeded through his high expectations of himself, as he adopted an all or nothing risk-taking mindset. In electoral politics, he had spent far too much money beyond his means, indebting himself to the point of criminal liability, but somehow managed to always be redeemed by an electoral or military success. Marcus Licinius Crassus's bailout was just the beginning. Caesar decided to divorce his newly obtained wife, Pompeia, because of rumors indicating that she might have been with another man, although the mysterious other lover had been acquitted in the courts. Caesar declared, "The wife of Caesar must be above suspicion," hinting that anyone associated with him must be upstanding and enhancing of his reputation.

At this point power's hand starts to reveal itself. The newly acquired governorship had supplied Julius Caesar with a position in which he could continue his status build, creating a potential conflict in our hero between pursuing his own well-being versus that of the people. Popularity among the citizens was gained through his acts of selflessness and heroism that he had displayed during the siege of Mithridates and his opinion of capital punishment. As power is introduced into the internal equation, Caesar abruptly recedes into an egocentric state. This is his heroic ordeal. According to Campbell (1949), the prototypical heroic path, which he called the hero monomyth, consists of three parts: departure, initiation, and return" (Allison, Goethals, & Kramer, 2017, p. 3). Deviating from this heroic path, Julius Caesar takes a detour after his initiation. His struggle with autonomy and power coincide to create a much larger internal conflict. It is clear that the initiation from youth to adulthood spurred a state of heroism within young Julius, but instead of maintaining his benevolent status, he undergoes a struggle. As Campbell explains, a hero's quest consists

of stepping stones along the journey, but Caesar not only skips a few, he steps into the murky waters below, blurring the line between hero and villain.

Julius Caesar furthers this controversy with his actions while holding a newly appointed position as governor, or *propraetor*. His character strayed from the heroic side, as Caesar's Spanish War broke out. It began with initial unrest in a province of Spain. Slowly growing worse over time, Caesar had had enough and kicked the hornet's nest, capturing several towns, looting them, and continuing his rampage along the western coast which is now modern-day Portugal. He went on to plunder the silver mines of Gallaecia, granting him an extreme amount of wealth, increasing his overall stock as a grand leader of the Roman republic. These villainous acts of murder and destruction seemingly diminish Julius Caesar as a hero, but while they may cause much suffering, Duntley and Buss (2005) states that, "Some homicides...are considered excusable, justifiable, or even altruistic-for example, killing in self-defense, killing to protect a family member from harm, or to prevent a helpless stranger from being raped" (p. 105).

Arguably, Caesar had prevented further civil wars and the harming of future citizens by shutting down an uprising among the Spanish people. Plundering and pillaging are not selfless acts and in no way represent qualities of heroism, but it is still the duty of a leader to protect the land and its posterity. Caesar slides down the steep slope of questionable activity as he returns to the courts. Once elected consul, he was appointed to a smaller province for which he would not be allocated an army to command. Counteracting this purposeful measure from the Senate, Caesar created an alliance with his old friend Crassus, the wealthy banker who secured his spot in Spanish command while paying off his debt, and Pompey, Rome's leading general. Together, the triumvirate, the three most respected men in Rome, held power over the Senate of Rome and would greatly influence Caesar's transformation.

JULIUS CAESAR'S ORDEAL

Caesar's pursuit of political change and wealth of his nation was sought out by ignoring many conventions and rules, even laws that strained his autonomous goals. His approach was to achieve said goals without the dependence of the state. As he grew physically and mentally, the young hero took it upon himself to

right any wrongs he encountered. The determination of success which ensued significantly correlates with the claim that Allison and Goethals (2017) make when they observe that “the hero must leave home and venture on the journey to obliterate a status quo that is no longer working” (p. 394). But Caesar continued to resort to actions that painted him as both hero to some and villains to others. The repetition of illegalities committed by our yearning anti-hero led others to prosecute him politically. To escape the ever-present threat to his political career, along with his military status, Julius Caesar was required to move up in position to free himself from scrutiny, or to let go of his ambitions. This was the trap in which he found himself.

Originally, Caesar did not intend to attack Gaul, but it had blossomed into a golden opportunity. He could impress the Senate and People's Assembly which would give him more immunity for possible future controversial actions he might take to promote change within the Roman Empire. Beside this advantage, there were reports about Germans who were attacking the Aedui, a Gallic tribe in alliance with Rome. A victory over the Germans would advance Julius Caesar to the same rank his uncle Marius once acquired before his untimely death. Of course, given Caesar's skills as a combatant and leader, the Germans were defeated. Caesar could have easily led his troops back home due to the cessation of the threat, but our hero changed his mind; he aspired to conquer all of Gaul. This decision showcases the great struggle Julius had with power. It intoxicated him. Given a little bit of what it was like to be a war hero and great leader, he had to have more, once again paving the way for his transformation from hero to villain.

After his return home from battle, this time as a politician, Caesar is tempted with more power than he can handle. After Crassus' death, the triumvirate consisted of only Caesar and Pompey; the Senate feared a civil war from which a dictator would arise. An overwhelming majority in the Senate, 400 against 22, formally insisted both leaders sacrifice their commands before the consular elections for the sake of the political peace. Because Pompey obeyed the Senate, he stood in better stead with the Senate than did Caesar. This was the easy, cowardly way out. If the latter obeyed, Julius would no longer be immune to prosecution. If Caesar refused the order, he would be declared an enemy of the state.

This choice would be the turning point at which Julius Caesar would be rewarded or punished. The power at stake was that of his initial goal to change the way Rome was governed. Everything he had strived for was at risk. Preferring the dignity of war, standing up for his views, and refusing submission, Caesar chose to rebel. In response to the Senate's mandate, he quoted the poet Menander, "*alea iacta est*" (the die is cast). In doing so, he crossed the river Rubico, thereby invading Italy and provoking the Second Civil War.

PAINTING THE BIGGER PICTURE

While this act of treason would lead to the deaths of many civilians, Julius Caesar exemplifies qualities that a great hero would possess. He not only gives his life for a greater cause, but he also displays the perseverance and optimism, allowing his strength to prevail. Two of the seven important character strengths of a hero are presented through just one act of Caesar, marking the point in his transformation from anti-hero to martyr, creating a new physicality and morality of his heroism. His life and goals had turned from those of internal value to that of a movement. The change of setting in which Julius Caesar was operating, from war to a rebellion against a higher, unjust order, can be summed up by Dik et al. (2017): "Some types of work environments increase the odds of experiencing work as meaningful -- in particular, those that offer autonomy; a chance to use one's skills; recognition of how one's work contributes to a tangible product" (p. 329).

As one can conclude, Julius's early life was a stepping stone to his hero's transformation upon which he obtained many skills to build and succeed. His scholarly teachings, battles fought in, and political status represented an effort to gain a position high enough to begin reformation of the Roman empire. These early steps were for mere egocentricity, but arguably the act of denouncing and opposing the government marked a pivotal moment in Caesar's journey. No longer volatile was his trend line on the hero's market; he would now begin to act to benefit a cause greater than himself. He aspired to selflessly sacrifice his life to draw attention to the corruption of the Senate. Because of the major shifts Caesar creates due to the extremity of his many operations, Goethals and Allison (2012) would categorize him as a member of "trending heroes, for example, those heroes whose impact is rising or falling" (p. 24), furthermore reinforcing the structure of heroism rooted within his activities.

Caesar was first appointed dictator in 49 BC after he had crushed the last resistance of Pompey's army and the Senate's weaker legions. Although typically ruthless and brutal, dictators in antiquity could be acceptably pleasant, as it was much more common to have a single, strong leader who would rule the land. Despite owning all of the power in the Roman empire, Julius Caesar finally harnessed his self-control and thirst for domination, a major change from his previous heroic challenge. Allison and Goethals (2017) claim that, "transformations advance society. The culmination of the hero's journey is the hero's boon, or gift, to society. This gift is what separates the hero's journey from simply being a test of personal survival" (p. 382), which is precisely how our hero proceeded (Allison & Goethals, 2013).

Through trials and tribulations as a war commander, scholar, politician, and martyr, Caesar had gained great skills in which he would apply to those of his new, rightfully owned kingdom. He founded new settlements for the veterans of his army along with the distribution of land to around 20,000 poor families who had three or more children. To deal with widespread unemployment, he offered many citizens jobs in public works involving the reparation of ancient cities. Accumulating enough workers in need of employment, Carthage and Corinth were both rebuilt. Also, he mandated that landowners were required to have at least one-third of their laborers as freemen instead of slaves, thus reducing unemployment and creating a significant change in human rights. Introducing a new and likeable taxation system, Julius increased tax on luxury imports to receive more money from the rich and to encourage domestic production.

These, along with many more reforms to the old, unfit government of Rome significantly enhanced Julius Caesar's popularity. He endowed people with many more rights, helped the poor immensely, and ultimately improved conditions in which many people lived. His promotion of the general well-being of his society was heroic (Efthimiou, Allison, & Franco, 2018). Caesar went on to publish and speak to promote a more humane style of government, appealing to the people, not the state. His influence in politics can be seen today.

CONCLUSION OF CAESAR'S TRANSFORMATION

Kafashan et al. (2017) sum up the success of a hero's journey by declaring that "the costs of providing help are less than the fitness benefits received, and we can expect that benefits would be directed towards those whose well-being is valuable to the helper" (p. 39). As explained in *Presenting Elixir to Society*, Julius Caesar greatly contributed to the lives of many Roman citizens, as well as to politics and human rights. The perils in which our hero traveled and the obstacles he overcame eventually molded his character into one of great leadership and wisdom. Beginning as a member of a wealthy family, Julius sought to improve his life after the death of his beloved father and uncle.

Through initiation into adulthood and learning from many tests, Caesar claimed allies with the likes of Crassus and was mentored by the battles he commanded along with the spats he endured with members of the Senate. Eventually, as he struggled with power's influence and the state's suppression, our young, aspiring, egocentric hero transformed into the heroic leader of a movement. This is what spurred his mental and moral transformation, along with the creation of a physical rebellion. His pathway from egocentricity to sociocentricity finally concluded once Julius Caesar claimed his goal: to change the way Rome was governed through dictatorship (Allison & Toner, 2017). The impact of his career and accomplishments greatly influence our society today, further emphasized and solidified by many stories told, myths created of our ambitious hero, plays written, and his famous words upon his infamous death, "et tu, Brute?"

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