

**MORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT IN BRUTUS: AN
ANALYSIS THROUGH COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY.**



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Abstract

This research examines the moral and psychological conflict in Brutus, a character from *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare. Through the theoretical lens of Cognitive Dissonance Theory. This study analyzes the mental discomfort experienced by Brutus created by his contradictory beliefs, as supported by Leon Festinger in Cognitive Dissonance Theory (3). The study explores the tension between friendship and loyalty, which Brutus experiences, he is conflicted between friendship with Caesar and Loyalty towards Rome, which creates mental discomfort and leads him towards his tragic downfall. The research argues that Brutus's part in the assassination of Caesar is not purely political but a result of his internal conflict and to justify his moral choices. Furthermore, this research is based on close reading and textual analysis of the selected scenes from Brutus ' soliloquies, dialogues and key speeches that reveal moral and psychological conflict. This research contributes to psychological literary criticism by offering cognitive dissonance analysis of Brutus's character.



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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my beloved parents, whose unconditional support, prayers, and sacrifices have guided me throughout my academic journey. I am also deeply grateful to my teachers and mentors for sharing their knowledge, guidance, and encouragement, which have continuously inspired me to learn and grow. Finally, I dedicate this work to all students who seek meaning in literature and life. May they always find truth, purpose, and the courage to keep questioning and exploring.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Literature has always been used as a medium for portraying human complexities, inner conflicts and struggles. Many writers have used different characters who are torn between moral and psychological conflicts; because of this, psychological criticism is mainly used in literature to know about the inner psyche of a character. The analysis of a character through psychological theories not only shows their inner psyche but also shows how it shapes the character's decisions and consequently their actions.

Among these writers is Shakespeare, whose characters are mostly complex and are torn between psychological and moral conflicts. He wrote many tragedies in which characters often hold internal conflicts. Among those tragedies, one is *Julius Caesar*, and one of its much-debated characters is Brutus, who, too, holds such internal conflicts.

The play *Julius Caesar*¹ is set in ancient Rome, whose story is based on real-life characters. In play, Rome is going through political uncertainty when Julius Caesar came to power. Brutus, who is a friend of Julius Caesar, thought that Caesar may be a threat to the republicanism and democracy. Incited by the Roman senators, who opposed Caesar and conspired against him, Brutus was persuaded of Caesar's autocratic disposition. As such, Brutus was torn between friendship with Caesar and loyalty to Rome, and thus he experienced internal conflicts which later became the cause of his tragic outcome.

Brutus has moral and psychological conflicts; therefore, he is the most apt character for psychological analysis. These moral and psychological conflicts can be best understood by Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which says that when a person holds two conflicting beliefs, dissonance or mental discomfort is experienced by that person. Therefore, Brutus will be studied through the lens of Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger).

Background of the Study

Literature has produced many characters who cannot be studied only through literary theories; some characters need to be studied from other related subjects. For example, characters who have moral dilemmas and internal conflicts, which can be studied through a psychological lens. Therefore, there are psychological approaches applied to a vast majority of literary characters to understand their inner psyche and mental contradictions.

Shakespeare has produced tragedies that have characters who cannot be solely studied through literary theories, but must be studied through a psychological perspective. One of these characters is Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, which hold internal conflicts and is torn between friendship and loyalty to Rome; these mental contradictions and moral dilemmas lead him towards a tragic outcome.

An appropriate theory to explicate Brutus' internal conflicts is Cognitive Dissonance Theory, developed by Leon Festinger in 1957. This theory states that dissonance exists when two cognitions are psychologically inconsistent (Festinger 12). In other words, a person may feel discomfort or dissonance when s/he holds two contradictory beliefs. Brutus can be best studied through this theory because he is torn between friendship with Caesar and loyalty to Rome. This

creates dissonance or discomfort, which leads him towards action that proved to be a tragic outcome for him at the end of the play.

Statement of the Research Problem

A complete work of scholarship is done on the internal conflicts and moral contradictions of Brutus. Many scholars have already found the internal conflicts of Brutus and have studied them through a psychological point of view. Aulia Putri is of the view that Brutus' internal conflicts are such that 'The treatment of Brutus' id is so strong for the superego to overcome Brutus' internal conflicts and to find the best resolution. Brutus' "superego fails to handle Brutus' id"(Putri 74). Parameshwara, another scholar, views Brutus as a complex with internal conflicts (2238).

Existing studies have mostly studied Brutus' internal conflicts through psychological theories. This research will study Brutus through the lens of Cognitive Dissonance theory and will find out the reason for his internal conflicts and how it shapes a character, his actions, decisions and finally the tragic outcomes.

Research Question

How Brutus's inner conflict and the tragic outcome of his choices in *Julius Caesar* reveal the tensions between moral conviction and psychological struggle?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- a) To analyse Brutus's conflicting beliefs and his efforts to justify his actions.

b) To examine the clash between Brutus's personal loyalty and his sense of duty to Rome.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, which involves deep reading and textual analysis of the selected scenes from the play. It not only summarises the text but involves close textual analysis to examine Brutus's inconsistent decision, moral dilemmas and psychological conflicts. This method is ideal for understanding the inner world of a character, especially Brutus and this is done by closely reading the selected text and then comparing it with Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory.

Data Collection

This research uses two types of data: primary and secondary. The primary source is the selected texts from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The secondary sources are scholarly articles about Brutus and the selected theory, which serves to establish a theoretical framework. These articles are identified through database searches (Academia, Research Gate, Google Scholar, HEC digital Library) using key terms "Cognitive Dissonance", "Brutus", "Internal Conflicts" and "Julius Caesar".

This research has been properly cited and given references at the end to avoid plagiarism and to maintain academic integrity. AI tools such as ChatGPT were only used for organizing the data and preliminary guidance. All interpretations, analysis of a text and application of theory are done by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The selected acts and scenes are thoroughly read and thematic analysis is done. The researcher has focused on the scenes, especially relating to Brutus' character, which involve conflict, contradiction, justification, psychological tension and moral struggles. Then these elements are analysed through the Cognitive Dissonance Theory.

Theoretical Framework

Brutus is a character who holds contradictory beliefs and can be best examined through Cognitive Dissonance Theory by Leon Festinger, which states that when a person holds two contradictory beliefs, it creates psychological discomfort or dissonance. In order to lessen this discomfort, a person attempts to justify their actions or alter their thinking. Brutus believes that Caesar is his friend but also believes that he might be dangerous for the democracy of Rome, thus he is conflicted between two thoughts, friendship and loyalty to Rome, which creates dissonance that leads him toward the tragic outcome at the end.

Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited in several aspects. This research mainly focuses on Brutus and deliberately does not analyze other characters. Taking the text from our primary source, this study has only selected acts and scenes that show Brutus's contradictory beliefs. Those acts and scenes are Act 1, Scene 2, Act 2, Scene 1, Act 3, Scene 1, Act 3, Scene 2, Act 4, Scene 3, and finally Act 5, Scene 5. The other characters and acts are deliberately left out to set the boundaries of this research. In theoretical terms, this study only focuses on Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which focuses on the moral and psychological side of the character.

Significance of the Study

This research study serves a great significance in terms of theoretical perspective. It contributes to psychological literary criticism in which Brutus is understood psychologically. This research shows the importance of Cognitive Dissonance Theory in the literature. Moreover, it helps to understand Shakespeare's characters' psychological and moral flaws.

¹ William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, edited by David Daniell, was published by Penguin Popular Classics in 1994. All the subsequent references to the text are from this edition incorporated in parentheses with the author's last name, page number(s).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The central concern of this literature review is to explore how Brutus's inner conflict and eventual tragic outcome in *Julius Caesar* reveal the tension between moral conviction and psychological struggle. Many scholars, such as Aulia Putri, Parameshwara, and Mengkorn Pum have already worked on the psychology of characters as both literature and psychology are different subjects, but still, there is a wide range of connections between them. The internal conflicts of a literary character are mostly a topic for most of the scholars. The objective of this literature review is to examine what other scholars are saying about the internal conflicts or psychology of a character, as the current study is about the character from *Julius Caesar*, Brutus. Therefore, this literature review aims to study the existing articles and connect them to the internal conflicts of Brutus through the lens of Cognitive Dissonance Theory by Leon Festinger.

Internal Conflicts of Brutus

Brutus internal conflicts arise when he decides to kill Caesar, he was conflicted between the thoughts of loyalty to Caesar versus loyalty to Rome. According to Aulia Putri, the internal conflicts of Brutus arise from the clash between blindness to reality and idealism. She studied Brutus and gave her assumption about Brutus's internal conflicts by studying his character through the lens of Psychological theory, which consists of the id, the ego and the superego. "The treatment of Brutus" id is so strong for the superego to overcome Brutus' internal conflicts and to find the best resolution. Brutus" superego fails to handle Brutus" id" Putri added this in her article, *The Impact of the Internal Conflicts of Brutus toward His Life in 'Julius Caesar' by Shakespeare* (Putri 74). According to her, Brutus's id is so dominant that lead him towards the

assassination of Caesar, and ultimately makes him a tragic character. The research by Aulia Putri explains the personality structure of Brutus and it does not examine the psychological tension arising from conflicting beliefs and actions of Brutus. This study aims to provide the reason of the psychological discomfort between Brutus' beliefs and actions through the lens of Festinger's theory of Cognitive Dissonance.

Furthermore, Parameshawara explains Brutus as a complex character. "He is the only major character in the play intensely committed to fashioning his behavior to fit a strict moral and ethical code, but he takes actions that are unconsciously hypocritical" (Parameshwara 2238). Moreover, Parameshwara argues that Brutus tries to ritualise the murder as a noble act but still he cannot justify his own satisfaction as he is conflicted between the thought of loyalty to his friend and to Rome. This study reads the character of Brutus as complex character having internal conflicts yet not fully explains the reason of these internal conflicts which will be analyzed through psychological theory of Festinger.

Cognitive Dissonance and Inner Conflict

Cognitive Dissonance is a psychological concept which can be applied to classical literature. Cognitive Dissonance theory is applied to classical literature by Mengkorn Pum in his article Cognitive Dissonance and Inner Conflict in Classic Literary Characters. She has applied this theory to major literary characters like Hamlet, Raskolnikov and Dimmesdale. "These classic characters reveal that internal conflict is not a narrative detour but a central axis of meaning" (Pum). According to her internal conflict is central to human identity and literature uses Cognitive Dissonance theory to explain the complexity of thoughts. Therefore, this literature review is the roadmap for the current study as the Cognitive Dissonance Theory is already applied to certain

famous literary characters but the Character Brutus which also hold internal conflicts is mostly neglected to be studied through the lens of Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Therefore this research study will fill the research gap by identifying internal conflicts in Brutus and then applying the theory of Cognitive Dissonance by Leon Festinger.

The Conflict Between Loyalty and Duty in Brutus

Brutus's character in Julius Caesar has been widely analyzed in literary criticism because of his deep psychological struggle between loyalty and political duty. Mst Sabrina Moktar Arju explains that Brutus experiences a strong internal conflict before the assassination of Caesar. He is emotionally attached to Caesar as a friend, but at the same time, he believes that Caesar's death is necessary for the safety of Rome (Arju 35). This creates an approach-avoidance conflict in which Brutus tries to justify his decision by convincing himself that it is for the greater good. The study further shows that after the assassination, Brutus does not find peace and instead becomes psychologically disturbed as he faces the consequences of betrayal (Arju 37). This clearly shows that Brutus's decision is not purely political but deeply psychological, making him a strong example of cognitive dissonance.

Brutus' Ideological and Psychological Conflict in Julius Caesar

Brutus's character in Julius Caesar has been widely studied because of his strong inner struggle between loyalty to Caesar and his duty toward Rome. Seçil Erkoç Iqbal explains "Brutism" as Brutus's strong belief in strict moral rules and rational thinking, which makes him feel that killing Caesar is necessary to save the Roman Republic. However, the study also shows that this way of thinking is very rigid, and it makes Brutus behave in a way that is similar to Caesar in terms of being self-confident and unwilling to consider emotions (Iqbal 207). This is important

because it shows that Brutus is not only making a political decision, but also struggling inside his mind between what he believes is right and what he actually feels. Because of this, he keeps trying to justify Caesar's murder, even though he feels guilt and emotional pressure, which clearly reflects cognitive dissonance in his character (Iqbal 210).

Cognitive and Moral Dissonance in Literature and Film

Wyatt Moss-Wellington, in "Affecting Profundity: Cognitive and Moral Dissonance in Lynch, Loach, Linklater, and Sayles," explains cognitive dissonance as the mental discomfort created by conflicting beliefs, values, or perceptions, and argues that audiences often find pleasure in resolving these contradictions while watching films, interpreting this process as "profundity" or deeper meaning rather than psychological adjustment. He further suggests that narrative ambiguity forces viewers into dissonance reduction, where they reorganize conflicting ideas to restore coherence, a process that can sometimes hide ethical tensions within the text (Moss-Wellington 38–45). This source is helpful for the current research on Brutus in Julius Caesar because it provides a theoretical framework to understand his internal conflict between loyalty to Caesar and duty to Rome as a form of cognitive dissonance, where Brutus resolves psychological tension by justifying Caesar's assassination as morally necessary; thus, it strengthens this research's analysis by showing that Brutus's tragic decision can be interpreted as a psychological process of dissonance reduction rather than purely political or moral certainty (Moss-Wellington 42–62).

Cognitive Dissonance in Philological Perspective

The idea of cognitive dissonance helps to clearly understand Brutus's mental struggle in Julius Caesar, especially the conflict between what he believes and what he actually does. Drozdova,

Vishnyakova, and Vishnyakova explain that cognitive dissonance happens when a person holds opposite thoughts, values, or actions at the same time, which creates mental discomfort and forces the person to reduce this inner tension (Drozdova et al. 160). In literature, this often appears when characters try to justify actions that go against their emotions or moral beliefs. This fits Brutus very well because he convinces himself that killing Caesar is necessary for Rome's freedom, even though he is personally disturbed by the decision. The study also shows that people often use reasoning and justification through language to reduce this mental conflict and regain inner balance (Drozdova et al. 162). This is important for the present research because it shows that Brutus's decision is not only political but also psychological, as he continuously tries to defend his action in order to deal with guilt and maintain his sense of honor.

Cognitive Dissonance as an Emotional Experience

Fontanari et al. investigate the emotional dimension of cognitive dissonance by examining how individuals experience emotions when faced with conflicting choices. The researchers define cognitive dissonance as the psychological stress that arises when a person simultaneously holds contradictory beliefs, thoughts, or motivations. Their study focuses on the emotional responses generated during decision-making situations rather than after decisions have been made.

The researchers conducted questionnaires with thirty-four participants who were asked to choose between conflicting alternatives. Participants evaluated both the intensity and pleasantness of the emotions they experienced while making those choices. The findings revealed that cognitive dissonance generates a wide range of emotions, including anxiety, fear, uncertainty, hope, pleasure, and disappointment.

An important contribution of this study is the argument that cognitive dissonance is not merely a cognitive process but also an emotional experience. The authors found that individuals experience emotional discomfort when confronting incompatible motivations and that these emotions can be organized according to established emotional models. They conclude that emotions such as uneasiness, indecision, disappointment, and desire are closely associated with cognitive dissonance situations.

This article is highly significant for the present study because Brutus repeatedly experiences emotional conflict throughout Julius Caesar. He struggles between his loyalty and friendship toward Caesar and his perceived duty toward Rome. The findings of Fontanari et al. help explain the emotional consequences of such internal conflict. Brutus's anxiety, hesitation, guilt, uncertainty, and eventual psychological suffering can be interpreted as emotional manifestations of cognitive dissonance. Therefore, this study provides a strong theoretical basis for analyzing the psychological turmoil experienced by Brutus after deciding to participate in Caesar's assassination.

Rationalization and Cognitive Dissonance Reduction

Jarcho, Berkman, and Lieberman examine the neural and psychological mechanisms involved in cognitive dissonance reduction during decision-making. The authors argue that individuals often rationalize their decisions after making difficult choices. According to the study, people tend to increase their preference for chosen alternatives and decrease their preference for rejected alternatives in order to reduce psychological discomfort.

Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), the researchers investigated brain activity during decision-making situations involving equally attractive options. Their findings

revealed that rationalization processes begin immediately during the act of decision-making rather than only afterward. The study showed that individuals unconsciously engage in psychological mechanisms that help justify their choices and reduce feelings of conflict and distress.

The authors further conclude that cognitive dissonance reduction involves emotional regulation and conflict-resolution processes. Individuals attempt to align their attitudes with their actions to restore psychological consistency. Rationalization, therefore, serves as a defense mechanism that protects individuals from prolonged emotional discomfort.

This article is particularly valuable for understanding Brutus's behavior in Julius Caesar. After deciding to join the conspiracy against Caesar, Brutus repeatedly rationalizes his actions by convincing himself that Caesar's death is necessary for the welfare of Rome. His famous argument that he kills Caesar "not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more" reflects a clear attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance by justifying his morally troubling decision. The findings of Jarcho et al. support the argument that Brutus engages in rationalization to reconcile the conflict between his personal loyalty to Caesar and his political responsibility toward Rome. Consequently, this study offers a strong psychological framework for examining Brutus's moral reasoning and post-decision justification throughout the play.

Chapter 3

Findings and Analysis

This chapter deals with close textual analysis of the selected scenes of *Julius Caesar*, specifically focusing on the dialogues and soliloquies of Brutus where he feels mental conflict, psychological struggle, guilt, and moral predicament. The text is closely analyzed to find contradictory beliefs, internal conflicts and moral dilemmas. These issues are analyzed through Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.

Beginning of Brutus's Internal Conflict

The internal conflicts of Brutus begins when he talks with Cassius, and Brutus personally admits that he has some internal conflicts, "Vexed I am of late, with passion of some difference, Conceptions only proper to myself" (Shakespeare 29). Then, in another line, Brutus says, "poor Brutus with himself at war" (Shakespeare 29), which clearly shows his internal conflict. The act of opposing his emotions towards other men shows his discomfort or dissonance, which is the beginning of cognitive dissonance experienced by Brutus.

Brutus begins to think that Caesar might become king, which he clearly does not want to happen. He is conflicted between loyalty to Rome and friendship with Caesar. "I would not, yet I love him well" (Shakespeare 30). These lines show a clear contradiction between two beliefs: Brutus believes that Caesar is his friend, and he loves him, yet he believes that he will not allow him to be crowned, which is a core belief of Cognitive Dissonance theory. In order to reduce his mental discomfort, he uses the idea of honour, and it is also his tragic flaw. Besides, Cassius

knows that if he wants to manipulate Brutus, he must talk to him about honour, which actually works. Brutus begins to think that honor is better than friendship or any other emotion.

Brutus's Soliloquy and his Moral Conflict

Brutus's soliloquy is the peak of his dissonance or mental discomfort, because at this stage he is convinced and he believes that Caesar must die, "It must be by his death. And for my part I know no personal cause to spurn at him, But for the general." (Shakespeare 44). Here is a contradiction of beliefs. At the beginning, Brutus believes that Caesar must die, but at the same time, he believes that Caesar is his friend, and there is no personal reason for killing him here but for the general good of Rome, so here is a clash between friendship and loyalty to Rome.

According to Festinger, when a person who holds two contradictory beliefs tries to overcome his discomfort by justification, rationalization and moral reframing. Brutus, too, is torn between friendship and loyalty to Rome. He then seeks to rationalize his behavior, portraying it as morally justified, and frames his act in patriotic terms so that it appears noble. That is how he is struggling with moral and psychological conflict. According to Brutus in his soliloquy ambition often begins with humility, as people use modest behavior to climb toward power. However, once they achieve success, they tend to forget their earlier struggles and look down on the same conditions that helped them rise. It reflects how ambition can distort moral judgment and create psychological tension between values and actions.

But 'tis a common proof

That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,

Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;

But, when he once attains the upmost round,
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend. (Shakespeare 44)

These are some common reasons in Brutus' mind for an idealized version of Caesar's tyranny as he knows that Caesar is not dangerous, yet he believes that he might become cruel if he becomes a king. These justifications, rationalization and moral reframing show the peak level of mental discomfort experienced by Brutus and how he tries to reduce it by his justifications clearly resonate with the theory of Festinger.

Violence and Moral Justification in Brutus

Caesar's assassination scene is important in this study as it shows the transition in which Brutus finally acts out of his discomfort; it shows how his psychological conflict leads him towards the death of Caesar. After the assassination, Brutus delivers his speech to the Romans in which he argues,

Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved
 Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living, and
 Die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all
 Freemen? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him. As he
 Was fortunate, I rejoice at it. As he was valiant, I
 Honor him. But, as he was ambitious, I slew him. (Shakespeare 73)

He still believes that he loves Caesar, while there is a clear contradiction between what he thinks, his emotions and what he did; his action of the assassination, which is a highly violent act.

After the assassination, Brutus tries to show the murder as a patriotic act to justify his action so that his guilt is reduced, “Ambitious debt is paid” (Shakespeare 65). Brutus tries to convince himself that Caesar was ambitious and the murder or assassination was necessary. Brutus rationalizes the murder to protect his moral self-image and reduce psychological discomfort. According to Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory, "The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance." (3). Brutus's actions and beliefs stand in clear contradiction, and to ease his inner conflict, he rationalizes the murder as a necessary act.

Moral Justification and Psychological Fragmentation in Brutus

After the assassination of Caesar, Brutus believed that he killed Caesar for the sake of Rome and always justified himself that it would be great for Rome but later incidents prove his idealism to be wrong when reality struck him because Caesar's assassination brings about corruption and civil war on Rome which contradict his idealistic perspective behind his killing of Caesar. This contradiction brings about discomfort on Brutus's psyche. In one of the scene Brutus mention “Things done undone” (Shakespeare 85), which shows his regret about the assassination of Caesar.

In Act 4 of Julius Caesar, Brutus tries to defend the assassination of Caesar by presenting it as an act of justice and honor. During his argument with Cassius, he reminds him, “Remember March; the ides of March remember. / Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?” (Shakespeare

87). These lines clearly show that Brutus still believes Caesar's murder was necessary for the good of Rome. However, according to Cognitive Dissonance theory, a person experiences mental discomfort when his actions conflict with his emotions or moral beliefs. Brutus loved Caesar as a friend, yet he participated in his murder. In order to reduce this inner conflict, he repeatedly uses ideas such as honesty, justice, and honour to justify his actions. This is also visible when he says, "For I am armed so strong in honesty" (Shakespeare 89). The line shows that Brutus wants to convince both Cassius and himself that he is still morally pure despite the violence he committed.

As the scene continues, Brutus's emotional suffering becomes more visible, which shows the psychological effects of cognitive dissonance on his mind. Although he tries to appear calm and rational, he finally admits, "I am sick of many griefs" (Shakespeare 92). This line reflects his emotional exhaustion caused by war, guilt, and the death of Portia. The appearance of Caesar's ghost further increases his mental disturbance. Brutus confesses, "The ghost of Caesar hath appeared to me," while the ghost calls itself "Thy evil spirit, Brutus" (Shakespeare 97). These lines suggest that Brutus cannot escape the memory of Caesar or the guilt connected to the assassination. Shakespeare presents the ghost as a symbol of Brutus's troubled conscience and inner conflict. Even though Brutus continues to defend the assassination intellectually, emotionally, he remains disturbed and haunted by his actions.

Guilt, Self-Recognition, and Tragic Resolution in Brutus

In Act 5, Brutus becomes fully aware of the tragic consequences of the conspiracy and begins to accept defeat and death. After seeing the destruction caused by the civil war, Brutus realizes that violence and killing have become common after Caesar's assassination. This clearly shows the

failure of the conspirators' original purpose. Brutus also says, "I know my hour is come" (Shakespeare 109), which reflects his acceptance of fate and approaching death. According to Cognitive Dissonance theory, continuous contradiction between beliefs and reality creates psychological pressure and emotional collapse. Brutus believed he was saving Rome, but instead he sees war, suffering, and destruction everywhere around him. The reappearance of Caesar's ghost also reminds him that he cannot escape the consequences of his actions or the guilt hidden within his conscience.

Brutus's final words reveal his complete tragic realization and inner conflict. Before his death, he says, "Caesar, now be still. / I killed not thee with half so good a will" (Shakespeare 110). These lines strongly show Brutus's cognitive dissonance because he finally admits that he never truly wanted to kill Caesar. Although he convinced himself that the assassination was honourable, emotionally he remained attached to Caesar and disturbed by the betrayal. By saying that he kills himself more willingly than he killed Caesar, Brutus unconsciously accepts his hidden guilt and emotional pain. His tragedy therefore, becomes both political and psychological. This idea is further supported when Strato says that "Brutus only overcame himself" (Shakespeare 110). Shakespeare suggests that Brutus's greatest battle was not against Antony or Octavius, but against his own divided conscience and unresolved inner conflict.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This research explored Brutus's character through the theoretical lens of cognitive dissonance theory. This study offered a close textual analysis of *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare. The analysis has shown the beginning of Brutus's internal conflicts between friendship with Caesar and loyalty to Rome, which become stronger in the later scenes of Brutus's soliloquy when he first thinks about the murder of Caesar and how he rationalizes murder as a noble duty, but at the same time, Brutus knew that Caesar was not dangerous yet. When mental discomfort becomes stronger, it leads him towards the final violent act of assassination and then Brutus starts moral justification and from here his psychological fragmentation starts, which leads him towards his guilt and tragic downfall. These are all key scenes of internal conflicts, discomfort, action and then moral reframing, moral justification, guilt and tragic downfall analyzed through the theory of Cognitive Dissonance.

The study further revealed that Brutus repeatedly changes his interpretation of events in order to maintain consistency between his beliefs and actions. He presents the murder of Caesar as a noble sacrifice made for the welfare of Rome rather than a personal act of betrayal. Through this process, Brutus attempts to resolve the dissonance created by the contradiction between his values and his actions. However, instead of achieving peace of mind, his decision leads to deeper emotional and psychological conflict. The consequences of the assassination continue to affect his thoughts, decisions, and behavior throughout the play.

Moreover, the analysis demonstrated that Brutus's psychological fragmentation becomes more visible after Caesar's death. His feelings of guilt, anxiety, self-doubt, and emotional isolation indicate that the dissonance was never fully resolved. The appearance of Caesar's ghost can also be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Brutus's troubled conscience and unresolved inner conflict. As the play progresses, these psychological pressures contribute to his declining judgment and eventual downfall.

Overall, the findings suggest that Brutus is not merely a political conspirator but a deeply conflicted individual whose actions are shaped by competing moral obligations and psychological tensions. Cognitive Dissonance Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how Brutus justifies his choices, copes with internal discomfort, and ultimately suffers the tragic consequences of his decisions. The study concludes that Brutus's tragedy emerges not only from external events but also from the unresolved conflict within his own mind, making him one of Shakespeare's most psychologically complex characters.

Theoretical Contribution

This research makes several contributions to psycho literary criticism. Many studies discuss Brutus politically or morally, but this research focuses on his mental tension, self-justification and psychological discomfort, so this study combines literature, psychology and cognitive theory; the interdisciplinary approach itself is a contribution. This study presents Brutus not only as a political conspirator but also as a psychologically divided character.

Implications for Future Research

This research is expanding interdisciplinary studies for future researchers. Future scholars can apply Cognitive Dissonance Theory to other Shakespearean characters, such as Hamlet and also be helpful for comparing Brutus with other characters in terms of moral and psychological conflict. Moreover, future scholars may explore Shakespeare's works through alternative psychological frameworks to broaden interdisciplinary understanding of character and consciousness.

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