

«SPEAK NO MORE OF HER»: SILENCING THE FEMININE VOICE IN SHAKESPEARE'S «JULIUS CAESAR»¹

ABSTRACT

Although the female characters in *Julius Caesar* are given little stage time and are ill-treated by their husbands, this article shows that it is not a misogynous play, but a play which effectively depicts a misogynous world.

On the one hand, it validates the standpoint of the characters marked as feminine and therefore irrational. On the other hand, the silencing of the feminine poetic and prophetic voice is one of the mainsprings of the tragedy since it is the main characters' inability to heed this voice which brings about their downfall.

Benché nel *Giulio Cesare* i personaggi femminili abbiano poco spazio e siano maltrattati dai loro mariti, questo articolo dimostra che non si tratta di un'opera misogina, bensì di una efficace rappresentazione di un mondo misogino. Per un verso, esso corrobora l'opinione dei personaggi contrassegnati come femminili e pertanto irrazionali; dall'altro, il silenziamento della voce poetica e profetica femminile è uno dei principali motivi della tragedia, dal momento che è l'incapacità dei personaggi principali a dare ascolto a questa voce che determina la loro rovina.

Unlike Shakespeare's other Roman works, *Julius Caesar* is conspicuous by the limited space it devotes to female characters. Not only do Calpurnia and Portia have small parts, but also they are treated disparagingly by their husbands. Moreover, several minor male characters share the women's fate in that they, too, are dismissed, brutalised or silenced one way or another. This is the case for the Soothsayer, Artemidorus, Cinna and the Cynic poet. My purpose in this paper is to address three related questions. Does the systematic exclusion of women in *Julius Caesar* make the play misogynous? What do the marginalised figures have in common? Why are they silenced? Since commentators tend on the whole to silence the feminine voice² just as the play does, I will also aim at redressing this critical bias.

Although Ancient Rome was a world controlled by men, women feature prominently in Shakespeare's Roman works: Tamora and Lavinia are important figures in *Titus Andronicus*, Cleopatra is the main female character in *Antony and Cleopatra*,

¹ I am much indebted to Victoria Bladen for inviting me to lecture on Shakespeare's Roman plays, and to Patricia Buccellato, Jean-Jacques Chardin and Alessandra Marzola for their support and judicious comments.

² This is true of some of the most perceptive of critics. Cf. Paolucci 1960, David Bevington (Shakespeare 1988), Miles 1989, Maquerlot 1995, Ronan 2005, Baines 2005, Chernaik 2011.

and Volumnia plays a major part in *Coriolanus*; as for *The Rape of Lucrece*, it is the eponymous heroine's voice which predominates in the poem.

In *Julius Caesar*, on the other hand, Calpurnia and Portia are minor roles, and each of them appears in only two scenes of the play.³ Granted, the action of the tragedy takes place between men, chiefly Caesar, Cassius, Brutus and Antony. Still, Shakespeare might have mentioned or brought onto the stage several women connected with his male characters, such as Aurelia (Caesar's mother), Cornelia (Caesar's first wife), their daughter Julia (Pompey's third wife), Cornelia (Pompey's fourth wife), their daughter Pompeia (Caesar's second wife), Servilia (Caesar's former lover and Brutus' mother), Junia (Brutus' sister and Cassius' wife), Cleopatra (Caesar's ex- and Antony's future lover), Octavia (Caesar's niece, Octavian's sister and Antony's future wife), etc. Indeed, all of these women are referred to by the classical authors Shakespeare had access to, such as Suetonius or Plutarch, whose *Lives of Noble Grecians and Romanes* (trans. North, 1579) was his main source for the play.

Plutarch makes much of Caesar's use of marriage as a way of cementing political alliances and concludes unequivocally:

Cato then cried out with open mouth, and called the gods to witnes, that it was a shamefull matter [...] that they should in that sorte make havoke of the Empire of Rome, by such horrible bawdie matches, distributing among them selves through those wicked marriages, the governments of the provinces, and of great armies.⁴

Shakespeare might have taken this hint to emphasise the bonding of men through women and to show how the latter are instrumentalised by powerful Romans in general, and by Caesar in particular, one aspect of the dictator's portrait being his immoderate ambition.

He might also have followed in his French forerunners' footsteps by bringing Calpurnia or Portia into prominence. Calpurnia is one of the principal characters in Marc-Antoine de Muret's Latin tragedy *Julius Caesar*⁵ (1544 or 1545) as well as in his imitator Jacques Grévin's *César*.⁶ Portia is the eponymous heroine of Robert Garnier's tragedy *Porcie*, which Kyd planned to translate.⁷ Besides Portia, Garnier's main

³ Calpurnia speaks twenty-seven lines, and Portia, eighty-two (4% of the play's total number of lines).

⁴ BULLOUGH 1964, p. 65.

⁵ Calpurnia and her Nurse speak about 20% of the play's 570 lines. The third act of the play is devoted to a dialogue between the two women, in which the former describes her ominous dream and expresses her fear that a disaster might befall her husband. The first part of Act 4 is taken up by a tense exchange between Calpurnia and Caesar, who reluctantly agrees to postpone the Senate meeting before Decimus Brutus blames him for giving credence to a woman's dreams. In Act 5, Calpurnia laments her husband's death and hopes that she will not survive him. She then hears Caesar's comforting voice and rejoices at the news that he is in heaven, from where he continues to protect his kin.

⁶ The structure of Grévin's tragedy is close to that of its model. Calpurnia's dialogues with her Nurse and with her husband appear in Act 3. In Act 4, she learns of Caesar's murder and hopes that her suffering will end soon. Calpurnia and the Nurse speak just under 18% of the play's 1103 lines.

⁷ Kyd, who translated Garnier's *Cornélie* (1574), mentioned the translation of *Porcie* «as a future

character, other female figures play a major role in his work: the Fury Megaera is the main speaker in Act 1, there is a Chorus of Roman women, and the Nurse is Portia's favoured interlocutor throughout the play, which ends with the Nurse's suicide. It is as if women were more sensitive to the disastrous consequences of Brutus' defeat both on a personal and cosmic level.

Apart from the French Senecan tragedies, Orlando Pescetti's *Il Cesare* might have induced Shakespeare to give Calpurnia and Portia more substantial parts and to introduce other feminine figures, such as Venus, the Waiting Woman, the Chorus of Roman Matrons or the Chorus of Court Ladies. The same is true of the anonymous *Tragedy of Caesar and Pompey, or Caesar's Revenge*, which has been suggested as a possible source for *Julius Caesar*.⁸ Whether or not this is the case, Shakespeare was familiar with this play,⁹ which features Calpurnia, but also Cornelia and Cleopatra, all of whom appear in several scenes where they speak at length.

Not only is Shakespeare's cast of female characters limited to Calpurnia and Portia, who both get small parts, but also these two women are dismissed, spoken to offhandedly or even ill-treated by their respective husbands.¹⁰ Here is Caesar and Calpurnia's first exchange:

CAESAR: Calpurnia.
 CASCA: Peace ho, Caesar speaks.
 CAESAR: Calpurnia.
 CALPURNIA: Here, my lord.
 CAESAR: Stand you directly in Antonio's way
 When he doth run his course. Antonio.
 ANTONY: Caesar, my lord.
 CAESAR: Forget not, in your speed, Antonio,
 To touch Calpurnia, for our elders say,
 The barren, touchèd in this holy chase,
 Shake off their sterile curse. (1. 2. 1-9)

The first word uttered by Caesar in the play is the name of his wife, Calpurnia. He repeats it the better to assert his domination over her, and orders her to stand in Antony's way during the race he is about to run as part of the feast of Lupercal so that she be struck by his thong and cured of her barrenness. Since the aim of a Roman matron

project» but possibly never did the work (WIGGINS - RICHARDSON 2013, p. 243). Shakespeare probably knew Kyd's *Cornelia* as well as the Roman plays written or translated by «the court circle revolving round Sidney's sister, Mary Countess of Pembroke, [whose] attempts to naturalize French Senecanism in closet drama» (BULLOUGH 1964, pp. 30, 25) he must have been familiar with.

⁸ Cf. MUIR 1957, p. 192.

⁹ Cf. PEARSON 1981, pp. 101-104.

¹⁰ As NEELY 1993, pp. 102-103 observes, «The rupture of marriages and of men's intimacy with women begins in *Julius Caesar* with Caesar's refusal to heed Calpurnia's dream and Brutus' failure to confide in Portia [...]».

was to raise children, Calpurnia is shown as a *matrona* unworthy of the name.¹¹ The possibility that he might be unfit or too old to impregnate her does not occur to Caesar: the blame is laid on her. In other words, the first time the couple appear onstage, he humiliates her publicly. Shakespeare departs from his main source for the play by evoking Calpurnia's barrenness – Plutarch never mentions it.¹² No matter how submissive she may be (the only words she utters in this scene are «Here, my lord», l. 2), she is presented as an inadequate wife from the Roman standpoint. Of course, parallels might be drawn between Elizabethan anxieties over the absence of a successor to the Virgin Queen's throne and Caesar's annoyance at not having an official heir. The fact remains that in the play, his wife is unfairly made to bear the brunt of his resentment.

Shakespeare's Calpurnia does not fulfill her duties as a woman in Roman society. Nor does Portia, who expresses herself in a bold, «unfeminine» fashion when she asks Brutus to confide in her. On the other hand, being a woman, there is a risk that she might blurt out his secret because, as the saying goes¹³ and as she herself later acknowledges, it is difficult for women to keep something confidential: «How hard it is for women to keep counsel!» (2. 4. 9).¹⁴ In Ancient Rome just as in Elizabethan England, the stereotypical woman was reputedly too talkative and unguarded to be entrusted with serious matters. Cato the Elder, for instance, wrote that he had only three regrets, one of which was that he had once told his wife a secret.¹⁵ No wonder, under such circumstances, that Brutus should simply send his wife away: «Good Portia, go to bed» (2. 1. 260).

In a parallel scene, Caesar rejects Calpurnia's understanding of her nightmare as a foreboding that he will be murdered in favour of Decius' flattering interpretation of the same dream («How foolish do your fears seem now, Calpurnia!», 2. 2. 105). This time, he treats her harshly because she is too fearful, and therefore womanish. This need not have been the case: in the equivalent episode in *Caesar's Revenge*, Caesar treats his wife much more gently: «Weepe not faire love, let not thy wofull teares / Bode mee [...]» (l. 1612-1613).

Consequently, Calpurnia and Portia are either not womanly enough or too womanish for their husbands' tastes, albeit for different reasons: both women are caught in a double bind – whichever course they take, they will fail to come up to masculine standards.

After their quarrel, Brutus tells Cassius that Portia is no more. Informed of the cir-

¹¹ «Expressions such as *matrona* and *materfamilias*, denoting an honourable married woman, were derived from *mater* on the assumption that marriage and motherhood went together [...] The goal of woman's life [...] was a successful marriage and the raising of children» (DIXON 1988, p. 71). «Once married, a woman was expected to bear children and to educate them by instilling Roman values» (KLEINER - MATHESON 2000, pp. 6-7).

¹² Plutarch explains what the ritual consists in (BULLOUGH 1964, p. 81), but it is Shakespeare who introduces Calpurnia into this episode.

¹³ «Women can keep no counsel» (SHAKESPEARE 1999, p. 93).

¹⁴ This phrase is the Elizabethan equivalent to Portia's admission in Plutarch «[...] that a womans wit commonly is too weake to keepe a secret safely [...]» (BULLOUGH 1964, p. 98).

¹⁵ Achard 1995, p. 39.

cumstances of her death, Cassius exclaims, «O ye immortal gods!», but Brutus enjoins him to «Speak no more of her» (4. 3. 157-158). Later in the same scene, after Brutus has pretended that he has had no news from Portia, Messala tells him that she has died.¹⁶ Brutus makes no inquiries as to the «strange manner» (l. 189) of her death but dispatches the matter in three lines: «Why, farewell, Portia. We must die, Messala. / With meditating that she must die once, / I have the patience to endure it now» (l. 190-192). Significantly, neither of these episodes is related by Plutarch. Such suppression of feelings for his wife may well be evidence of Brutus' Stoicism, the consequence of his Stoic attitude is nonetheless the silencing of the feminine voice. By contrast, Muret's Portia, far from being silenced, is regarded by her husband as an inspiration as is made clear in his soliloquy in Act 2, where he recognises that she is in a position to teach him how a brave Roman¹⁷ should act.

We can therefore conclude that, unlike the male characters in plays by the French Senecans, in Pescetti's *Il Cesare*, or in *Caesar's Revenge*, Shakespeare's Roman men cast their wives aside and treat them with callous disdain.

This is hardly surprising in a play where all the references to women are negative, so much so that femininity can be characterised as that against which a Roman man defines himself.¹⁸ Indeed, in order to belittle a Roman man, it suffices to compare him to «a sick girl» as does Cassius with Caesar (1. 2. 128).

In keeping with the patriarchal double standard, Calpurnia's docility is a virtue in a woman, but a serious failing in a man. Thus submission to and rebellion against tyranny are presented by Cassius in gendered terms: «But, woe the while, our fathers' minds are dead / And we are governed with our mothers' spirits; / Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish» (1. 3. 82-84). Similarly, fear and cowardice are feminine flaws. When Casca relates the frightening events of the night, he describes «[...] a hundred ghastly women, / Transformed with their fear; who swore they saw / Men all in fire walk up and down the streets.» (1. 3. 23-25). Interestingly, there are no women in Plutarch's account of the same scene: «[...] Strabo the Philosopher wryteth, that *divers men* were seene going up and downe in fire [...]».¹⁹ Fearful or cowardly behaviour is intolerable in a man. Thus Brutus resorts to startling metaphors to comment on the conspirators' noble undertaking:

¹⁶ Many critics reject one of the two accounts of Portia's death, assuming that the scene was revised. On the other hand, commentators such as Bevington (SHAKESPEARE 1988, p. 81), MILES 1996, pp. 144-145 and Daniell (SHAKESPEARE 1998, pp. 139-143) believe that the two speeches should stand. Although I am an agnostic on the subject, I would refute the argument that the two passages cannot exist simultaneously because this would imply that Brutus was a liar: if he lies to Portia («I am not well in health, and that is all», 2. 1. 257), why should he not lie to Messala?

¹⁷ According to Cicero, courage (*fortitudo*) is the main component of *virtus* or manly virtue (from *vir*, man).

¹⁸ KAHN 1997, p. 77 points out that the Roman «ideology is itself constituted by its opposition to the feminine».

¹⁹ BULLOUGH 1964, p. 83, italics mine.

But if these [motives],
 (As I am sure they do), bear fire enough
 To kindle cowards and to steel with valour
 The melting spirits of women, then, countrymen,
 What need we any spur but our own cause,
 To prick us to redress? (2. 1. 119-124)²⁰

When Roman men are shown to lack self-control, they blame their mothers.²¹ In the quarrel scene, Cassius complains about Brutus' harshness: «Have not you love enough to bear with me / When that rash humour which my mother gave me / Makes me forgetful?» (4. 3. 119-121). He could have said «that rash humour *with which I was born*», but chooses to involve his mother as though she were responsible for everything that is unmanly or unRoman in her son. As Sanders notes, «The fact that Cassius inherited his quick temper from his mother is Shakespeare's invention; Plutarch merely notes that he was "marvellous choleric and cruel"».²²

To suggest that the plebeians are taken in by Caesar's play-acting when he ostensibly refuses the crown, Casca chooses women to illustrate their gullibility: «Three or four wenches where I stood cried "Alas, good soul!" and forgave him with all their hearts. But there's no heed to be taken of them: if Caesar had stabbed their mothers they would have done no less» (1. 2. 262-265). The suggestion is that the mob is easily manipulated because it is emotional and therefore womanish.

In patriarchal cultures, women tend to be metonymically reduced to their genitalia. Just as Caesar's injunction to Calpurnia during the Lupercal ceremony reduces her to a defective womb, the cobbler's ribald pun that he meddles with no «women's affairs» (1. 1. 22) suggests a debasing equation between femininity and sexuality. Strikingly, this equation carries a positive connotation when applied to the ideological construction of Rome in the play. Indeed, Roman men feminise and sexualise their city in ways that enhance its prestige. When Cassius exclaims,

When could they say, till now, that talked of Rome,
 That her wide walks encompassed but one man?
 Now is it Rome indeed and room enough
 When there is in it but one only man. (1. 2. 154-157),

his depiction of the Republic is evocative of a generous woman whose charms would be enjoyed by many men had she not fallen into the clutches of her tyrannical partner. The homophonic pun *Rome / room* underscores the notion of the city as a feminine,

²⁰ The phallic «spur» and «prick» confirm that for Roman warriors, victory is equated with sexual penetration and defeat with defective manhood (THUILLIER 2011, p. 105).

²¹ Self-control is the main yardstick for Roman *virtus*: it is what distinguishes Roman men from women and Barbarians (ivi, p. 108).

²² SHAKESPEARE 2005, p. 180.

enclosed space which could accommodate more lovers than one. When Ligarius joins the conspiracy, he addresses Brutus as the «Soul of Rome, / Brave son, derived from honorable loins» (2. 1. 321-322), emphasising this time the maternal side of Rome. Similarly, taking the hint from Plutarch,²³ Shakespeare later has Brutus represent the city as Roma Materna when he says to dead Cassius, «It is impossible that ever Rome / Should breed thy fellow» (5. 3. 100-101).

My reading of a feminised and sexualised Rome is consonant with Girard's comment that since Brutus is a prey to mimetic desire, «He is like a lover who sees the woman he loves in the arms of another man. The woman here is Rome herself. And Brutus loves that woman because Caesar loves her».²⁴ Brutus comes close to realising what is at stake when he says, «[...] not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more [...]» and «[...] I slew my best lover for the good of Rome [...]» (3. 2. 19-20, 38), which, in keeping with Girard's theory, should also be read «for the possession of Rome».

From the male viewpoint, Rome combines all aspects of benevolent womanhood. She is the idealised feminine figure men fight over, the prestigious, all-powerful phallic mother. Unlike Portia, unlike Calpurnia, she emerges as the perfect lover-cum-bountiful mother whom no woman, whether real or fictional, can ever hope to equal. This accounts in part for the depreciation of female characters in the play.

Julius Caesar is sometimes interpreted as a misogynous text. In an article entitled *Shakespeare, «Julius Caesar», and Misogyny*, Riviuccio claims that in this play, the dramatist consciously discriminates against women by staging two-dimensional female characters and by limiting their stage presence. The author further deplors «Shakespeare's lack of interest in establishing any sort of female dominance [...]».²⁵ In 2001, some of Shakespeare's plays were banned from the curriculum by an education department of South Africa. Among them was *Julius Caesar*, which «was deemed sexist because it “elevates men”».²⁶ One problem with such interpretations is that they are ahistorical: steeped as Shakespeare was in Roman history, he could hardly have considered that establishing women's predominance over men was an option in a play about the final days of the Republic.

However, judging from my own analysis so far, one might indeed wonder whether the objective asymmetry in the play's treatment of men and women makes it a misogynous work: unlike its sources and analogues, it contains only two female characters who are given little stage time and are scorned or paid scant attention to by their own husbands; its presentation of women and womanhood is entirely negative. Furthermore, as I have argued, Shakespeare does his best to darken the picture whenever it

²³ «[...] after he had lamented the death of Cassius, calling him the last of all the Romanes, being unpossible that Rome should ever breede againe so noble and valiant a man as he: he caused his bodie to be buried [...]» (BULLOUGH 1964, p. 124).

²⁴ GIRARD 2002, p. 109.

²⁵ RIVIECCIO 2010.

²⁶ DORAN 2012.

is conceivable to do so. Finally, the depreciation and marginalisation of women and womanhood is offset in the play by the positive image and centrality of Rome, the peerless phallic mother imago.

Far from corresponding to an antifeminist stance on the playwright's part, the point of this dramatic framework, I suggest, is to *show* that the Roman world is founded upon the exclusion of the feminine, that the silencing of women largely stems from the male fear of the female Other,²⁷ and that the repression of the feminine is all the stronger as this Otherness can never be securely established.

Indeed, the Roman patricians fear what escapes their control: Caesar cannot command Calpurnia's fecundity, hence his powerlessness, and his humiliating attitude towards her; Brutus can prevent Portia neither from being a woman nor from behaving too daringly for a woman, hence his dismissive stance. Besides, the patricians' fear of the feminine is strengthened by their half-awareness that the gender distinction upon which their society is based does not hold water: ironically, some of the negative references to femininity I quoted before are used to characterise *men* as inadequate – Caesar is like «a sick girl», his enemies are «womanish», Cassius lays the blame for his own lack of composure on his mother.

The play repeatedly suggests that the boundaries between masculinity and femininity are not clear-cut. No matter how much they wish to «elevate» themselves by constructing an ideal image of manhood, the main characters in the drama prove to be frail, vulnerable, subject to passions and easily prevailed upon. Critics who believe *Julius Caesar* to be misogynous therefore wrongly take the discourse of the play for that of its principal figures. Caesar, the purported epitome of Roman constancy, is anything but constant: after stating categorically that «Caesar shall go forth» (2. 2. 48) and attend the Senate meeting, he changes his mind (l. 56) only to be persuaded that he should join the Senators after all (l. 107). Tragic irony reaches its height in the murder scene, for no sooner has Caesar indulged in a pompous self-eulogy («But I am constant as the northern star, / Of whose true-fixed and resting quality / There is no fellow in the firmament», 3. 1. 60-62) than he is reduced to a «bleeding piece of earth» (l. 254) which «signifies as a shameful token of uncontrol, as a failure of physical self-mastery particularly associated with woman».²⁸ As for the Stoic Brutus, the portrait which Portia draws of him is that of a melancholy man entirely governed by his humours (2. 1. 237-256), just like Cassius (4. 3), no matter how hard they try to deny them. This blurring of gender boundaries, of course, must be repressed at all costs, in order for masculine identity not to collapse.²⁹

²⁷ This fear can only be particularly acute in a culture based on the domination of women, of strangers, of enemies. «Dominer la femme, dominer l'autre, l'étranger, l'ennemi, est en quelque sorte inhérent à l'homme romain» (THULLIER 2011, p. 104). More generally, the fear of sexual undifferentiation is characteristic of male identity crisis (PERROT 1995, p. 45).

²⁸ PASTER 2002, p. 149.

²⁹ Cultural historians such as VIGARELLO 2011, p. 13 have shown that the shift, in the sixteenth century, from the knight to the courtier amounted for some contemporaries to an unmaning. In 1592, Nashe complained about «these degenerate effeminate dayes of ours» (BANKS - HOLDERNESS 2000). In *Much*

Femininity is so abhorrent to the Roman patricians that they extend their rejection of it to male characters who share traits identifiable as feminine. Thus all the characters who have a connection with the female realm of dreams, omens and portents, fears and superstitions, poetry and madness, are spurned by the male rulers, who pride themselves on their rationality.³⁰

Caesar's public shaming of his wife is immediately followed by his dismissal of the Soothsayer who warns him to «Beware the Ides of March» (1. 2. 18). As Corso points out, «Despite his efforts to listen ("Caesar is turned to hear"), observe ("let me see his face"), and hear again ("speak once again"), Caesar fails to understand»³¹ and concludes: «He is a dreamer, let us leave him. Pass» (1. 24). He will later scorn his wife³² for exactly the same reason: she lives in a world of dreams and her fears are groundless (2. 2). Shakespeare departs from Plutarch by establishing a connection between the Soothsayer and Portia (2. 4), even though her motives for dreading what may befall on the Ides of March are different from Calpurnia's.

When Artemidorus insists that Caesar should read his petition immediately because it is «a suit / that touches Caesar nearer» (3. 1. 6-7),³³ the latter's reaction is: «What, is the fellow mad?» (1. 10). Similarly, Brutus will later invoke Portia's madness to account for her suicide: «she fell distract» (4. 3. 155). The Artemidorus in the play is Artemidorus of Cnidos, «a doctor of rhetoric», but his namesake Artemidorus of Daldis (2nd century AD) was famous in the Renaissance for having written an influential treatise on dreams.³⁴ I cannot, of course, adduce evidence of this conflation, but it seems likely that the literate spectators of the Globe would have associated the name Artemidorus with dreams. Furthermore, as Bladen notes, «Although Artemidorus is a separate character to the Soothsayer, in performance the same actor usually plays both these roles».³⁵ A nexus is thus created between portentous dreams, prophetic speech and madness, and all the characters concerned are regarded as irrational. Whatever their gender, they are marked as feminine³⁶ and dismissed accordingly.

Ado About Nothing, Beatrice reports a similar decline: «[...] manhood is melted into curtsies» (4. 1. 305). Whether or not Shakespeare perceived this as a problem, his depiction of gender insecurity in Roman society was no doubt coloured by Elizabethan anxieties over male identity.

³⁰ This is merely an ideal representation of Roman manhood, which the patricians fail to live up to, as evidenced by Caesar's changing attitude to the supernatural: «For he is superstitious grown of late, / Quite from the main opinion he held once / Of fantasy, of dreams, and ceremonies» (2. 1. 195-197).

³¹ CORSO 2010, pp. 176-177.

³² Plutarch also connects the two characters: he recalls the Soothsayer's warning to Caesar just before his description of Calpurnia's dream (BULLOUGH 1964, p. 83).

³³ In Plutarch, he has no time to read it whereas in Shakespeare, he magnanimously defers the reading of the text for «What touches us ourself shall be last served» (1. 8). Although Metellus' plea is rejected as well, I do not include him in my list of marginalised characters because his petition is merely the pretext for the conspirators to act.

³⁴ CORSO 2010, p. 174.

³⁵ BLADEN 2011, p. 22.

³⁶ It is important to recall how Artemidorus and the Soothsayer present themselves: the former says «My heart laments that virtue cannot live / out of the teeth of emulation» (2. 3. 10-11), which is both a

It cannot be coincidental that the characters who are marginalised in the play should all be well-intentioned. If Calpurnia is so upset by her nightmare that she behaves like a nagging wife on one occasion and musters all her eloquence (2. 2), it is because she is fond of her husband and wants to protect him. The Soothsayer and Artemidorus both wish to shield Caesar from his enemies. Cinna left his house because he dreamt about his friend and was concerned about his welfare (3. 3. 1-4, 18-20). For all its clumsiness, the Cynic poet's intrusion in the quarrel scene between the generals is intended as an exhortation to «Love and be friends, as two such men should be» (4. 3. 131). Intriguingly, it is only after the poet has burst in on them that Brutus admits to Cassius that his wife is dead, as if this interruption were needed for him to release his pent-up emotions.³⁷ As regards Portia, her plea to Brutus, with its subtle intertwining of possessives which mimics the process by which two human beings are joined in matrimony,³⁸ leaves us in no doubt that her love for him is what guides all her actions:

And upon *my* knees,
I charm *you*, by *my* once-commended beauty,
By all *your* vows of love and that great vow
Which did incorporate and make *us* one,
That *you* unfold to *me*, *yourself*, *your* half,
Why *you* are heavy [...] (2. 1. 270-275) [emphasis added]

Consequently, all these characters aspire to peace, love and harmony and uphold life-enhancing values, the very values which Roman patriarchy constructs as feminine and disregards as such. Paradoxically, the conspirators use the word «love» and its cognates («loving», «lover», «beloved») again and again,³⁹ never more so than in Act 3, after the deed has been done. In fact, this «love» between «friends» and «brothers» is simply another word for mimetic rivalry, *i. e.* a deadly bond between men.⁴⁰ In

feminine view and the conclusion a mimetic theorist is bound to reach (cf. GIRARD 2002, pp. 124-125: «Shakespeare feels human sympathy for all his characters and great antipathy for the mimetic process that turns them all into equivalent *doubles*»); the latter describes himself as «a feeble man» who does not *know* if harm will befall Caesar but who *fears* it might be the case (2. 4. 36, 32).

³⁷ HUMPHREYS 2008, p. 20 notes «the transference of Portia's suicide from where Plutarch records it (in the very last paragraph of *Brutus*) to precede the quarrel (though Brutus conceals it). Plutarch makes it seem a sad postscript to Brutus' own death (though if read attentively he indicates that it occurred some unspecified time earlier). Shakespeare redeploys these events to moving effect. The disclosure of Portia's death, at this crucial moment, explains Brutus' unwonted agitation, and the whole quarrel takes on a new dimension».

³⁸ This description is suggestive of the Protestant companionate marriage of the late sixteenth century and owes nothing to its Roman counterpart. As Finley explains, «Marriage was a central institution but it had nothing sacramental about it. It was central because the whole structure of property rested on it [...] If the relationship turned out also to be pleasant and affectionate, so much the better» (FINLEY 1968, pp. 135-136).

³⁹ Wilson Knight rightly comments that «All the people are "lovers"» (KNIGHT 1965, p. 63) but makes no distinction between the kinds of love involved.

⁴⁰ GIRARD 2002, p. 109 calls the mimetic doubles «beloved enemies».

my view, Miola's contention that Calpurnia and Portia «[...] represent forces and ideals crucial to the city but tragically unrecognized and unappreciated [and that] Their anguish conveys Shakespeare's increasingly critical conception of Rome and Roman values»⁴¹ should therefore be extended to all the marginalised figures associated with the feminine.

Another significant connection is that between femininity and poetry. Calpurnia may be regarded as a poet within the play, as evidenced by her account of the supernatural events which occurred on the night before the Ides of March:

Caesar, I never stood on ceremonies,
 Yet now they *fright* me. There is one within,
 Besides the things that we have heard and seen,
 Recounts *most horrid sights* seen by the watch.
 A lioness hath whelpèd in the streets,
 And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead;
Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds,
 In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,
 Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;
 The noise of battle *hurtled* in the air,
 Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan, [*do neigh* F]
 And ghosts did *shriek and squeal* about the streets.
O Caesar, these things are *beyond all use*,
 And I *do fear* them. (2. 2. 13-25) [emphasis added]

The aim of Calpurnia's vivid evocation is to instil in her husband a sense of impending danger. The style of her strikingly alliterative and hyperbolic speech matches the violent actions it depicts, and is characteristic of hypotyposis: she resorts to emphatic terms; the passage abounds in concrete details; two verbs in the present tense («fight», «do neigh») are used in a greater past context⁴² and betray the speaker's inner turmoil; she apostrophises her interlocutor, the better to make him live the scene. Caesar's Stoic fatalism, however, indicates that his wife has failed to impress the horror of the events on her husband's mind:

What can be avoided
 Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?
 Yet Caesar shall go forth, for these predictions
 Are to the world in general as to Caesar. (II. 25-29)

⁴¹ MIOLA 1983, p. 97.

⁴² Daniell observes that «grammatically scrupulous editors emend “fight” to “fought”, and “do neigh” to “did neigh”». I agree with his objection that Calpurnia is «reporting effects which are confused between earth and heaven, then and now. The whole point is unusualness: niceness of grammar is inappropriate» (SHAKESPEARE 1998, p. 220).

When she forcefully objects that «When beggars die, there are no comets seen; / The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes», he retorts that only cowards fear death, «a necessary end» (ll. 29-36). He snuffs out her poetic frenzy with his cold Roman rationality.

The same thing occurs when her nightmare is related, but with a difference: *he* reports the dream and then dissociates himself from her ominous picture of «lusty Romans» bathing their hands in the blood pouring from his statue («And these does she apply for warnings and portents / And evils imminent [...]», 2. 2. 80-81). When Decius Brutus reverses Calpurnia's interpretation to present Caesar as the nurturing mother of the Roman people, he readily accepts this feminine image of himself because it is suggestive of power, recalling as it does the she-wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus, the former being the mythical founder of Rome («[...] from you great Rome shall suck / Reviving blood [...]», 2. 2. 87-88).⁴³ Hamer analyses this scene as follows: «How careful Shakespeare has been to keep any original voicing of the prophecy in images that suggested uncanny knowledge out of the mouth of Calpurnia herself. [...] It is Caesar who tells us of what Calpurnia knows. How could her dream acquire greater authority for us than that?».⁴⁴ While I agree with the first part of her statement, it seems to me that the narration of Calpurnia's dream by Caesar does not lend it «greater authority»: rather, it is a way of suggesting that female wisdom is always already appropriated by men, the better to be disposed of.⁴⁵

His scathing remark, «How *foolish* do your fears seem now, Calpurnia!» (2. 2. 105), is echoed in Brutus' dismissal of the poet who interrupts his quarrel with Cassius in 4. 3: «What should the wars do with these jiggling *fools*» (l. 137, italics mine). Here again, masculine reason will entertain only serious matters and reject superstitious beliefs and poetic ravings alike. This contemptuous treatment of a bad versifier refers back to the lynching by the mob of another poet, Cinna,⁴⁶ after the murder of Caesar. Both Brutus' comment and Cassius' «Ha, ha, how vildly doth this cynic rhyme» (4. 3. 133) are reminiscent of the 4th plebeian's «Tear him for his bad verses» (3. 3. 28).

It is no accident that the characters who are silenced should be associated with prophetic or poetic speech – Shakespeare even replaced Plutarch's Cynic philosopher⁴⁷ by a poet. It was commonplace in the Renaissance to regard poets as divinely inspired civilisers. This is how Puttenham describes Orpheus' powers: «[he] assembled the wilde beasts to come in heards to harken to his musicke, and by that means made them tame, implying thereby, how by his discreete and wholesome lessons uttered in harmonie and with melodious instruments, he brought the rude and savage people to a more civill and

⁴³ I believe that a stage design which recalls the mythical origins of Rome, such as a statue of the Capitoline wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, is of particular relevance to the play.

⁴⁴ HAMER 1998, p. 51.

⁴⁵ This particularly applies to inspired speech, traditionally feminine and dismissed as such, as is the case with Cassandra in *Troilus and Cressida*.

⁴⁶ The plebs mistake the poet Caius Helvius Cinna for the conspirator Lucius Cornelius Cinna.

⁴⁷ Cf. BULLOUGH 1964, p. 114.

orderly life [...]».⁴⁸ In *Julius Caesar*, poets are mocked, reviled, or torn apart. Since Orpheus was torn to pieces by Bacchantes,⁴⁹ Taylor is right to suggest that «In dismembering Cinna, Shakespeare must have remembered, and expected many playgoers to remember, the death of Orpheus». As Taylor further notes, in 1599 the government decreed that satires should be destroyed: «*Julius Caesar* was thus probably being written at a time when books were being burned [...]».⁵⁰ If Shakespeare used the Roman Republic to comment on his own times, as I believe he did, the failure of poets to tame «rude and savage people» and the repression of Orphic values point to a sceptical appraisal of the degree of civilisation attained by Ancient Rome and Elizabethan England.

Importantly, as Taylor observes, in the Orpheus myth «[...] a crowd of *women deliberately* murders a *male* poet [...]» whereas in the play, the sex of the crowd is changed: «The dispute over the name and body of the poet becomes a dispute between men».⁵¹ Shakespeare thus strips the myth of its misogyny, which is consistent with my insight that what the play registers and criticises is the systematic suppression of the feminine prophetic and poetic dimension.⁵²

Julius Caesar presents two antithetical views of civilisation: the «civilising» influence of the feminine realm is pitted against a masculine order which is in fact founded on nothing but domination and the subjugation of whatever is constructed as Other. I suggest that most of the characters marked as feminine are cast aside or silenced because they oppose violence, death and destruction. More precisely, they threaten to prevent the re-enactment of the founding murder of Rome. Girard explains that just as Tarquin's expulsion is «[...] the real foundation of the Republic», «Caesar's murder has become the *foundational violence* of the Roman Empire».⁵³ The three characters whose pleas Caesar rejects are those who wish him well and whose advice, had he chosen not to ignore it, would have prevented his murder: he fails to heed the Soothsayer's timely warning, brushes away Artemidorus' urgent petition and reneges on his promise to Calpurnia; even though Cinna appears onstage after the murder, there is little doubt that he would have attempted to stop it happening had he been in a position to do so. What the play therefore emphasises by uniting these figures in a pattern of feminine and poetic dissent is the rationale of Roman myth and history to suppress forces

⁴⁸ PUTTENHAM 1589, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Whether out of fidelity for his wife (Virgil), or because of his attraction to young boys (Ovid), Orpheus shuns all female company. In revenge for his misogyny, but also because he has neglected the cult of Dionysus, a group of incensed Bacchantes, or Maenads, tear him apart.

⁵⁰ TAYLOR 2002, pp. 189-190.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 191.

⁵² If Greene is correct in noting the play's «ambivalence towards language», I do not agree with her contention that this ambivalence «casts doubts on the value of poetry itself» (GREENE 1980, p. 73). It seems to me that it is the abuse of poets and poetry which casts doubts on the virtue of Ancient Rome and Elizabethan England. The connection between poetry, love and madness which is detectable in the play recalls the rationalist Theseus' famous speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is a defence of poetry in disguise (5. 1. 7-8, 14-17).

⁵³ GIRARD 2002, pp. 120-121.

which might thwart the endless reproduction of Rome's violent founding act.⁵⁴

At first sight, Portia seems to be an exception to the rule that the characters who are silenced are both feminine or feminised and oppose the repetition of the founding murder of Rome. Far from objecting to the assassination of Caesar, she sides with her husband and hopes that the plot will succeed: «O Brutus, / The heavens speed thee in thine enterprise!» (2. 4. 40-41). The historical Portia is known to have supported the conspiracy,⁵⁵ and in Pescetti's *Il Cesare*, Portia wishes her sex would let her prove «that a generous / And manly heart dwells in this female breast» and that she could take part in the bloodbath (ll. 332-333, 323-324). Interestingly, although he follows Plutarch in emphasising her unwomanly bravery, Shakespeare plays down her desire to be one of the conspirators. His Portia fears for her husband's safety – she sends Lucius to the Capitol to see «if thy lord look well» (2. 4. 13). As in her exchange with Brutus in 2. 1, the caring wife she is shows concern for his well-being and therefore stands, like the other marginalised characters, for the preservation of life.

Despite the fact that she is on her husband's side, she might impede the conspirators' plan to kill Caesar because, as I have suggested, a woman was perceived as unreliable, as unable by nature to hold her tongue. It is thus with impeccable logic that the play presents Portia as a potential threat from the male viewpoint, regardless of where her sympathies lie: being a woman, she might disclose the conspirators' plan and so prevent the re-enactment of the founding murder of Rome.

There is another reason why Portia must be silenced: she disrupts the gender hierarchy upon which Rome was founded and which still prevailed in the Elizabethan age,⁵⁶ albeit with some differences. Unlike Calpurnia, whose discourse clearly marks her as feminine, Portia's rational discourse is that of an educated Roman man well-grounded in the art of formal oration. She is a master logician who gives her husband tit for tat:

- | | | |
|----|--------|--|
| 1) | BRUTUS | <i>It is not for your health</i> thus to commit
Your weak condition to the raw cold morning. |
| | PORTIA | <i>Nor for yours neither.</i> (2. 1. 235-237) |
| 2) | BRUTUS | I am <i>not well in health</i> , and that is all. |
| | PORTIA | Brutus is wise, and <i>were he not in health</i> ,
He would embrace the means to come by it. (l. 257-259) |
| 3) | BRUTUS | Kneel not, <i>gentle</i> Portia. |
| | PORTIA | I should not need <i>if you were gentle</i> Brutus. (l. 278-279) |

⁵⁴ Whatever the complexity of Rome's foundation myth, the murder or eviction of a powerful male is always what leads to the construction of a new order. Before Tarquin, expelled by Lucius Junius Brutus, the ancestor of the Brutus in the play, King Numitor was overthrown and killed by his brother Amulius. Numitor's grandsons quarrelled: Romulus killed Remus and founded Rome, which he named after himself as ancient historians believed.

⁵⁵ SALISBURY 2001, pp. 285-286.

⁵⁶ Cf. AUGHTERSON 2003, p. 230.

- 4) BRUTUS *You are my true and honourable wife,
As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart.*
- PORTIA *If this were true, then should I know this secret. (ll. 288-291)
[emphasis added]*

As the last three quotations demonstrate, Portia is partial to the use of the past subjunctive in the logical sequence if / (then), whereby she destabilises her husband by systematically calling his statements into question. She astutely echoes his own words («in health», «gentle», «true»), sometimes twisting them in order to make her own point (cf. her negative use of the adjective «gentle» in ex. 3, and the antanaclasis – «true» meaning «loyal» vs «true» meaning «accurate» – in ex. 4). Finally, her parodic imitation of his ponderous monosyllables (ex. 2 and 4) suggests that she won't be misled. Portia's use of language is vigorous throughout her exchange with Brutus:

Y'have ungently, Brutus,
Stole from my bed; *and* yesternight at supper,
You suddenly arose *and* walked about,
Musing *and* sighing, with your arms across,
And when I asked you what the matter was,
You stared upon me with ungentle looks.
I urged you further, then you scratched your head,
And too impatiently stamped with your foot.
Yet I insisted, *yet* you answered not,
But, with an angry wafture of your hand,
Gave sign for me to leave you. So I did,
Fearing to strengthen that impatience
Which seemed too much enkindled, and withal
Hoping it was *but* an effect of humour,
Which sometime hath his hour with every man.
It will not let you eat, *nor* talk, *nor* sleep; [ll. 237-252]

[...]

Is Brutus sick? and is it physical
To walk unbracèd and *suck* up the humours
Of the dank morning? What, *is Brutus sick*,
And will he steal out of his *wholesome* bed,
To dare the *vile contagion* of the night
And tempt the *rheumy and unpurgèd* air
To add unto his *sickness*? *No, my Brutus*,
You have some *sick* offence within your mind,
Which by the right and virtue of my place,
I ought to know of. [ll. 261-270]

[...]

I should not need if you were gentle *Brutus*.
 Within the bond of marriage, tell me, *Brutus* [ll. 279-280]
 [...]

Dwell I but in the suburbs
 Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.

BRUTUS: You are my true and honourable *wife* [ll. 285-288, emphasis added
 throughout]

She resorts to polysyndeton (the conjunctions «and», «yet», «but», «nor» are repeated in the first part of her speech, increasing the vividness of her description of his mental disturbance), paronomasia («sick» / «suck»), polyptoton («sick», «sickness»), striking antithesis («wholesome» / «vile contagion», «rheumy and unpurgèd air»), plocé (the sarcastic repetition of «Is Brutus sick»), hypophora (she raises the question «Is Brutus sick?» in order to answer it herself: «No, my Brutus...»), epiphora («Brutus») and prosopeia (the self-deprecating «Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife» successfully triggers off her husband's indignant denial). We know when he starts echoing her words («wife», ll. 287-288) that she has practically carried the day.

Her threefold argument is carefully and gradually constructed as befits a consummate rhetorician:

- 1) as a devoted wife, she expresses her concerns about her husband's present state of mind and urges him to confide in her (ll. 237-256);
- 2) as a lawful wedded wife, she establishes her credibility as a speaker and asserts her right to know what troubles him (ll. 267-287);
- 3) as a woman «stronger than my sex», she deserves to be treated as an equal and to be informed of her husband's secrets (ll. 292-302).

Portia appeals successively to her husband's feelings, to his moral sense, and to his reason — pathos, ethos and logos, to use Aristotle's terminology. Roughly speaking, her speech therefore follows the same pattern as Brutus' address to the plebeians in 3. 2.⁵⁷ Ironically, whereas Brutus fails to sway the Roman people — his address proves counterproductive⁵⁸ and Antony overrides him because his oratorical skills are greater than his — Portia easily outwits her husband. Although Shakespeare gives her little stage time, he shows her mastering the art of persuasion better than an orator whose style was praised by Cicero himself.⁵⁹

Her disquisition reaches a crescendo when she both claims and proves that she is as valiant as the most Stoic of Roman warriors:

⁵⁷ See Fuzier's detailed analysis of this scene (FUZIER 1974, pp. 28-30).

⁵⁸ His speech against tyranny elicits a sobering response: «Let him be Caesar» (3. 2. 43).

⁵⁹ Cf. BULLOUGH 1964, p. 7. Although she plays only a small part, Portia leaves a lasting impression on the reader or playgoer. As Kermode points out, «[...] there are people who, knowing little of the rest of Shakespeare, remember the dignity of Portia and recall with warm affection the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius» (SHAKESPEARE 1974, p. 1100).

*I grant I am a woman, but withal
 A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife.
 I grant I am a woman, but withal
 A woman well reputed, Cato's daughter.
 Think you I am no stronger than my sex,
 Being so father'd and so husbanded?
 Tell me your counsels, I will not disclose 'em.
 I have made strong proof of my constancy,
 Giving myself a voluntary wound
 Here, in the thigh. Can I bear that with patience
 And not my husband's secrets? (ll. 292-302) [emphasis added]*

She emphasises her feminine gender (epanode, ll. 292-293 and 294-295) only to counter the predictable objection that since she is a woman, she cannot be trusted: her male connections are such that she is no ordinary woman (prolepsis). Subtly, she works upon her husband by simultaneously flattering him (ll. 293, 297) and provoking him (ll. 296-297).

Plutarch mentions the gash in Portia's thigh before her speech.⁶⁰ Shakespeare exploits the full dramatic potential of the situation by combining the two actions in such a way that the disclosure of her self-inflicted wound becomes the climax of her plea: when she reveals it in what may be called her *coup de théâtre*, her gesture is framed by two startling rhetorical questions (ll. 296-297, 301-302), which Brutus can only respond to by hoping he will be «worthy of this noble wife» (l. 303).

Although Portia's discourse explicitly endorses the Roman view of female inferiority, she evinces the bravery of a Roman warrior. She manages to assert her Romaness whilst not denying her womanhood. Her self-penetration with a phallic weapon is equally ambiguous.⁶¹ She cuts herself in the thigh, a body part located so close to her genitals that eighteenth-century producers of the play tackled this impropriety by moving the gash to her arm.⁶² By wounding herself, Portia is the female body which is penetrated but she also controls the male organ which penetrates her.

Her ambivalent gesture is the opposite of Irigaray's «mimeticism», a form of resistance whereby women deliberately mime or mimic their assigned position in phallogen-

⁶⁰ BULLOUGH 1964, p. 98.

⁶¹ As Kahn notes, «That wound destabilizes the gendered concept of virtue [...] [It] anticipates the suicidal wounds of Brutus and Cassius». Like hers, they are «voluntary wounds, cultural markers of the physical courage, autonomy, constancy that count as manly virtue; but at the same time, they demonstrate the fleshly vulnerability, the capacity to be penetrated, that marks woman» (KAHN 1997, p. 101).

⁶² Cf. Bevington (SHAKESPEARE 1988, p. xxv). Portia's gesture was also perceived as indecorous in the Renaissance. In her analysis of the portrayal of Portia's self-mutilation by Italian Renaissance and Baroque painters, Modesti points out that «Ercole de' Roberti, held back by Quattrocento conventions and notions of decorum, dresses Portia from veiled head to foot, the only allowance of flesh being the exposed toes to show Brutus her wound on top of her foot, and not the thigh as in Plutarch's account which Elisabetta [Sirani] accurately depicts» (MODESTI 2014, p. 151).

tric discourse, the better to undermine this position.⁶³ What she achieves, however, is a comparable subversive effect. Indeed, by playing the man's part, by casting herself as the unruly woman on top who dares stand up to her husband, she demonstrates that Romanness and masculinity can be performed.⁶⁴ If there is such a thing as the performance of Romanness and masculinity, it follows that there is neither Roman essence nor intrinsic maleness, but only a culturally determined set of values.⁶⁵ This disruption of the rigid Roman gender code can only have been stronger at the Globe, where Portia would have been played by a boy actor embodying a female character acting like a male hero.

Unlike Calpurnia, the feminine woman lost in a man's world, Portia succeeds: by showing that she is as valiant as the best of men, she persuades her husband to entrust his secret to her (cf. 2. 4). Nevertheless, by temporarily embracing normative masculinity, she enhances her status only briefly. Although she behaves heroically, she is denied a noble Roman death. After Brutus has informed Cassius that she died, this is all the funeral oration she is granted:

CASSIUS: Upon what sickness?
 BRUTUS: 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. 152-156)⁶⁶

By calling her «distract», Brutus safely relegates Portia to the feminine world of unreason.⁶⁷ after performing masculinity in a disturbing way, she is reassuringly re-feminised. He makes no attempt at discovering what her suicide might have meant for her: he interprets it for her. As is the case with Calpurnia's dream, a man imposes his meaning upon a woman's words or deeds, thereby dispossessing her of her status as subject. Typically, Brutus indulges in abstraction and will not go into the particulars: he simply states that she «swallowed fire». In Plutarch, Portia silences herself;⁶⁸ in Shakespeare, she is silenced by Brutus, who turns what might have been a homage to his deceased wife⁶⁹ into a ceremony of reconciliation with his «good brother» (4. 3. 237): «Speak

⁶³ IRIGARAY 1977, pp. 73-77.

⁶⁴ This is consistent with Judith Butler's theory that the congruence between sex and gender identity is neither stable nor consistent and that gender *is* performance.

⁶⁵ Her disruption of this system does not imply that she does not feel the pressure of gender norms. Her paronomasia, «I have a man's mind but a woman's might» (2. 4. 8) attests to the contrary.

⁶⁶ This speech should be contrasted with Brutus' farewell to dead Cassius on the battlefield (5. 3. 98-110).

⁶⁷ Plutarch, on the other hand, places Portia's suicide after her husband's death and suggests that she was ill and chose «[...] to dye, rather than to languish in pain» (BULLOUGH 1964, pp. 131-132).

⁶⁸ Plutarch writes that Portia «[...] tooke hotte burning coles, and cast them into her mouth, and kepte her mouth so close, that she choked herself» (*ibidem*).

⁶⁹ By contrast, Boccaccio emphasises the courage and faithfulness of Porcia, who commits suicide

no more of her. Give me a bowl of wine. / In this I bury all unkindness, Cassius» (ll. 158-159). In other words, two male friends make peace over a dead woman.

Significantly, the tenderness one would expect Brutus to feel for his wife is transferred to another male, his boy servant and lute-player. Although Lucius is also an Orphic figure whose words suggest that something is out of tune in the Roman Republic («The strings, my lord, are false», l. 291), his subservient status⁷⁰ implies that at no time has he been a threat to the conspirators' dark designs, hence Brutus' kindness towards him.

What strikes the reader or playgoer, therefore, is the text's cogency as regards gender norms: it is only when femininity is entirely passive,⁷¹ when it cannot disrupt male order, that Roman patricians do not feel the urge to bring it under control.

As has often been stressed, one of the distinctive features of *Julius Caesar* is that its characters constantly misconstrue the events depicted in the play. What has not been brought to light, however, is that this misconstruction is ascribed to the masculine characters only. Although the latter are dismissive of the figures marked as feminine and therefore irrational, it is the standpoint of these very figures which is validated in the play.

By weaving into his text a consistent pattern of dissent and then showing that these counter-voices are systematically suppressed by the Roman patriarchy, Shakespeare highlights the process of exclusion through which masculine dominance establishes itself. Far from being a misogynist, he is a subtle anthropologist whose play suggests that the silencing of the feminine poetic and prophetic voice is one of the mainsprings of the tragedy. Like any tragic play, *Julius Caesar* describes the rise and fall of powerful men, but what it specifically represents is the fall of men through their inability to heed the voices of life and love.

There would have been no murder, and thus no tragedy, if, instead of identifying with Romulus, the violent founder of the city named after him, the patricians had realised that the palindrome of *Roma* is *amor*.

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after learning her husband's death (BOCCACCIO 2013, p. 147).

⁷⁰ Lucius' status and his musical talent are not the only markers of femininity in his case. His inability to stay awake bespeaks a lack of self-restraint which was perceived as feminine in Elizabethan England as much as in Ancient Rome. «In humoralism, the coldness and sponginess of female flesh, relative to the flesh of men, become traits of great ethical consequence by explaining the sex's limited capacity for productive agency, individuality, and higher reasoning. [...] states of consciousness and cognitive awareness were ranked in terms of hot / cold, moist / dry. Waking consciousness was thought to be a hotter and drier state than sleep; rationality was less cold and spongy than irrationality» (PASTER 2004, pp. 78-79).

⁷¹ In Ancient Rome, femininity and passiveness were synonymous (cf. WALTERS 1997).

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