

interpretation

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MANLINESS AND FRIENDSHIP IN SHAKESPEARE'S *JULIUS CAESAR*

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The city of Rome had besides its proper name another secret one, known only to a few. It is believed by some to have been "Valentia," the Latin translation of "Roma" ["strength" in Greek]; others think it was "Amor" ("Roma" read backwards).

—G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Part III, Section 1

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* examines the lives and souls of the sort of men who made republican Rome the foremost model of political greatness and glory. The men we see in the play have the strongest desire for worldly glory and, regarding honor as the highest good, relentlessly strive to win it. They look up to the things that make men strong and, having tremendous pride and trust in their own "strength of spirit" (I.iii.95),¹ jealously contend with one another for outstanding distinctions. Their hearts are, as Cassius says, "hearts of controversy" (I.ii.108). Loving victory, dominance, and honor, they characteristically equate manliness and human excellence. Cassius sums up their view of their humanity when, bemoaning Rome's acquiescence to Caesar, he says,

But, woe the while! our fathers' minds are dead,
And we are govern'd with our mothers' spirits;
Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish.
(I.iii.82–84)

Rome is a man's world. No one in *Caesar* has a good word for women. Even Portia, Brutus' noble wife, is a misogynist. Even she, ashamed of her woman's heart, insists that the best human qualities neither come from nor belong to women.² If a woman like herself happens to show them, she does so in spite of her sex. She is "stronger than [her] sex" (II.i.296); she is manly.

That a woman must somehow overcome her nature to show the highest virtue points to the close correlation in *Caesar* between manliness and rising up or rising above the common or merely human things. Throughout the play men's activities and ambitions are repeatedly expressed in terms of standing, rising, climbing to new heights, "soar[ing] above the view of men" (I.i.74), and reaching "the upmost round" (II.i.24) while scorning everything below; and their defects and defeats expressed in the contrary terms of bending, bow-

¹References are to the Arden editions of *Julius Caesar*, ed. T. S. Dorsch, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. M. R. Ridley (London: Methuen, 1964).

²II.i.292ff.; II.iv.6–9, 39–40. For the Roman patriots' disparaging their maternal origins as much as they revere their paternal origins, see I.ii.111–114, 156–159; I.iii.80–84; II.i.294–297; IV.iii.118–122; V.iii.67–71; V.iv.1–11. Note also that "ancestor(s)" always refers only to men: I.ii.111, I.iii.80–84, II.i.53–54, III.ii.51. For the fact that "virtue" derives from the Latin word for "man," see Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, II.43.

ing, lying, crouching, fawning, falling, sinking, kneeling, shaking, trembling, and melting.³ The manly is associated with the firm, the brilliant, the cold, the independent, the high and the noble; the womanish, with the soft, the dull, the warm, the dependent, the low and the lowly. The manly is the outstanding; the womanish, the obscure. The manly both contains and confers distinctions. The womanish does neither. Like the body, it is the great equalizer. It tends to level all important differences.⁴

Shakespeare shows that the manly love of distinction engenders a characteristic attitude towards the world. It is one of resisting and overcoming all the things that threaten to drag a man down or overshadow him. This fundamental Roman stance is reflected in part by the great importance attached to wakefulness. Early on the ides of March, Brutus tells the other conspirators that he has been “awake all night” (II.i.88). Indeed,

Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar,
I have not slept. (ll. 61–62)

His servant, Lucius, can “Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber,” because, as Brutus says, the boy has none of the “busy care[s]” that occupy “the brains of men” (ll. 230, 232). But the conspirators and Caesar alike have been kept awake by just such cares. Only those outside the political realm belong in bed. Thus Brutus sends Lucius back to bed soon after awakening him and, shortly afterwards, tells Portia, too, to “go to bed” when she complains of his having left “his wholesome bed” (ll. 237ff.). But he himself is aroused to act against Caesar by Cassius’ anonymous note accusing him of sleeping and urging him to awake (ll. 46ff.); and then, arguing that they need nothing but their Roman cause to “prick” them to action, he spurs his co-conspirators on by associating “The melting spirits of women”—in contrast to “th’ insuppressive mettle of our spirits”—with each man returning “to his idle bed” (ll. 114ff.).⁵ It is not going too far to say that from the Roman point of view nothing very interesting ever happens in bed.⁶

Brutus and the others understand the private world to be destructive of manliness. As he indicates at Sardis shortly before the decisive battle of Philippi, to succumb to sleep is to succumb to necessity. Brutus finally puts his work aside and prepares for bed only because “nature must obey necessity” (IV.iii.226). Natural necessity, he implies, is not part of his nature. His noble

³E.g., I.i.72–75; I.ii.99–136; II.i.21–27, 118, 142, 167; III.i.31–77, 122–137, 148–150, 204–210; IV.ii.23–27; IV.iii.38–50, 66–69; V.i.41–44; V.iii.57–64.

⁴I.ii.268–272; I.iii.80–84; II.i.122, 292–297; IV.iv.6–10, 39–40.

⁵See also I.iii.164, II.i.98–99; and cf. in context IV.iii.92ff. For Lucius, see further IV.iii.235–271. And for Caesar’s estimation of “such men as sleep a-nights,” see I.ii.189f. Also, note II.ii.116–117.

⁶Just as the possibility of a Roman woman warrior like Antony’s wife Fulvia is totally suppressed in *Caesar* (see *Ant.*, I.ii.85–91; II.i.40; II.ii.42–44, 61–66, 94–98; also I.i.20, 28–32; I.ii.101–106), so too is Caesar’s erotic interest in a woman like Cleopatra (see *ibid.*, I.v.29–31, 66–75; II.ii.226–228; II.vi.64–70; III.xiii.116–117; cf. *JC*, I.ii.1–11.

nature is to oppose necessity. So while women and children “look for a time of rest” (l. 261), Brutus “will niggard” sleep with only “a little rest” (l. 227). He opposes “murd’rous slumber” (l. 266) because he opposes any form of obscurity. Men like him resist all forms of reclining because to recline is to surrender one’s standing in the world. Their characteristic opposition to the earth’s downward pull is well expressed by Alexander the Great’s remark that, more than anything else, sleep and sex reminded him he was not a god.⁷

The specific character of manly virtue is indicated by Portia, who gashes herself in the thigh to prove that she is strong enough to keep Brutus’ secret plans in confidence. The important difference between the sexes, she seems to believe, is that men are stronger than their bodies but women are not. Women are inconstant because they are weaker than bodily fears and pains.⁸ One might therefore suppose that their characteristic trait is concern with necessary rather than with noble things. But Portia’s subsequent actions reveal something she herself fails to see. The self-inflicted wound she calls “strong proof of my constancy” (II.i.299) turns out to be no proof at all. As soon as Brutus leaves, she is overwhelmed by anxious fears for his welfare, and her strong “patience” (l. 301) and manly endurance quickly vanish. There are evidently worse tortures for her than bodily pains and even death. Love for her husband makes her more a woman than the superiority to her body makes her a man. If, as she says, “The heart of woman” is a “weak thing” (II.iv.39–40), its weakness, her actions seem to show, stems not from fear but from affection, from loving another more than herself.

While manliness no doubt sustains a timocracy like the Roman republic, such an honor-loving regime is often praised for fostering fraternity. Its citizens, bound together by a common ancestry and upbringing, are free and equal; they respect the mutual claims to rule that only manly virtue can enforce. It is therefore fitting that only “man” is mentioned in *Caesar* more often than “love” or “friendship”⁹ and the most elaborated friendship in the play is that of the leaders of the republican faction. In fact, Brutus and Cassius call each other “brother” as many as eight times¹⁰ although Shakespeare never explains that they are brothers-in-law.¹¹ Shakespeare’s silence is appropriately misleading. Brutus and Cassius’ fraternal form of address seems entirely elective and a sign of the sort of friendship nurtured by the manly regime under which they live and which they die defending.¹² Their friendship does, I think, epitomize the republic, but not as just suggested or usually understood.

⁷Plutarch, *Alexander the Great*, 22.3.

⁸For the importance of constancy, see Caesar’s claim to divinity at III.i.31–77, esp. 58–73.

⁹“Man” (including its variants) appears 148 times; “love,” 51 times; “friend,” 53 times. By comparison, “Rome” occurs 38, “Roman” and “Romans” together 35 times. Only Caesar’s name is mentioned more often than “man.”

¹⁰IV.ii.37, 39; IV.iii.95, 211, 232, 236, 247, 303; see also II.i.70.

¹¹See Plutarch, *Brutus*, 6.1–2.

¹²Shakespeare’s silence also has the effect of concealing that Cassius is married, thus making him appear a fully spirited or public man.

The implications of the Roman view of virtue are strikingly revealed when the tensions inherent in Brutus and Cassius' friendship surface in their ugly quarrel at Sardis late in the play. Indeed, manliness and friendship are the express themes of the quarrel. Two principal threads, closely tied, run through the scene: 1) presuming upon Cassius' expressed love, Brutus challenges his manliness and, in particular, demeans and taunts his proud anger (esp. IV.iii.38–50); and 2) he refuses to confess any love until Cassius shames himself by announcing that he utterly despairs of Brutus' contempt and will do anything to have his love (ll. 92–106). What is perhaps most telling, however, occurs not during the quarrel itself but during their apparent reconciliation (ll. 106ff.). Cassius' previous conciliatory efforts notwithstanding, Brutus still makes him solicit an explicit admission of love and forces him to plead for it, moreover, by accepting Brutus' degrading characterization of his anger as the effect of an irritable, unmanly disposition (ll. 39–50, 106–112). Thus Cassius, apologizing for having gotten angry in the first place, diffidently asks,

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

And Brutus answers with only a meager “Yes,” to which he quickly adds, sealing Cassius' disgrace,

. and from henceforth
When you are over-earnest with your Brutus,
He'll think your mother chides, and leave you so.
(ll. 118–122)

Brutus confesses only to having enough love to overlook Cassius' womanish spirit. He shall excuse his “over-earnestness” because he shall regard such fits of temper as the chiding of Cassius' mother rather than the spirited anger proper to a man.

Men such as Brutus are ambitious for love. They wish to be loved rather than to love because being loved closely resembles being honored.¹³ Both are tributes of esteem. Love between such men is therefore jealous; like honor, it is ardently sought and only begrudgingly given. Unrequited “shows of love” (I.ii.33,46) therefore amount to confessions of envy. A Roman, moreover, is a man's man. He admires manly men and seeks love from men he himself could love. The erotic Antony is disparaged by his own men in *Antony and Cleopatra* not simply because he flees battle to pursue Cleopatra but more generally because he fights bravely chiefly to impress a woman and win her love. As one of his officers complains, “so our leader's led, / And we are women's men” (*Ant.*, III.vii.69–70). The republican contest for love, however, is a contest in manliness for the love of other manly men. Moments before the quarrel, Brutus, anticipating the heart of the quarrel, contrasts true and false friends. The differ-

¹³Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1159a13–15.

ence turns wholly on manly strength. Using a metaphor from war to describe what constitutes a false friend, he says,

But hollow men, like horses hot at hand,
 Make gallant show and promise of their mettle;
 But when they should endure the bloody spur,
 They fall their crests, and like deceitful jades
 Sink in the trial. (IV.ii.23–27)

False friends are hollow warriors. They lack the dauntless strength they pretend to have. The quarrel brings out the significance of this view of virtue and friendship: the manly contest for love issues finally in a struggle to crush a friend by unmanning his proud heart. Love is not an end in itself, but rather a means to win victory in the defeat and shame of a friend.¹⁴

Manliness is a contentious virtue. It is a “virtue” that “cannot live/ Out of the teeth of emulation” (II.iii.11–12). Untempered, it is hungry, devouring, and finally self-consuming. Nothing could lower Cassius more in Brutus’ esteem than his swallowing his repeated abuse and openly confessing that he is “Hated by one he loves; brav’d by his brother” (IV.iii.95). But manly love is spirited, not affectionate. It does not aim at collapsing the distance between men into intimacy but rather at expanding that distance to the point where friendship finally becomes impossible, as Caesar himself most vividly demonstrates. As manliness is displayed primarily in battle, so the combat between warriors does not stop at the city’s walls. It pervades their loves as well as their enmities. Rome’s civil strife seems to be Roman friendship writ large.

Antony, the major counterexample, is in many ways the exception who confirms the rule. No one can doubt that his love is spirited and has an ambitious quality. But his sought-for victory in love is altogether different from Brutus’. Just as he declares at the outset of *Antony and Cleopatra* that the “nobleness of life” is for lovers to embrace

when such a mutual pair
 And such a twain can do’t, in which I bind,
 On pain of punishment, the world to weet
 We stand up peerless, (I.i.36–40)

so too, when he thinks Cleopatra has killed herself for him, he wishes to end his own life so that, reunited in death, they can win even greater acknowledgment as a matchless pair:

Eros!—I come, my queen: Eros!—Stay for me,
 Where souls do couch on flowers, we’ll hand in hand,
 And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
 Dido, and her Aeneas, shall want troops,
 And all the haunt be ours. (IV.xiv.50–54)¹⁵

¹⁴See esp. IV.iii.41–50.

¹⁵Cf. Cassius’ mention of Aeneas (I.ii.111–114).

Antony wants to out-love all other great lovers and be recognized as the greatest lover the world has ever known. The achievement he imagines may imply the defeat of all other heroic lovers, but his victory would in no sense be the defeat of his own lover. He does not seek to win another's "hot" love (*JC*, IV.ii.19) while coldly withholding his own. On the contrary, his envisaged triumph is shared by Cleopatra and is, moreover, their shared glory as a singular couple. Indeed, it rests on the wished-for prospect that nothing at all, not even their bodies, will ever again separate their souls. It is the victory of the utmost devotion and intimacy between "a mutual pair."

Antony neither resents Caesar's domination like Cassius, nor seeks to dominate other men's hearts like Brutus. Yet, while having great love for Caesar, he never presumes an equality with him. His ready submission may therefore seem to foreshadow the Empire where the Emperor has no equals and all citizens are reduced to private men subject to his will.¹⁶ But Antony loves Caesar solely for his superlative nobility and not for his favors. To him, Caesar was "the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times" (III.i.256–257). Antony's heart is ruled, as Cassius correctly fears, by "the ingrafted love he bears to Caesar" (II.i.184), a love which Caesar's murder turns into the most savage desire for revenge. It is not hard to see that what Antony gives to Cleopatra, or gives up for her, is meant to measure his love.¹⁷ Not only his giving her "realms and islands" so bounteously that they are like small change "dropp'd from his pocket" (V.ii.92), but also, and even more importantly, the battles he loses or, more exactly, the losses he actively pursues, the "Kingdoms and provinces" he "kiss[es] away" (III.x.7–8), and most of all his self-inflicted death—all this is meant to measure his overflowing love.¹⁸ The same is true of his ferocious vengeance for Caesar's assassination. However cruel and even inhuman, the vengeance is, above all, an act of giving, not of taking. Its indiscriminate savagery is intended to prove "That I did love thee, Caesar, O, 'tis true!" (III.i.194). It shows that he will spare nothing—that he will even sink to the level of a beast and scourge all human or humane feeling from the innocent as well as the guilty (III.i.254–275)—for his love. As different as they appear, Antony's terrible vengeance for Caesar is of a piece with his lavish gifts and enormous sacrifices for Cleopatra. It manifests a heart that will give up everything dear for his "strucken" "deer" (III.i.209). This "Herculean Roman" (*Ant.*, I.iii.84) is nothing if not a thoroughly immoderate lover.

In contrast to Antony, "lean and hungry" Cassius is austere and unerotic, often petty and envious, and never playful.¹⁹ No one in *Caesar* speaks of the shame of unmanliness as much or as vehemently as he. Yet, notwithstanding

¹⁶Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976) 129f.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 148–156.

¹⁸Antony of course insists that his love is too great to be measured: "There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd" (I.i.15).

¹⁹See esp. I.ii.189–207. See also note 12 above.

his ardent wish to be entirely spirited and always manly, Cassius is the leading republican example of the tension between manliness and womanliness. If Brutus is lately "with himself at war" (I.ii.45) because of his conflicting loves for Rome and Caesar, Cassius is always at war with himself because of the conflicting sides of his mixed but unstable nature—a womanly side drawing him towards others and a manly one pulling him back or away. Although he is unquestionably shrewder than Brutus, Cassius' temper is much more volatile and his passions far less restrained. Despite his strong self-contempt for any real or imagined trace of softness, his affection is stirred as easily by sorrow as his manly resentment is provoked by envy, and he often shows solicitous care for others, even his equals. He alone shows deep feeling at the news of Cicero's murder; and in sharp contrast to Brutus, who boasts that "No man bears sorrow better" and then feigns ignorance of his wife's death to impress other men with his Stoic endurance, he is willing to let others see how much he takes to heart the "insupportable and touching loss" of Portia. Cassius may have "in art" as much manly patience as Brutus to endure Portia's suicide "like a Roman," "But yet my nature," he realizes or perhaps confesses, "could not bear it so" (IV.iii.143-194). If he appears more concerned than Brutus with manliness, he does so, paradoxically, precisely because he lacks Brutus' manly constancy and reserve.

The man Cassius calls his "best friend" is his lieutenant Titinius (V.iii.35). Their friendship is probably the nearest example in *Caesar* of the sort the republic claims to foster and Brutus suggests when he describes "hearts / Of brothers' temper" as sharing "all kind love, good thoughts, and reverence" (III.i.174-176). Cassius and Titinius do indeed have mutual regard and good will. Yet their friendship is not altogether unlike Brutus and Cassius' It too demonstrates, though in a different way, that manliness separates honor-loving men. Appropriately, the scene at Philippi depicting their friendship also presents their deaths. Each kills himself, blaming himself at least in part for the other's death. Their suicides, however, are not the same. Whereas Titinius can feel great sorrow and affection for his commander without losing pride in his Romanness (V.iii.51-90), Cassius cannot wish to die for love of another without feeling shame at his own unmanliness. During the battle, Cassius, appealing expressly to Titinius' love for him, asks him to take his (Cassius') horse and ride to where he can tell whether certain troops are friend or enemy; and, moments later, learning that Titinius has been encircled by horsemen shouting for joy, he jumps to the wrong conclusion. Deciding then to kill himself, he says in disgust,

O, coward that I am, to live so long,
 To see my best friend ta'en before my face.
 (V.iii.34-35)

The qualities surrounding Cassius' death are considered unmanly by all the major figures in the play. Rashness and a fatalistic despair, born of weariness,

ness and melancholic self-doubt, lead to his mistake, and his own imagined cowardice determines his act. Yet whatever else it is—and it certainly is many things²⁰—Cassius' suicide is an act of friendship. Because his manliness is partly tempered by its opposite, he can wish to die for another man who soon returns the tribute in kind. But, importantly, Cassius tries to stifle his fond wish. Ashamed of all his unmanly qualities, he intends his suicide to repudiate the side of his nature that allows him to choose death thinking of anything but his honor. Ruled by his spirited heart, he kills himself, ultimately, more out of manly pride or shame than love or sorrow. The fundamentally Roman quality of his friendship with Titinius is indicated both by his suppression of his own affection and by the way each man emulates the other's brave death. But it is pointed up most of all by the more basic fact that Cassius' "best friend," though a nobleman, is not his equal. Whatever closeness there may be between them depends decisively on the distance their unmistakable inequality preserves.

As Cassius' suicide points to the limits of closeness among Roman men, so Portia's shows the limits of sharing within a Roman marriage. It marks the unattainability of the intimacy she desires from a virtuous marriage. Portia's attempt to persuade Brutus to confide in her contains the play's only expression of intimate, erotic love. Calling herself "your self, your half," she tries to "charm" him

by my once commended beauty,
By all your vows of love, and that great vow
Which did incorporate and make us one.
(II.i.271–274)

Love's desire or goal seems to inspire love's own special language. Lovers speak as if nothing at all separated them. Love not only makes or shows them equals, but even incorporates them and makes them indistinguishable parts of "one." Yet Portia makes this plea upon her knees. She says she would not have to kneel if Brutus were gentle. His customary gentleness, she suggests, implies or presupposes mutual respect. We see for ourselves, however, that Brutus is in fact much gentler with unequals than equals, and gentlest of all with his servant boy, Lucius. Portia nevertheless associates his recent ungentleness with his reticence and distance. "Within the bond of marriage," she continues, "tell me, Brutus,"

Is it excepted I should know no secrets
That appertain to you? Am I your self
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs

²⁰Cassius' last words (V.iii.45–46), like Brutus' (V.v.50–51), acknowledge Caesar's personal victory, in the former case as a matter of revenge, in the latter as a matter of love.

Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.

(ll. 280–287)

But because she is “his wife,” Portia is indeed Brutus’ “self / But, as it were, in sort or limitation.” And her metaphor of “suburbs” as well as her subsequent self-inflicted wound tells us why. “You are my true and honourable wife,” Brutus assures her,

As dear to me as are the ruddy drops

That visit my sad heart. (ll. 288–290)

Portia may be “dear” to him,²¹ but Brutus’ manly virtue rests on his valuing his heart more than his blood, his public life more than his marriage. As her own metaphor of “suburbs” ironically anticipates, Portia only “visits” Brutus’ heart; she does not “dwell” there. The love of fame and honor does.

Portia wishes her conjugal plea would succeed, that Brutus would tell her what “by the right and virtue of my place / I ought to know of” (ll. 269–270). Yet, as her having already taken steps to prove herself “stronger than [her] sex” (l. 296) indicates, she never really expected it would. Recognizing that Brutus could never consider a woman his equal, she thinks she must prove herself a man to win his confidence. She realizes that, to the extent she is a woman, Brutus will never give her his trust. She fails to realize, however, that, to the extent she proves herself a man, he can no more unfold himself to her than to any other man (cf. I.ii.38–40). Since honor requires him to hide his weakness from everyone he respects and whose respect he seeks, her manly proof can succeed no better than her conjugal plea. Although Brutus at last promises to reveal his secrets, he in fact leaves home just moments later and does not return before Caesar’s assassination.²² Portia’s self-inflicted wound succeeds only in shaming him to bear his troubles with greater manly patience. It inspires his prayer to be worthy of such a “noble wife” (ll. 302–303).²³

²¹Note that Brutus never actually says he loves Portia, though he speaks often of love.

²²Brutus cannot have returned home after II.i. When he leaves with Ligarius, he says he will reveal his plans “to thee, as we are going / To whom it must be done” (II.i.330–331); and soon afterwards they arrive together at Caesar’s house to escort him to the Capitol (II.ii.108ff.). Yet there is no inconsistency in Portia’s knowing in II.iv what she asks to be told in II.i. She knows as much when she asks Brutus’ secret as she does later when she almost blurts it out. Whether or not she has overheard the conspirators (who leave almost immediately before she enters), it is clear from what she says and does in the earlier scene that she knows that what troubles Brutus is political and involves him in dangerous clandestine nighttime meetings. It would not require much for her to imagine the rest. Shakespeare’s point, I think, is not that Portia wants to know Brutus’ secret; rather, she wants him to “Tell me your counsels” (II.i.298) on the grounds that she is worthy of his trust.

²³For a contrary view of Portia and Brutus, see Mungo MacCallum, *Shakespeare’s Roman Plays and Their Background* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1967) 235f., 272f., and Allan Bloom, *Shakespeare’s Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1964) 101–103. See also Jay L. Halio, “Harmartia, Brutus, and the Failure of Personal Confrontation,” *The Personalist*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Winter 1967) 51–52.

Portia does not really understand the virtue she tries to emulate. She has too exalted a view of manliness to see its limitations. She recognizes that manliness involves the sort of strength that makes one superior to bodily pains and pleasures, but not that at the same time and for the same reason it also tends to make one superior to personal affection and sorrow. She is drawn to Brutus because of his virtue and imagines he would be drawn to her because of the same. Believing manliness the highest virtue, she also believes it supports or gives rise to every excellent human quality as well. She does not, or perhaps cannot, see that the virtue she most admires resists the sharing she desires as it strives for noble distinction, that it distances men from one another as it distances them from their own bodies. In both a literal and a figurative sense, the distance between Portia and Brutus leads to her death. Her suicide, which closely parallels her sudden loss of constancy when Brutus leaves home after her manly proof, is the piteous culmination of the madness caused by her extreme “impatience” for his return from the war and her desperate “grief” over the growing power of his Caesarian foes (IV.iii.151–155). Her touching death shows just how much her happiness and even her life depend on the closeness and well-being of the man she loves. Portia is the only character in *Caesar* to die solely for the love of another. Despite her real shame at the weakness of a woman’s heart, hers is the only suicide not meant to prove manly strength.

No suicide is less like Portia’s than Brutus’. Everyone understands his, quite properly, to have been a manly, death-defying act.²⁴ By killing himself in high Roman fashion, Brutus deprives his enemies of the honor of killing or capturing him. In another sense as well, however, “no man else hath honor by his death” (V.v.57). Brutus, like Caesar, dies tasting his unshared glory. The very last time he mentions Cassius is when he comes upon his and Titinius’ corpses:

Are yet two Romans living such as these?
The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!
It is impossible that ever Rome
Should breed thy fellow. Friends, I owe moe tears
To this dead man than you shall see me pay.
I shall find time, Cassius, I shall find time.

(V.iii.98–103)

Acknowledging the republican cause has been lost, Brutus praises Cassius in a way befitting what the republic had always stood for. He praises him and Titinius in the same breath. He praises them, in other words, as equals, as fellow citizens, as sons of Rome (cf. V.iii.63). For himself, however, Brutus

²⁴V.v.52ff.; cf. V.i.98–113, V.iv. *passim*, V.v.23–25. By contrast, only Titinius calls the dead Cassius “brave” (V.iii.80); despite everything, his death is seen by others as womanish (see V.iii.58ff.). It is perhaps not surprising that no one mentions Cassius in the last two scenes of the play.

seeks preeminent distinction, not republican equality. Just as he never again mentions Portia (even in soliloquy) after stoically bidding her farewell at Sardis (IV.iii.189–191), so he forgets Cassius entirely when, about to kill himself, he envisions the glory he shall win for his life:

Countrymen,
 My heart doth joy that yet in all my life
 I found no man but he was true to me.
 I shall have glory by this losing day
 More than Octavius and Mark Antony
 By this vile conquest shall attain unto.
 So fare you well at once; for Brutus' tongue
 Hath almost ended his life's history.
 Night hangs upon mine eyes; my bones would rest,
 That have but labour'd to attain this hour.

(V.v.33–42)

Brutus' thoughts center on himself. He imagines his fame and glory as his alone, neither blurred nor obscured by any fellow Roman. More importantly and surprisingly, however, he sees his personal victory undiminished and perhaps even enhanced by his country's collapse. His "life's history" somehow stands above or apart from Rome. Brutus had of course claimed to be guided only by his country's good. "I know no personal cause to spurn at him," he had said of Caesar, "but for the general" (II.i.11–12). Indeed, Caesar's slaying, he had argued, was a personal sacrifice: "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more" (III.ii.22–23). Moreover, as the sacrifice of a dear friend was proof of his fully public-spirited virtue, so too was his declared willingness to kill himself if necessary for the good of Rome: "as I slew my best lover for the good of Rome," he had pledged at Caesar's funeral, "I have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please my country to need my death" (III.ii.46–48).²⁵ Yet, when Brutus does finally turn his sword upon himself, Rome's welfare is absent from his thoughts. He speaks proudly of his personal "joy" and "glory," but while in effect eulogizing himself, he says not a word in praise of the republic or to lament its passing.²⁶ Indeed, his only allusion to Rome is that he shall have more glory than her conquerors.²⁷ His personal triumph eclipses the "vile conquest" of Rome herself.

Brutus sees his end as epitomizing and completing his virtuous life. He regards his death as far more than a last-ditch effort to salvage some honor from defeat, even while he understands suicide as the only honorable choice left to

²⁵See also I.ii.81–88.

²⁶Compare Brutus' silence here with what he says in the corresponding speech in Plutarch (*Brutus*, 52.2–3): "It rejoiceth my heart," he begins, "that not one of my friends hath failed me at my need, and I do not complain of my fortune, but only for my country's sake." " *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. W. W. Skeat (London: Macmillan and Company, 1875) 151.

²⁷The last time Brutus mentions Rome is also the last time he mentions Cassius.

him (V.v.23–25; see also V.i.98–113). His end is his crowning conquest in manly love. Just as Lucilius bravely risks his own disgrace and death for the sake of defending Brutus' manly honor (V.iv.12–25; see also V.v.58–59), so, likewise, the refusal of Brutus' "poor remains of friends" to kill him when he asks them to fill his heart with joy because he understands their reluctance to spring from love (V.v.1–42).²⁸ Brutus believes the personal loyalty and sacrifices of his loving admirers and friends serve to show how, to the last, he is held in esteem by Rome. In more than the most obvious way, his death is Caesar's fitting revenge. For in Brutus' own eyes the ultimate measure of his fame and glory is not his public-spirited devotion to his country but his countrymen's personal devotion to him.²⁹ In the end, the virtue of the "Soul of Rome" (II.i.321) shows itself as manliness, not patriotism. The Roman love of distinction, spurring him to master other men's hearts, separates Brutus finally not only from his friends and family, but even, or perhaps especially, from Rome herself.

Brutus does of course win singular praise and glory. Antony, who calls him "the noblest Roman of them all," says,

His life was gentle, and all the elements
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"
(V.v.69,73–75)

In spite of Antony's generous praise, or rather precisely because of the ambiguity of "a man," the untempered affirmation of manliness seems ultimately to issue in the repudiation of one's "mix'd" nature. Even in "gentle Brutus," the Roman view of excellence encourages the desire to have all of the manly and none of the womanly qualities. Stressing hardness, distance, and assertiveness, it teaches men a willingness to risk simple cruelty and callousness in order to avoid all signs of softness, dependence, and weakness. Brutus, we saw, describes "hearts / Of brothers' temper" as sharing "all kind love, good thoughts, and reverence." But his own actions, particularly in the quarrel with his "brother" Cassius, remind us that while Rome was founded by a pair of brothers, even her own traditional accounts depict her sacred origins as lying not in fraternity but fratricide.³⁰ Moreover, just as Shakespeare frequently reminds us of

²⁸MacCallum, 271.

²⁹This spirit of personalism allows Octavius to take into service those whom he says "serv'd Brutus" (V.v.60)—he does not say, "serv'd Rome under Brutus"—and who are recommended to him on the basis of their personal devotion. Note that even Massala speaks of Brutus as "my master" (V.v.52, 64–67). For a discussion of the spirit of personalism in *Caesar*, see Jan H. Blits, "Caesarism and the End of Republican Rome," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Feb. 1981) 40–55.

³⁰It is striking and revealing that all eight of Brutus' and Cassius' references to each other as "brother" occur in the scene at Sardis and in the context of a contest of wills. The first occurs literally in the opening words of their quarrel; the second when Brutus, answering Cassius' angry charge, demands to know how he should wrong "a brother" if he does not wrong even his enemies

the literal meaning of Brutus' name,³¹ so he also reminds us that those same Roman accounts say Romulus was nurtured by a she-wolf.³² Shakespeare, I think, truly admires Roman virtue. In *Caesar* he shows that such excellence does indeed involve more than human strength. But Shakespeare's appreciation of manly virtue is by no means unqualified. His portrayal of Rome, like Rome's own traditional accounts of her foundations, suggests that the Romans ultimately debase the human in order to elevate the man.

(IV.ii.37–39). The third reference occurs when Cassius, "awearied of the world," despairingly shames himself by acknowledging he is "Hated by one he loves; brav'd by his brother" (IV.iii.95); and the fourth not long after the quarrel itself when Cassius, commanding "Hear me, good brother" (l. 211), tries (but fails) to counter Brutus' willful overruling of his more prudent battle plans and then is forced for the first time to defer explicitly to his will (ll. 223–224). The next two references seem, by contrast, to stress reconciliation and even amity. Just a moment or so later, Cassius, taking leave, begs his "dear brother" not to let "such division" ever come "'tween our souls" again; and Brutus, assuring him that everything is well, bids "Good night, good brother" (ll. 232–236). Despite one's first impression, however, Brutus' use of "good brother" does not reflect a restored equality or mutual respect between him and Cassius. Coming in the general wake of their quarrel and less than a dozen lines after Cassius explicitly submits to his will, his use of the phrase springs from the generosity of a conqueror, not the manly esteem of an equal. Brutus can afford to show Cassius greater friendliness and even praise him more highly than ever before (l. 231) precisely because Cassius, having been forced to acknowledge the inequality in their friendship, can no longer threaten his domination. Indeed, Brutus' valediction "Good night, good brother" comes in direct response to Cassius' valediction "Good night, my lord" (l. 236). At no other time does Cassius ever call anyone his "lord." In accordance with all this, the last two references to "brother" both involve Brutus' issuing Cassius military orders (ll. 247, 303). The only other time either man is spoken of as the other's "brother" (II.i.70) directly precedes the meeting of conspirators when Brutus, forcing Cassius to bow to his moral domination, supplants him as the conspiracy's leader.

³¹Most esp. at III.i.77.

³²I.ii.1–11; for the connection between the Lupercal race and the story of Romulus, see Plutarch, *Romulus* 21.3–8, and Ovid, *Fasti* II.381ff.