

“honour is the subject of my story”:

Representing the Construction of Male Selfhood
in *Julius Caesar*

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Introduction

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599) was the play performed at the Globe at its opening in 1599. The year 1599 was a critical one in which several important political incidents happened both inside and outside of England (Shapiro). Outside, England at that time was in great trouble in its military campaign against Ireland. On the other hand, the most serious problem in England was about the successor of the ageing and childless queen. Naturally, in such a situation, Shakespeare's original audience must have taken great interest in the political situation which this play presents. Andrew Hadfield considers that the reason is that in the play “Shakespeare represents Roman society as a toxic mixture of decayed republicanism and emergent tyranny” (Hadfield 171) and that he intends to emphasize the unstable political situation in England at that time. It is understandable that Shakespeare should have reflected such concerns in his play.

This essay aims to discuss the problems of ideal manhood as represented in *Julius Caesar*, in which masculinity is most highly valued and

the term “honourable” is given particularly strong significance, focusing on three male characters, Brutus, Caesar and Cassius. The society of the play is said to be ruled by the principle of Roman Republicanism, the social norms of which defines ideal manhood as “mettle” (2.1.133) while women are assumed to be modest and subjected to men, constructed of “melting spirit” (2.1.121). In the play, power is closely related to “mettle,” which indicates the strength of manhood. Patricians are supposed to be equal even though women and plebeians should obey them. Actually, republicanism functioned efficiently in ancient Greece, but in this play Roman Republicanism does not work well. Caesar behaves like a tyrant and neither men nor women obey the social norms in a true sense.

From the beginning of the play, the Roman society is described as disorderly because of the decline of its Republicanism, and the characters’ behaviour does not meet up to the ideology. This is exemplified in the description of the relationship between husband and wife. Two pairs appear in the play; Caesar and Calphurnia, and Brutus and Portia. Both wives worry about their husbands’ imminent crisis and meddle in their political affairs, though well aware that women are not entitled to do so, excluded from the male world of politics. The deviance of the characters from the norms is most clearly shown in the episodes related to the suicides. Despite the strict gender distinction in ideology, men and women are not described as entirely different from each other with regard to their suicide. Three kinds of suicides are dramatized in the play. To examine the significance of each one would be helpful in understanding the nature of the Roman society presented in the play. Men often unconsciously identify themselves with their wives while they try to prove their manly independence in the Roman society. Although separated from the male world, wives are undoubtedly essential to their husbands since only wives

can produce legitimate heirs, who can maintain patriarchal authority. Therefore, these men are heavily dependent upon their wives to continue their genealogy. Though wives were not regarded as equal, they were indispensable to husbands, at least as a means to produce an heir.

I. Brutus

For Brutus, his wife plays an important role in his mentality as well. Hadfield says: "Brutus and Portia are shown to be an affectionate and well-matched couple" (Hadfield 173). Hadfield goes so far to say that she is dear to him as "the ruddy drops/ That visit" his sad heart (288-9); by comparing his wife to his blood, he expresses that she is a part of him. In Act II Scene I, his sense of identification with his wife is particularly foregrounded in their private conversation in the garden. Portia is characterized as a woman of a particularly strong will. Portia's mental strength seems to be equivalent to male Roman *virtus*, which is repeatedly expressed as "mettle" in the play. The term "mettle" is defined in *OED* (n 3) as "Ardent or spirited temperament; spirit, courage." Appealing to her husband that she is entitled to share the secret with him, she takes a strikingly violent action to injure herself to prove her masculine strength. Thus, she attempts to resolve the gender distinction which separates her from her husband, by getting involved in the Roman male world through the knowledge of her husband's secret. To her, the garden represents a midway between the private and the public, that is, their domestic domain and the male Roman society to which her husband belongs. Interestingly, it is in the garden that Shakespeare sets this scene which renders gender distinction ambiguous since Portia assumes masculinity in her speech, aiming to appeal to her husband to reveal his secrecy.

Finally, Brutus changes his mind and decides to tell her the very important issue of male secrecy, although a chance occurrence prevents him from doing so. As to the relationship between Brutus and Portia, Coppelia Kahn states as follows:

Portia shows, as it were, a fine discernment in this strategy of constructing herself as a man, for as I suggested earlier, men mutually confirm their identities as Roman through bonds with each other. Brutus can trust Portia only as a man.

(Kahn 99)

On the other hand, as will be argued below, it can also be said that in identifying himself with his wife, Brutus, displays his inconstancy, which was a typical attribute of femininity in sixteenth and seventeenth England. The inconstant attitude is what the play defines as "melting spirit," a female characteristic. When the play was originally performed, it was Queen Elizabeth that ruled English patriarchal society, and therefore, the gender distinction in society was rather contradictory. Bruce R. Smith states: "England was ruled until 1603 by a female monarch. The power she enjoyed at the apex of the social hierarchy caused anxieties about male privilege up and down the line" (Smith 104). Hence, there was a great contradiction inherent in the English patriarchal society itself at the time when Shakespeare wrote the play.

The word "honourable," as has been mentioned, is one of the key words in the Roman world of power presented in the play. Portia blames Brutus for not telling her his secret, saying, "Portia is Brutus's harlot, not his wife" (2.1.286). Responding to her words, Brutus shows his great respect to her by saying, "You are my true and *honourable* wife" (2.1.287

[italics mine]). According to the *OED*, one of the meanings of the word “honourable” is “Worthy of being honoured; entitled to honour, respect, or reverence” (A.1.a.). Moreover, it is noteworthy that the word “honourable” is rarely used to admire women in Shakespeare’s works; women in high social rank such as Olivia in *Twelfth Night* and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* are sometimes referred to as “honourable” by their social inferiors, but it is exceptional to call one’s own wife “honourable.” In fact, no such use of the term is found in any other dramatic works by Shakespeare. Thus, as Kahn says, Brutus shows his respect to Portia because of her masculinity. Hence, Brutus’s reference to his wife as “honourable” makes it clear that he acknowledges her excellence in masculine qualities.

Besides, the term “honourable” is in this play clearly connected to the male virtue of *virtus*, for which, as has been already mentioned, the term “mettle” is frequently used. To examine the way in which “honourable” is used in the play helps to understand the special features of the male relationship in the play. Men tend to employ the term “honourable” (the underlining of the following is mine) when they praise each other’s masculinity:

Cassius: . . . Thy honourable mettle may be wrought
From that it is disposed. (1.2.308–9)

Cassius: . . . To undergo with me an enterprise
Of honourable—dangerous consequence. (1.3.122–3)

Brutus: . . . Young man, thou couldst not die more honourable.
(5.3.60)

Octavius: Within my tent his bones tonight shall die,
 Most like a soldier, ordered honourably. (5.5.77-8)

As has been shown above, the term “honourable” is generally used to praise a man for possessing the masculine virtue, in particular courage.

The most remarkable usage of “honourable” can be seen in Act III Scene II, where Antony pretends to justify the plebeians the assassination of Caesar by his rhetorical speech, using the word “honourable” repeatedly. He is well aware of the power of this word and makes clever use of it to appeal to the plebeians about the injustice of the assassination:

Antony: . . . Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest
 (For Brutus is an honourable man;
 So they all, all honourable men)
 Come I to speak in Caesar’s funeral.
 He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
 But Brutus says, he was ambitious,
 And Brutus is an honourable man. (3.2.82-88)

Brutus allows Antony to speak “in the pulpit, as becomes a friend/ Speak in the order of his funeral” (3.1.229-30) on conditions that Brutus speaks to the plebeians before Antony and that Antony will not speak ill of the assassins. By using the word “honourable” effectively, Antony succeeds to evoke the plebeians’ hostility to the conspirators. In Antony’s speech, although Brutus’s goodness is stressed, the conspirators’ treachery is emphasized; though the plebeians considered him as “noble” (3.2.11) a short while ago, they start to call him as one of “traitors, villains” (3.2.197). This process of Antony’s transforming the attitude of the plebeians towards

Brutus well illustrates the great significance of the term “honourable” in the play. Soon after Brutus talks to Portia as “honourable,” Ligarius comes and admires Brutus, saying that he was a “Soul of Rome” and “Brave son,” “derived from honourable loins” (2.2.321). Thus, Brutus is widely respected for his masculinity and great hereditary descent, which he is well aware of. On the other hand, as has already been mentioned, he compares his wife to his “ruddy drops”; Brutus, an exemplar of masculine virtue, identifies himself with a woman. Portia’s masculine quality allows him to identify himself with his wife. Overwhelmed by Portia’s masculine courage, Brutus refers to Portia as “honourable.” Though she is a woman, impressed by her masculinity, he displays to her his great respect, which he normally pays to men.

However, he cannot admit his wife’s masculinity publicly, unwilling to defy the social norms, which defines women as possessing “melting spirit.” When he hears about her death, both his respect to her masculinity and his sense of identification with her, which are shown in their private conversation in their garden, completely disappear from his speech. Although unconsciously, he disregards her masculinity, trying to emphasize her feminine weakness. Even though he acknowledges Portia’s courage privately, Brutus utters his response in terms of her femininity on hearing of her suicide in public:

Impatient of my absence,
And grief that young Octavius with Mark Antony
Have made themselves so strong—for with her death
That tidings came—with this she fell distract,
And, her attendants absent, swallowed fire.

(4.3.150-4)

His comments on her suicide in the passage above reveals that he applies to his wife's suicide the assumption about women's suicide commonly accepted in Elizabethan England. He says that Portia's suicide is due to her "distraction," that is, madness. Moreover, he thinks that she was so weak a woman that she was unable to bear his absence and his defeat by Octavius Caesar and Antony which is likely to happen. Nevertheless, in view of Portia's characterization in the earlier scene, it is almost impossible to accept entirely his words about her death. Portia possesses constancy which men in Rome think highly of; that is, the quality of "mettle," not "melting spirit." Constancy is an important element which constitutes the Roman *virtus*. Possessing the mental strength of constancy, she cannot be regarded as a typical woman who is characterized by femininity.

On the other hand, ironically, the play presents Brutus as not at all constant. In the earlier part of the scene he tells Cassius that he finds suicide "cowardly and vile" (5.1.103), so that he will "stay the providence of some high powers" (5.1.106). Though the play is situated in ancient Rome, he thus displays the Christian doctrine against suicide, although suicide is the only means for men to uphold their male virtue in the play world (Kishi 108). However, against his own words, Brutus commits suicide at the end. Thus, his suicide reveals his inner contradiction. And yet, he still does not want to accept his suicide as an act of self-contradiction, but tries to convince himself that he does not kill himself but the ghost of Caesar takes revenge upon him. This idea of Caesar's revenge upon him often appears in Brutus's speeches toward the end of the play:

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet.

Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords

In our own proper entrails.

(5.3.94-6)

He tries to emphasize that his death is not caused by his voluntary will. As a matter of fact, the Christian doctrine against suicide is again reflected in his speech. He says that he will not commit suicide:

. . . But I do find it cowardly and vile,
For fear of what might fall, so prevent
The time of life—arming myself with patience
To stay the providence of some high powers
That governs us below. (5.1.103-7)

On the other hand, men in Rome traditionally esteem suicide as an extremely noble deed. Thus, in the latter part of the play, Brutus is portrayed as a mixture of Christian ethics and the Roman concept of virtue. In fact, Brutus’s view that Portia kills herself because of her weakness is related to the cause of his own suicide. With regard to Portia’s suicide, he believes that its cause lies in “distraction” which makes her unable to bear his absence and his defeat against Antony and Octavius. He thinks that in the case of women they tend to commit suicide owing to their mental weakness while in the case of men he partly believes it embodies noble Roman *virtus*. However, following the Christian doctrine, he states that he will not commit suicide because he regards suicide as “cowardly and vile.” Accordingly, Brutus does not at all die a noble death though suicide is supposed to be a noble deed in Roman society. After all, it is Brutus that kills himself because of “distraction,” that is, his mental weakness. As he is driven into the desperate situation and has no way but to kill himself, he tries to justify the cause of his suicide by assuming that Caesar

takes revenge upon him.

II. Caesar

While Cassius refers to Caesar as a “wolf” (1.3.104), Caesar describes himself in relation to danger as “two lions littered in one day” (2.2.46). He regards himself and is regarded by other members of Roman society as similar to a fierce animal that feeds on others. On the other hand, when Metellus, Brutus, and Cassius appeal to Caesar to recall Metellus’s banished brother, Caesar says; “That couchings and these lowly courtesies/ Might fire the blood of ordinary men” (3.1.36-7). Moreover, he despises Metellus as “a cur” (3.1.46). He further describes himself, proudly speaking about his constancy:

But I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament. (3.1.60-2)

From these passages above, it is clear that Caesar thinks of himself as a man of far superior to any other men in Rome. That is, compared with him, other men are trivial. Moreover, his attitude toward Metellus suggests that Caesar is too arrogant to listen to other men’s opinions. Thus, he is consistently portrayed as a potential tyrant in Roman society.

In other scenes of the play, Caesar also ignores other people’s advices that could have some possibility to save his life. A soothsayer says to him, “Beware the Idles of March” (1.2.23), while Artemidorus tries to give him a scroll that informs him of the assassination plan. Nevertheless, Caesar despises and ignores these warnings entirely. From the begin-

ning of the play, he is presented as a tyrant, thinking that he should not accept other men's words because he is superior to anyone. His sense of his own superiority frequently appears in his speeches; "The things that threatened me/ Ne'er looked on my back" (2.2.10-1); and "I could be moved if I were as you" (3.1.58). Thus, he shows off his superior power, and Caesar's charismatic power is fully recognized in Rome. Even though he is killed in the middle of the play (Act III Scene I), he does not disappear from the play world in a true sense. He even appears as a ghost after his death. Whether the ghost is the outcome of Brutus's delusion or not is clear, it is evident that Brutus is scared by Caesar even after his death. Therefore, in committing his suicide, Brutus says, "Caesar, now be still. I killed not thee with half so good a will" (5.1.50-1). He thinks of Caesar even at his last moment. At the same time a problematic aspect of Caesar's personality is also represented in the play. Although he is an embodiment of "mettle" in the Roman world, his response to his wife, Calphurnia, reveals his flexible aspect.

It is important to note that though he is arrogant enough to treat other patricians scornfully, to the plebeians he never shows his despise, behaving rather flatteringly to them. For example, in Act I Scene II, Caska reports Brutus that Caesar has demonstrated to the plebeians his unwillingness to become their emperor. Caesar's behaviour is undoubtedly his performance to pretend to the plebeians that he is lack of political ambition and thus to acquire popularity with them. His strategy seems to work successfully: according to Caska, "the rabblement hooted, and clapped their chopped hands, and threw up their sweaty nightcaps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown. . ." (1.2.243-6). Nonetheless, the plebeians are shown to be unreliable. When Brutus insists on his justification for the assassination of

Caesar, they are easily persuaded by him and start to praise Brutus, saying, “Let him be Cesar” and “Caesar’s better parts/ Shall be crowned in Brutus” (3.2.50–1). As to their admiration in this scene, A. D. Nuttall states that “The people are not cheering for Republicanism. Witlessly, they are cheering for Brutus, the new star” (Nuttall, 174). However, what is important here is that they still remember their big old star, while applauding for the new one. What they are most concerned about here is which star will give them a greater benefit.

In the meanwhile, as has been already mentioned above, women are essential to their husbands though they are considered as their inferiors. In Shakespeare’s plays, this contradictory situation is often referred to. For example, Posthumus in *Cymbeline* grieves over the male incapacity to continue legitimacy without female power: “Is there no way for men to be, but women/ Must be half-workers?” (2.4.153–4). In the male world of strictly patriarchal Rome, it is a serious problem for a man of power to have no heir who can inherit his power and wealth. Since having no legitimate heir means their legacy will fall into other men’s hands, men naturally want their wives to produce a son. In this sense, a wife plays a very important role for her husband, influencing her husband’s social condition as well as the future of their households.

In his first appearance of the play, Caesar tells Calphurnia to stand in Antony’s way and Antony to touch Calphurnia because it is believed that “The barren touched in this holy chase/ Shake off their sterile curse” (1.2.8–9). Though Caesar is said to have some illegitimate children, he has no legitimate son, and ardently wants to have one; he thinks that through Antony’s touch his wife’s sterility can be removed. This scene presents Caesar’s male anxiety about being heirless. In this sense, Calphurnia is profoundly necessary for Caesar to continue his legitimate

genealogy though she is not recognized as a member of the Roman male world.

In the meantime, the bonds between husband and wife are represented as strong in *Julius Caesar*. As has been argued earlier, Caesar does not listen to other men’s advices. Nevertheless, in Act II Scene II where Calphurnia asks Caesar to stay home without going to the Senate House, he does not tell her not to interfere with his political affairs but is almost persuaded by her. Although he later changes his decision again and goes to the Senate House, it is important that his wife succeeds in changing his mind at least once. In short, women can hold their influential political power, and thus get connected to the male world through their connection with husbands. In this play, the wives’ sphere is considered to be within the home, but they can actually influence their husbands’ social conditions through their indirect power of the marital bondship.

III. Cassius

Cassius believes that Caesar neglects him and will eventually ignore his existence. To maintain his position in the Roman male world, Cassius believes that Caesar, an expected emperor of Rome, must die. As he himself knows that he is of little power in Rome, he tries to live through the male world by controlling men around him. The reason why he involves Brutus in the conspiracy against Caesar is that the existence of Brutus means a great deal to justify the motive of the assassination, so that other men will join the conspirators. As Hadfield states, Cassius “is manipulating his partner, leading him towards a predetermined course of action, using what he sees as Brutus’s good nature, universal popularity and high principles” (Hadfield, 175). Hadfield also thinks that Cassius’s

action of using Brutus "further violates the rules of proper friendship as determined by Cicero" and that the fact that Cicero does not join the conspirators because the conspiracy is "at odds with the proper goals of the republic" (Hadfield 176). When Cassius tries to persuade Brutus to join the conspiracy, he expresses his view of the male world of power he is in: "The fault . . . is not in our stars/ But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (1.2.139-40). In this speech, accepting he himself and Brutus are Caesar's underling, he reveals his strong sense of inferiority to Caesar. He thinks that by killing Caesar, he can improve his status in the male society. Since it is obviously unlikely for him to be promoted in the world of power ruled by Caesar from the beginning of the play, he intentionally locates himself to the edge of the male world of power, so that he can avoid his encounter with Caesar.

Although he also commits suicide, unlike Brutus he is not concerned about his "honour" at all; he kills himself without making any justification for his suicide. He asks his servant Pindarus to kill him, on the condition that Pindarus will be freed from slavery by killing him. Certainly, he says, "honour is the subject of my story" (1.2.93), but these words are spoken to entice into the conspiracy Brutus, who claims, "I love/ the name of honour more than I fear death" (1.2.88-9). On the other hand, when Brutus implores his servants to help him with killing himself, three of them refuse. Finally one of them helps him only out of his sense of loyalty to Brutus, his "lord."

It can further be said that Cassius behaves rather like a woman. He rarely displays his manly independence, while he strives not to be separated from the masculine world. As Juliet Dusinberre states, women are not completely different from men because they have a certain amount of subjectivity that is often regarded as men's privilege: "Shakespeare's

women are not an isolated phenomenon in their emancipation, their sufficiency, and their evasion of stereotypes" (Dusinberre, Introduction 4). In fact, women in Shakespeare's plays are described as not so entirely different from men; like Portia, they often show their "mettle," which is regarded as a special manly quality in the society presented in the play. Therefore, it is no wonder that Cassius, a man, feminizes himself though the social norms that define men as being completely different from women. He appears to be aware of his own "womanish" nature:

. . . we are governed with our mothers' spirits:
Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish. (1.3.83-4)

When that rash humour which my mother gave me
Makes me forgetful? (4.3.118-9)

As has been discussed earlier in this essay, Portia tries to be involved in the Roman male world from which she is excluded because of her gender. On the other hand, Cassius also feels himself separated from the male world to which he is supposed to belong. Even if Portia's statement, "I have a man's mind, but a woman's might" (2.3.8), apparently makes a striking contrast to his remarks on his own womanishness, Cassius and Portia have essentially something in common; both of them feel a sense of alienation from the Roman male world.

Moreover, it is worthwhile to compare Cassius and another female character in the play, Calphurnia. While Cassius disregards the male code of honour, Calphurnia cannot comprehend its nature. She asks her husband Caesar not to go to the Senate House because she fears that "horrid sights seen by the watch" (2.2.16) foretell a misfortune befalling

honourably, may well be regarded as just such a "fellow-traveller."

Eve Sedgwick discusses the male feminization dramatized in William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675). In this Restoration comedy, Horner is characterized as a man of strategy, who

represents himself, and is perceived by some women, not only as excepting himself the male homosocial circuit, but as making a sacrifice of (homosocially defined) masculinity, in favor of the pleasure of women. (Sedgwick 56)

In fact, he becomes successful in establishing good relationships both with men and women by way of feminizing himself. Sedgwick gives an account of such feminization of the male:

Deffering and sublimating his material need, disguising his ambition through various forms of apparent feminization, being able to envision only a manipulative rather than a mutual relationship with the real "wits," such a figure, by giving a voice and body to real or apparent contradictions in the status of those envies, may succeed in cleaving a path for himself to the ascendancy or even the material goods he desires.

(Sedgwick 62)

In this passage, she points out that the male feminization can be an effective way to be successful in a homosocial male world. Of course, Cassius is different from Horner in his aim; his attention being directed only to men around him, never to any women, what he aims at is to secure his status in the male world. According to Sedgwick, Horner actually aims to

be elevated in the male society he is placed in:

. . . the play makes clear that, far from renouncing or subordinating the male-homosocial destination of desire, Horner has actually elevated it to a newly transcendent status. If he gives up the friendship and admiration of other men, it is only in order to come into a more intimate and secret relation to them. . . . (Sedgwick 56)

Like Horner, Cassius is a man who neither displays his masculine quality nor obviously follows the male code of value, but both of them seem to internalize the importance of the male system of values in society. When Brutus blames Cassius for his accepting bribes in Act IV Scene III, Cassius's internalization of this value becomes clear. While Brutus speaks of Cassius's offence, Cassius says that Brutus does “wrong” him, thus transforming the subject of the quarrel into male bondship between Brutus and himself. He thinks that men should accept social responsibility while women, controlled by “melting spirit,” are considered too weak to do so. Therefore, using the term “love” repeatedly, he chooses to pretend to be a woman, that is, one who can have heterosexual affection for Brutus, in order to suppress Brutus's anger:

Do not presume too much upon my love:

I may do that I shall be sorry for. (4.3.63-4)

Cassius: You love me not.

Brutus: I do not like your faults.

(4.3.88)

Hated by one he loves, braved by his brother,
Checked like a bondman. . . . (4.3.95-6)

Have you not love enough to bear with me,
When that rash humour which my mother gave me
Makes me forgetful? (4.3.118-120)

Although he usually disregards the male code of values, internalizing its importance, he does not allow himself to offend Brutus as a man. Hence, being aware of his own “womanish” nature, Cassius intentionally changes the subject of their talk into the relationship of love between them, feminizing himself.

Cassius’s death makes a great contrast to Brutus’s death since the former represents the degenerated aspects of the male world of Rome in the play. In fact, Cassius does not live up to the norms of the male world as presented in the play but simply tries to make use of them. He thinks that he is loved neither by Brutus nor Caesar, the leading figures in Rome:

Caesar doth bear me hard, but he loves Brutus.
If I were Brutus now, and he were Cassius,
He should not humour me. (1.2.312-4)

. . . for I know,
When thou hate him worst, thou lov’st him better
Than ever thou lov’st Cassius. (4.3.104-5)

These passages also describe his sense of alienation from the male world. Though he limits himself to the edge of the male world, he is well aware

that male friendship can influence men’s social position in Rome. This recognition is deeply related to his jealousy toward those men such as Caesar and Brutus, who can build up intimate relationships with men around them.

Nevertheless, since suicide is thought to be an act of honour in the Roman society, his suicide shows that there still remains a certain amount of masculine quality in him. The reason why he decides to die is that he is informed by Pindarus that Titinius, whom he regards as his “best friend” (5.3.35), has been taken by the enemies. This is the scene where his male bondship is revealed for the first time in the play though the information turns out to be incorrect and Titinius is still alive. His death, therefore, leaves rather an awkward impression. He dies for love of Titinius, but actually his death is the outcome of his mistaken perception. Titinius also kills himself, saying “see how I regarded Caius Cassius... This is a Roman’s part” (5.3.88-9); he wants to follow Cassius, the “sun of Rome” (5.3.63). It is interesting that Cassius is thought highly by Titinius while, as has been argued in this essay, he is not portrayed as an “honourable” man in the play. In this respect, Titinius also dies because of his mistaken judgment of Cassius. Nonetheless, Cassius’s friendship with Titinius becomes a kind of proof that he still maintains his masculinity in valuing his bondship with his male friends, who also regard their male relationship as most important in the play.

Conclusion

It is often said that in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare reflects the unstable social situation in the end of the Elizabethan period. Robin Headlam Wells parallels Cassius with the Earl of Essex, who had a “desire to

remove what seemed to him a tyrannical ruler and reform government” (Wells 211), while comparing Caesar with Queen Elizabeth. Wells thinks that Essex wanted Elizabeth to resign her throne so that he could reform the government. Moreover, Katherine Duncan-Jones and Barbara L. Parker also compare people in Elizabethan England with the characters in the play:

Cassius’s brilliantly insidious account of the swimming match between him and Caesar implies that physical ageing and weakness in themselves disqualify a leader from continuing to exercise monarchical power. (Duncan-Jones 116)

In this passage, Duncan-Jones suggests that in this play Shakespeare tries to emphasize that Elizabeth has lost her ability to reign England, comparing her both with Cassius and Caesar. On the other hand, Parker compares both Cassius and Caesar with Elizabeth:

Caesar’s characterization of Cassius is equally applicable to Essex. . . . But Essex is also figured in Caesar—in his quest for supremacy, in his martial triumphs, in his heroic stature, in his courtship of and veneration by the rabble, in the fear and dislike he inspires in members of his own class, and in the potential for mob rule that inheres in such a figure. (Parker 89)

Whoever his contemporary figures are reflected in *Julius Caesar*, it is clear that Shakespeare represented in his characters some aspects of actual people who attracted people’s attention at that time. In the case of history plays, due to the censorship at that time it was almost impossible for

Shakespeare to portray clearly critical political issues which his audience would have taken great interest.

Since the Roman Republic in the play is represented as in decline, the characters no longer embody the ideal role allotted to them by the social norms. As has been already discussed, neither Brutus, Caesar, nor Cassius can adapt themselves to the ideal manhood. This disorderly condition of the society in the play world is efficiently presented in the scene in which the plebeians kill Cinna, the poet. The plebeians reveal their lack of reason in killing the innocent man. Just because he happens to have the same name as one of the assassins. Possibly, they know that Cinna they are killing is not the one whom they seek for:

Cinna: I am the Cinna the poet, I am the Cinna the poet.

4 Plebeian: Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his
bad verses.

Cinna: I am not Cinna the conspirator.

4 Plebeian: It is no matter, his name's Cinna. Pluck but his
name out of his heart and turn him going.

(3.3.29-34)

One of them declares that Cinna shall die just because his name is the same as that of a member of the conspirators. The plebeians' uncontrollable power of violence is well presented in this scene. The society in the play is so unstable that the patricians lack the power to control the plebeians' threats. Parker discusses the important role of the mob in the play:

Indeed, it may not be an overstatement to assert that the mob

is the play’s real protagonist, for they control not only Caesar and the other patricians but virtually the entire course of events. (Parker 80)

Actually, the mob possesses such a powerful influence that they transform Brutus’s title from “honourable” to one of “traitors, villains,” causing his destruction. Thus, that the plebeians overwhelm the patricians also underlines the weakness of Roman society dramatized in *Julius Caesar*.

As has been discussed in this essay, the society presented in this play is full of contradictions to the principles of Roman Republicanism. Both women and plebeians, who are regarded as inferior to the patricians in Roman society, sometimes overwhelm the patricians, who do not have power enough to put them under control. In such a situation of the play world, the only patrician who is represented as capable of suppressing the disorder in Rome is Caesar. That is the reason why the play was entitled *Julius Caesar* even though he is killed in the middle of it.

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