

Virtue and Vice in Shakespeare's Rome

by

Joshua C. Frey

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Ashbrook Scholar Program and Academic Honors
Program at Ashland University
April 2017

Advisor: Dr. Jeff Sikkenga, Professor of Political Science

Additional Readers: Dr. Chris Burkett, Associate Professor of Political Science
Dr. David Foster, Associate Professor of Political Science
Dr. Chris Swanson, Professor of Mathematics and Honor Program Director

Abstract

William Shakespeare's three roman plays, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, present a condensed history of Rome at three of its most important moments. *Coriolanus* portrays Rome near the inception of the republic, while *Julius Caesar* shows the death of the republic and *Antony and Cleopatra* explores the alternative to republican government. Each of the three plays shows the kinds of men produced by the Roman regime and explores how their virtues and vices affect the regime. The characters in the plays shows that the character necessary for republican government is hard but not impossible to produce. Shakespeare also uses *Antony and Cleopatra* to suggest republican regimes are best suited to developing the kinds of great character that republics require. When viewed in isolation, *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* seem to suggest that republican government produces base men and generates political instability. *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, shows that the vices seen in republics are caused by the faults of human nature rather than a defect in the regime. Furthermore, it highlights the virtues shown by characters in the other plans by showing a Rome devoid of those virtues. In *Coriolanus*, the main character is a courageous men who cannot maintain the support of the people because he demands too much virtue out of them. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare presents the rule of a man who abandoned his faith in the people. This destroys the republic and brings about the imperial rule of *Antony and Cleopatra* in which virtue is not possible.

Introduction

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates claims that no man can produce good comedies and good tragedies.¹ For most of human history this observation has held true. The variance of human nature is too immense for most men to have a deep knowledge of all aspects of it. It should therefore catch our attention that William Shakespeare wrote good comedies and good tragedies. He was only able to do this because of his profound understanding of human nature. This suggests that he must have thought seriously about man's relationship to different types of regimes. By examining Shakespeare's presentation of human nature under different types of regimes we can observe how he thought different regimes cultivated virtues and vices in their citizens. From these observations we can make judgements about what kinds of regimes Shakespeare thought best for human beings. His three Roman plays, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, present Rome at three of its most important moments. *Coriolanus* portrays Rome near the inception of the republic, while *Julius Caesar* shows the death of the republic and *Antony and Cleopatra* explores the alternative to republican government. By showing Rome's transition between regimes, Shakespeare explores the effect republics have on the character of their citizens and considers whether republics can produce the virtue necessary to sustain themselves. The characters in the plays show that the character necessary for republican government is hard but not impossible to produce. When viewed in isolation, *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* seem to suggest republics produce base men and generate political instability. Both plays show Romans of great personal virtue who are unable to prevent the city from being rocked by self-inflicted tumult. *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, shows that the vices seen in the previous plays are faults of human nature rather than defects in the regime. Furthermore, it highlights the virtues shown by characters in the other plays by showing a Rome

¹ 395a

devoid of those virtues. In *Coriolanus*, the main character is a courageous man who cannot maintain the support of the people because he demands too much virtue out of them. The Roman people cannot tolerate this man because they cherish their liberty too highly and believed he threatened it because of his pride. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare presents the rule of a demagogue who does not have faith in the people. By ruling the people in this way he made sure that could never again be ruled in any other way. This destroyed the republic and brought about the imperial rule of *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which virtue is much rarer. The republic demanded a high level of virtue from its citizens and sometimes produced it, although not always. The empire did not demand any virtue other than obedience and therefore did not produce any virtue other than obedience.

Chapter I: Coriolanus

“Had I a dozen sons, I had rather eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action”

In the first scene of *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare shows the Roman citizens attempting to exercise political power. They are preparing to revolt because they believe the Senate is denying them food. They are especially angry with Caius Martius² because he thinks he is better than them. Although they are not demanding equality, these citizens cannot tolerate Martius because they think he is prideful and acts like he does not need to care about them. These citizens are interrupted by a patrician named Menenius Agrippa, who attempts to calm them with a tale about the body parts rebelling against the stomach for receiving food without sharing in the work of the body. The belly, however, claimed it only receives food to distribute it appropriately and nourish the rest of the body. Menenius explains that “The senators of Rome are this good belly/and you the mutinous members” (1.1.157-158) Although Menenius does not share Martius’ violent contempt for the people, he also does not view them as equals. He believes the people of Rome are fundamentally different from the Patricians and as incapable of being elevated as an arm is incapable of performing the functions of the belly.

Through his tale, Menenius argues that all Romans are mutually dependent parts of the same body. The people play an important role in the republic as the legs and arms of the body, fighting its wars and performing other essential work. The Senate is needed to ensure the orderly functioning of the body, just as the belly ensures that the entire body can function. The Senate has an obligation to take care of the people because they are incapable of doing so themselves, as a father would be obliged to his children. However, Menenius’ view differs in one important respect. A father takes care of his children in order to help them outgrow their need for him.

² This is the main character of the play, whose name is changed to Coriolanus later in Act 1

Menenius believes the Roman people will always need the Senate, as a body will never outgrow their need for a belly.

At the conclusion of Menenius' tale, he is interrupted by the arrival of Martius, who despises the crowd because they constantly oscillate between different political positions "With every minute you do change a mind/And call him noble that was now your hate."³ Because the people are so inconstant, their political opinions are unpredictable and there is no consistent principle on which they anchor their beliefs. This prevents Martius from respecting the crowd because it can lead them to hate courage. He can tolerate those who lack courage, but he cannot tolerate those who hate it. In addition to this inconstancy, the crowd is also worthy of disparagement because they lack martial courage "He that trusts to you/Where he should find you lions, finds you hares."⁴ He despises this behavior because he believes the people are capable of acting nobly. Interestingly, the people believe Menenius loves them better than Martius, even though Martius has a higher opinion of them. While Martius and Menenius both think there is a difference between the patricians and the plebeians, Menenius claims the cause of this difference rests in the different natures of these two groups. Martius believes the people are inferior to him because they fail to exercise virtue. He cannot share in Menenius' paternal view of the people because he believes the only thing that makes them inferior is their own character. Therefore, he cannot help the people in the way Menenius thinks he can. The people find Martius' belief to be more offensive because it does not give the higher any obligation to care for the lower. Since Martius does not believe he has any obligation towards the people, his rising power threatens them. Menenius does not threaten them because he believes he is obligated to rule on their behalf. Martius does not and the people fear that he will rule them as slaves.

³ Coriolanus (1.1.194-195)

⁴ Coriolanus (1.1.181-182)

The discussion is interrupted by a message for Martius that the Volsces have taken up arms against Rome. Although he is not concerned about the Volsces as a threat to Rome, Martius is excited to talk about the leader of the Volsces, Tullus Aufidius “I sin in envying his nobility/And, were I anything but what I am/I would wish me only he.”⁵ Aufidius is what the Roman people ought to be. Martius relishes the opportunity to fight him because the only way he can truly demonstrate courage is by fighting other courageous men “Were half to half the world by th’ ears and he/upon my party, I’d revolt, to make/Only my wars with him.”⁶ They are both lions and will fight until one proves himself dominant. Therefore, Martius forgets his disgust with the recent political events and joins Comminius to fight the Volsces.

When Martius prepares to fight for Rome, it is an ideal, rather than a physical city that he thinks he is fighting for. Rome is worth fighting for because it honors courage and produces courageous men. He thinks the soul of Rome exists in the virtues of its people, rather than in the physical city itself. By compromising with the mob out of fear, the Senate did more to destroy Rome than the mob could have done if they had been allowed to burn the city to the ground.⁷ The importance of Rome is an ideal that is greater than any one of its citizens and greater than the physical city itself. It would therefore be foolish to sacrifice the ideal for the preservation of the city.

Martius’ love of courage prevents him from thinking the patricians and plebeians are inherently distinct classes. Although he believes the mob of plebeians protesting are hares, he

⁵ Coriolanus (1.1.256-258)

⁶ Coriolanus (1.1.260-263)

⁷ It seems that Martius is more offended that the compromise was made out of fear than by any of the specific terms of the compromise. He complains that the compromise made “Bold power look pale” (1.1.232), but cannot even remember the political details of the compromise, saying they were granted “Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms of their own choice. One’s Junius Brutus, Sicinius Velutus, and I know not. ‘Sdeath!’ Regardless of the wisdom of this reform, the cowardly motivations behind it destroys any good it could possibly bring.

thinks they could be lions. Distinction is drawn by virtue, not birth. Menenius, by contrast, does not believe an arm in the body could ever become the belly. Martius does not despise the men he fights with, fighting as their comrade and calling them his “fellows.”⁸ The esteem is entirely conditional upon these men’s courage, as Martius promises death for any man who retreats “He that retires, I’ll take him for a Volsce/And he shall feel mine edge.”⁹ Should he have to kill any man in this fashion, he would do so not out of hate for that man, but rather out of hatred for the cowardice which caused his retreat.

In the third scene, Martius’ mother, Volumnia, encourages her daughter in law, Virgilia, to rejoice in Martius’ absence because it is necessary for him to win honor. Volumnia believes honor is more important than life and would rather her son die on the battlefield than earn dishonor through cowardice. Danger should not just be bravely endured when necessary, but actively sought out for the sake of winning glory “[I] was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame.”¹⁰ Unlike her son, however, Volumnia thinks courage is especially connected to Rome, imagining her son on the battlefield chastising his fellow soldiers by telling them they were “got in fear/though you were born in Rome.”¹¹ She believes these men have the capacity for courage simply because they are Romans.

Virgilia is not as patriotic as her mother in law, preferring the private good of herself and her family over the good of Rome. She wants her husband to stay home from the war because she does not want to suffer if he should be killed or wounded. Volumnia is more public spirited because she wants her son to fight for his country. She does so partially because of the honor

⁸ Coriolanus (1.4.38)

⁹ Coriolanus (1.4.39-40)

¹⁰ Coriolanus (1.3.13-14)

¹¹ Coriolanus (1.3.36-37)

associated with fighting well and partially because he is a Roman and Romans ought to be courageous. She cares more about the good of Rome than Virgilia and claims she would rather have “Eleven (sons) die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.”¹² This is not because she does not care about her own private good, but rather because she sees her own private good as being connected to the good of the city. Thus, even if Martius dies in battle it is still to her benefit as long as he died for his country. She is able to arrive at this understanding because she believes the city stands for something and she believes in what it stands for. Like her son, Volumnia believes courage should be honored and people should desire that honor. She knows her city will honor courage and she knows the city benefits from courage. This allows her to be public-spirited without neglecting her own private good. Her view is different than Martius’ because she does not value courage for its own sake. She thinks it is honorable and desirable, but only if exercised in the service of the city.¹³

In the next scene Comminius shows an understanding of courage that is much different than Martius’, praising his soldiers for fighting “Like Romans, neither foolish in our stands/Nor cowardly in retire.”¹⁴ He believes strategically retreating is virtuous and all true Romans should practice this virtue. He does not celebrate cowardice but defines it differently than Martius. Martius believes courage requires men to disregard circumstances and brazenly challenge all enemies. Comminius’s definition of courage is more nuanced because he allows particular circumstances to dictate his actions. He is primarily concerned with the results of the battle and is willing to allow a strategic retreat, if necessary. He believes courage means fighting well in the pursuit of a specific goal. Martius is not interested in this type of courage because it cannot bring

¹² Coriolanus (1.3.25-27)

¹³ Unlike her son, Volumnia does not respect Aufidius, only mentioning him to say that she wants him dead. His courage does not earn her admiration because it is exercised against Rome, not for it.

¹⁴ Coriolanus (1.6.3-4)

glory. If people were able to attribute his success to good strategy, it would detract from his glory. He must fight against improbable odds and still emerge victorious in order to win the glory he desires. His pursuit of Aufidius at the end of the battle shows he is more interested in glory than victory. The Romans were going to win the battle regardless of whether Martius killed Aufidius or not. However, if the Romans won the battle without Martius fighting Aufidius that victory would not win him glory because he did not defeat a worthy opponent. Courage is not connected to fighting with any coordinated strategy because Martius believes courage is fighting well solely for the sake of fighting well.

During the battle, Martius again shows his faith in the ability of the people to be courageous. Before he begins his pursuit of Aufidius, Comminius tells him to take whatever soldiers he thinks will be most useful with him. Martius responds by saying that “Those are they/That most are willing.”¹⁵ He makes no distinction between patricians and plebeians, only wanting to fight with the bravest Romans and thinks it is possible that any man could be worthy of this honor.¹⁶ He does not think all men are capable of being his equal, however, he believes they can have the courage necessary to earn honor. Martius thinks courage is a virtue that can be held in common. Fighting alongside of other virtuous men is preferable to fighting alone because it allows the virtue of courage to be more fully present. Since honor is praise for virtue, fighting with other courageous men would not detract from Martius’ honor.

¹⁵ Coriolanus (1.6.85-86)

¹⁶ Although there are many similarities between Martius and Aufidius, this scene reveals one important difference. While Martius wants to fight with other courageous men, Aufidius sees virtue in his fellow soldiers as a threat to his honor. Aufidius thinks honor is finite commodity. If other men have courage, this takes away from the honor he can win by being courageous. Therefore, when other soldiers fight with him, they shame him. Aufidius does not want his men to fight with him, he wants them to fight behind him as he leads them into battle. He does not think the Volscies are capable of courage and by acting courageously they create a cheap counterfeit. This counterfeit debases the virtue and shames those who actually possess it. This is the opposite of Martius’ view. Martius believes courage can be possessed in degrees and, to the degree men act with courage, they can share in the honor that comes from courageous action. Aufidius does not think courage can be possessed in degrees. Either someone is completely courageous, like him and Martius are, or they lack the virtue entirely.

Courage is not the only virtue Martius cares about. After the battle he attempts to get justice for a Volsc man who had been kind to him by asking Cominius for his freedom. He did not secure the freedom of this man during the battle, however, because that would have delayed his pursuit of Aufidius. He tried to kill Aufidius first because the action demanded by courage is greater than that demanded by justice. He also believes true courage must be unadulterated by mercenary motives. During the battle, he stops to chastise a group of Roman soldiers who stopped to plunder “See here these movers that do prize their hours/At a cracked drachma.”¹⁷ Fighting for the sake of these petty trinkets was base and un-Roman. Such men could not be called courageous even if they fought well on the battlefield because the things they were fighting for were so low. True courage must be exercised for something higher than simply personal gain.

Although Coriolanus earns renown for his exploits in battle, he is not universally loved in Rome. The newly elected tribunes, Sicinius and Junius¹⁸, hate Coriolanus because they believe him to be proud. They do not care if his pride is justified, it threatens the people regardless. They believe Coriolanus’ nature would prevent him from being anything other than a tyrant over the people should he ever get in power “Such a nature/Tickled with good success, disdains the shadow/Which he treads on at noon.”¹⁹ Coriolanus’ pride makes him incapable of fairly ruling the people because the tribunes do not believe he can be proud without having disdain for the people.

¹⁷ Coriolanus (1.5.4-5)

¹⁸ This character’s full name is Junius Brutus and is referred to as Brutus in the play. He will be referred to as Junius here to avoid confusion with the Brutus in *Julius Caesar*.

¹⁹ Coriolanus (1.1.296-298)

When Coriolanus returns to Rome he rejects the people's praise "No more of this. It does offend my heart."²⁰ The Roman people are not worthy of praising his courage because they do not share in that virtue. Their flattery offends him because they praise courage but do not possess it themselves. In the political community Coriolanus wants to live in, he would not receive nearly as much praise because the other members of that political community would also possess the virtue of courage. They would recognize Coriolanus was more courageous than them, but would be less amazed because courage would not be unknown to them.

Although Menenius is not a warrior, Coriolanus recognizes his prudence as a virtue. However, when Menenius advises him to show his wounds to the crowd, Coriolanus refuses to allow his courage to yield to Menenius' prudence. Although Coriolanus recognizes all the different virtues, he treats courage as the most important virtue and will sacrifice prudence or justice to the demands of courage. The importance he places on the virtue of courage does not entirely exclude the other virtues. He has a different view of human failing than Menenius. Menenius accepts that not all men can be virtuous, yet they all must live together in order for Rome to function. Coriolanus believes all men are capable of being as virtuous as he is, and the problems of Rome could be solved by men being more courageous. Therefore, there was no reason to be prudent if that meant also being cowardly. Menenius has a much different view of courage. He honors courage as an important virtue, but does not think it is good for its own sake. The most important thing for Coriolanus is to be courageous. If this means making enemies unnecessarily or alienating the people, it is still better than acting cowardly. Menenius thinks courage is good and admirable, but only if someone is courageous in a way that helps Rome.²¹

²⁰ Coriolanus (2.1.173)

²¹ Menenius has an Aristotelian definition of courage. Like Aristotle, Menenius believes courage can be exercised in its highest form in the service of the city. Furthermore, Menenius and Aristotle both share an

When exercising courage harms the city, Menenius is opposed to courage. The city needs courageous men, but this courage must be balanced with other virtues for the benefit of the city. Unlike Coriolanus, who believes courage is good in all circumstances, Menenius believes there are times where courage does not benefit the city, and therefore should not be exercised. This is much different than Coriolanus' definition of courage. Coriolanus believes the courageous man would not act fearfully in any circumstance.

Despite seeming to be opposed to acting prudently, Coriolanus concedes to prudence and grudgingly asks the people for their voices. He does not, however, show them his wounds because they are not worthy of seeing them. He does not think it should be remarkable to be wounded in defense of Rome. If all men are capable of courage, all men should also fight for their country while wounded. They would have praised his courage, but their praise would have meant nothing because they do not understand courage themselves. He grudgingly asks the people for their voices, which lowers him to a kind of equality, but does not place him below the people. Coriolanus believes this would be one of the worst things he could do.

Although he will not beg for the consulship, Coriolanus wants to become consul because he thinks the city exists to cultivate virtue. Therefore, he must rule in Rome because he is the most courageous man. If asking the people for their voices is necessary to become consul, he will do so. Any attempt to beg for their voices, however, would lower him below the people whom he is begging and show he lacked the virtue that would entitle him to rule. If he begs for the consulship, it would mean the approval of the people was more important than courage.

understanding that true courage must be exercised in ordinate ways "he, then, who endures and fears what he ought, and in the way he ought and when... is courageous" (1115b 18-21).

This is perceived as pride by the people and it arouses their suspicions. They believe Coriolanus has earned their gratitude and the consulship “So, if he tells us his deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the mob to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude.”²² The people in this scene are attempting to act justly towards Coriolanus. They can see that he had done great things for Rome and wish to reward him. Shortly after talking to Coriolanus, the citizens complain that “He mocked us when he begged our voices.”²³ Coriolanus refused to follow the traditional forms of the republic because he believed they imposed a false equality between him and the people. The tribunes use this dissatisfaction to turn the people against Coriolanus by convincing them he would abuse them while in power. Once they have convinced them of Coriolanus’ hate toward them, they encourage the people to revoke their election of Coriolanus as consul. Although this action seems rash, it is motivated by a desire to protect their liberty. The tribunes convince them that Coriolanus’ pride would cause him to oppress the people. Once they do so the people become united in their opposition to him.

The tribunes inform Coriolanus that the people have rejected him as consul and he accuses them of stirring up the people against him and warns that this type of politics will be disastrous for Rome “Suffer’t, and live with such as cannot rule/Nor ever will be ruled.”²⁴ The tribunes have made sure the people will not be content to be ruled by anyone better than them, however, anyone who is not better than they are would not be capable of ruling. Sicinius justifies his actions by claiming the will of the people should always reign. Since Coriolanus despises the people, he must also despise Rome. Since the people and the city are inseparable, and

²² Coriolanus (2.3.8-12)

²³ Coriolanus (2.3.175)

²⁴ Coriolanus (3.1.53-54)

Coriolanus refuses to be part of the people, he also cannot be part of the city. Therefore, the tribunes and the people believe they should kill Coriolanus.

After calming the rage of the people, Menenius and Volumnia convince Coriolanus that he must flatter the people in order to be council. He abandons this plan, however, when the tribunes call him a traitor “Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death...I would not buy/ Their mercy at the price of one fair word.”²⁵ He is willing to make some concessions to prudence when he agrees to make peace with the people. He is, however, too much of a patriot to meekly submit to being called a traitor. He loves Rome, and cannot suffer to be accused to treason without becoming angry. This anger prevents him from placating the people and forces him to leave the city, which he does in disgust “Despising/For you the city, thus I turn my back/There is a world elsewhere.”²⁶ This represents a great change from Coriolanus’ position earlier in the play, when he despised the people for their cowardice but believed they could be better. Now he has given up hope on the city because it has turned its back on the virtue of courage entirely. He believed the purpose of the city was to produce courageous men. Now that the city had turned against courage, it had lost its reason for existence.

Coriolanus views his banishment as an opportunity to show he can be courageous apart from Rome. This would mean his courage was greater, because it came solely from his own virtue, and not from living in a virtuous city. He travels immediately to Aufidius, to “fight/against my cankered country.”²⁷ Coriolanus asks Aufidius to either allow him to destroy Rome or kill him. This drastic action reveals much about Coriolanus’ relationship to Rome. He loved Rome, but loved it because he believed it could produce and honor courageous men. The

²⁵ Coriolanus (3.3.114-117)

²⁶ Coriolanus (3.3.162-165)

²⁷ Coriolanus (4.5.100-101)

recent actions of the tribunes and the people had proven to him that Rome was not what he thought it was. Not only were the people not courageous themselves, but they had begun to treat courage as a vice rather than a virtue. He has not lost his emotional attachment to the city, but his love has turned to hate and he seeks to destroy the city.

As Coriolanus advances towards Rome, the patricians fail in their desperate attempts to dissuade him from destroying the city. Rome's cowardice has made its presence offensive to Coriolanus and he believes he must destroy it, even if that means killing his friends and family. Rome is saved from this fate by the intercession of Volumnia. She argues that it is in Coriolanus' interest to make peace, because the end of war is always uncertain but, if he made peace, both the Romans and the Volces would bless him. She also warns that he would mar his own noble reputation by destroying his city. If he destroys Rome, she claims the people would say "The man was noble/But with his last attempt he wiped it out/Destroyed his country, and his name remains/ To th' ensuing age abhorred."²⁸ She appeals to his honor by saying such rage was beneath an honorable man "Think'st thou it honorable for a noble man/Still to remember wrongs."²⁹ She suggests that it would be beneath a man of Coriolanus' virtue to be so upset by the slights of the people. Finally, she reminds her son that, if he attacks Rome, his mother, wife, and son will all die.

Coriolanus eventually yields to her arguments "Behold, the heavens do ope/The gods look down, and this unnatural scene/They laugh at."³⁰ Although he does not explicitly say which argument convinced him, this statement suggests it was love of his family that changed his mind. It is unlikely that he would have been swayed by an argument based in self-interest because he

²⁸ Coriolanus (5.3.167-170)

²⁹ Coriolanus (5.3.176-177)

³⁰ Coriolanus (5.3.206-208)

never would have placed himself in Aufidius' power if self-preservation was his primary concern. It is also unlikely he was convinced by the appeal to his honor. If that was what convinced him, he would not have called it an unnatural scene. It was unnatural because, for the first time, he prioritized something over courage. He still believes that courage is the most important virtue, yet in this case he subordinated courage to his love of his family. Coriolanus thinks these appeals would not work on the gods, who would have the strength to resist such sentimental impulses. Their laughter, therefore, is laughter at the weakness of human nature.

Volumnia successfully convinced Coriolanus to spare Rome even when Menenius, Cominius, and Virgilia all failed. Menenius and Cominius were unsuccessful because although they were both courageous men whom Coriolanus respected, he did not have familial obligations to either of them. Therefore, although their deaths would be regrettable, Coriolanus sees no reason to spare Rome on their behalf. Courage earns Coriolanus' respect, but not his love. He does not spare the city on behalf of Cominius and Menenius because he knows they have courage and it would be an insult to their virtue to spare the city for them. He respects courage in other men but does not think it makes him obligated towards them. His mother, however, is able to persuade him because of his familial obligations towards hers.

Virgilia is also unable to convince Coriolanus. Although she is part of his family, Coriolanus is able to neglect his love for her and ignore her pleas "But out, Affection!/All bond and privilege of nature, break!"³¹ He has affection for his wife but is able to banish his affection for the sake of courage, swearing he will never be "such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand/As if a man were author of himself/And knew no other kin."³² While it might seem unnatural for a

³¹ Coriolanus (5.3.26-27)

³² Coriolanus (5.3.39-41)

man to attempt to rid himself of affection for his own family, Coriolanus believes this is required to be a courageous man. Otherwise, he would be allowing a non-courageous person (Virgilia) to dictate actions to a courageous person, which places some other virtue above courage. His mother is different. Unlike Virgilia, his mother understands and respects courage, although she does not possess it in the same way he does. In this way she is like Menenius and Cominius. However, unlike those two, she also has claims on his affection.³³ It is this combination of respect and affection that eventually persuades Coriolanus to yield.³⁴

The ending of the play reveals Coriolanus had been wrong in what he thought about himself the entire play. He thought courage was the most important virtue but ultimately chooses love of family over courage. He thought the city of Rome only mattered if it produced courage but was unable to destroy it even though the city had rejected courage. It appears his faith in the people was misplaced. He thought that they could raise themselves to virtue by following his example. Instead, his example makes them fearful and jealous. His mistake is that he thought Rome could fix the flaws of human nature. Man's instinct for self-preservation can become inordinate and incline him toward cowardice. Coriolanus correctly observed that Rome produced men of great courage, but incorrectly believed this could rid the city of cowardice

³³ Both Shakespeare and Plutarch suggest that Coriolanus' affection for his mother was greater than most men's. Earlier in the play some of the plebeians suggest that Coriolanus performed his great deeds to please his mother rather than for his love of Rome. Similarly, Plutarch claims that "The end of [Coriolanus'] glory was his mother's gladness."

³⁴ Lucius Brutus, who is referenced later in Julius Caesar, earned fame for ignoring the pleas of his sons and allowing them to be executed for treason. He was praised for doing his duty and allowing his sons to be killed but some claimed he was inhuman because he did so without showing any visible emotion. Coriolanus is in a similar situation but lets his familial obligation dictate his actions. The situations are different because Lucius Brutus had the love of country competing against his love of family. It is possible to claim that he misordered these loves but patriotism is a natural human passion. Had Coriolanus ignored the pleas of his family and destroyed Rome it would have been utterly inhuman because he would be ignoring his love of family even without the counterweight of patriotism.

Chapter II: Julius Caesar

“There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries”

Julius Caesar begins with a group of citizens marching in the streets in order to “see Caesar and rejoice in his triumph.”³⁵ These citizens do not have the jealousy of the citizens in *Coriolanus*. While Coriolanus’ pride prevents the citizens from appreciating his military accomplishments, the citizens in *Julius Caesar* do not care that their hero is proud, as long as he returns to Rome victorious. Their tribunes suggest Caesar is unworthy of his countrymen’s love because his recent triumphs came against other Romans and not her enemies. They are concerned with the political implications of Caesar’s victory while the plebeians only care that Caesar won a victory because they know they will be enriched by his victory. They have lost their sense of principle in politics and turned into personal partisans. The relationship between the people and their rulers has changed greatly since the first scene of *Coriolanus* when Menenius told the plebeians the tale of the belly. Menenius greeted the crowd as his “countrymen”³⁶ while the tribunes greet the people by calling them “idle creatures.”³⁷ The tribunes do not ask the reasons why the people love Caesar and, although they are able to disperse the crowd, they do not change the people’s love for Caesar. Although Menenius does not think the people are equal to him, he thinks they are capable of understanding a rational argument. The tribunes in *Julius Caesar* have lost this faith and make no attempt to argue with the people. Additionally, the people in *Coriolanus* immediately recognize Menenius and know

³⁵ *Julius Caesar* (1.1.34-35)

³⁶ *Coriolanus* (1.1.55)

³⁷ *Julius Caesar* (1.1.1)

his reputation as “One who has always loved the people.”³⁸ In *Julius Caesar*, the people do not seem to recognize their own tribunes and never acknowledge them by name.

This celebration occurs on the feast of Lupercal, but the people ignore the religious feast because they are distracted by Caesar's triumph. The brief mention of a religious feast and the dismissiveness which the people and tribunes show towards it demonstrate the people do not care about the religion of the Roman republic. They have replaced it with a new religion in which Caesar is a god. However, in the scene immediately following, Caesar appears to take this religious festival seriously, publicly asking Antony to touch Calpurnia as he runs. He knows he must respect republican forms to maintain the support of the patricians. If he openly flaunted the city's religion, he would be seen as a threat to the republic. If, however, he openly maintains the forms of republicanism, he will be able to rule autocratically while the patricians and the people still think they live in a republic.

After this, a soothsayer calls out to Caesar and Caesar responds by saying “Speak. Caesar is turn'd to hear.”³⁹ (1.2.20) He refers to himself in the third person, as if the name ‘Caesar’ already had meaning beyond referring to the man named Julius Caesar. Caesar will continue to refer to himself in the third person throughout the play. This turns “Caesar” into a political office rather than just a name. In order for this project to be successful he must appear to possess characteristics that normal men cannot. Therefore, he orders the soothsayer to step out of the crowd, not in order to hear him better, but rather so he can be seen fearlessly dismissing the soothsayer's warning. This is because, while Julius Caesar must feel fear, Caesar cannot.

³⁸ *Julius Caesar* (1.1.51-52)

³⁹ *Julius Caesar* (1.2.20)

After Caesar and his company depart, Cassius recruits Brutus into the conspiracy against Caesar. However, Brutus will not act unless he is convinced the death of Caesar is in the public interest, “If it be ought toward the general good/set honor in one eye and death i’ th’ other/And I’ll look on both indifferently.”⁴⁰ Unlike Coriolanus, who values virtue above all else, Brutus thinks it is most important to pursue the common good and is willing to suffer death or dishonor for that sake. This makes Brutus much more political than Martius because he wishes to perform the common good. Martius did not need to be political because he believed the highest virtue could exist independently of Rome. Brutus considers concern for the good of Rome to be the most virtuous activity and views his own reputation as a means of advancing the good of Rome. The common good requires virtuous men. If the city is virtuous, these men would also have good reputations because the city would recognize their virtue.

Cassius initially tries to persuade Brutus to join the conspiracy in the wrong manner. He tries to turn Brutus against Caesar by claiming that Caesar had become too great to remain in power “Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world/Like a Colossus, and we petty men/Walk under his huge legs and peep about/To find ourselves dishonorable graves.”⁴¹ Although Cassius mentions honor in this appeal, he does not understand honor in the same way as Brutus. Cassius thinks honor is a matter of comparison; if Caesar is greater than him he will be shamed. Brutus, however, views honor as a good reputation earned by virtue and says that “Brutus had rather be a villager/Than to repute himself a son of Rome/Under these hard conditions as this time/Is like to lay upon us.”⁴² Brutus is not concerned that Caesar has eclipsed him in greatness, but is worried

⁴⁰ Julius Caesar (1.2.92-95)

⁴¹ Julius Caesar (1.2.142-145)

⁴² Julius Caesar (1.2.181-184)

about his own virtue. Cassius would prefer to be a dishonorable but powerful Roman than an obscure but honorable villager while Brutus claims to desire the opposite.

Cassius laments Caesar's rise as a sign Rome has lost her previously held virtue "Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!/When went there by an age, since the great flood/But it was famed with more than one man?"⁴³ Although Cassius resents Caesar for becoming so great that he eclipses all other Romans, he places the majority of the blame on the Roman people who allowed him to do so "And why should Caesar be a tyrant, then?/Poor man, I know he would not be a wolf/But that he sees the Romans are but sheep."⁴⁴ The people of Rome no longer want to be free and prefer to allow Caesar to rule them. They have lost the republican virtue that they possessed in *Coriolanus*. Even though those people were cowardly and short-sighted, they would never have allowed a man like Caesar to rule over them. They were jealous of their liberty and would not tolerate anything that looked like tyranny. Since that time, however, the people and patricians have corrupted each other. The patricians corrupt the people by selling them material comfort at the price of their liberty and the people corrupt the patricians by rewarding such behavior with political power.

Cassius recognizes this corruption and thinks the people have already have chosen slavery, the only remaining question would be determining who their master would be. It is unclear who Cassius wants to make master of Rome but he clearly thinks Caesar is unworthy, as he laments that Rome has become "trash" if it will "Illuminate/so vile a thing as Caesar."⁴⁵ He does not have any reason to expect Rome will improve after the death of Caesar but thinks he is obligated to kill Caesar anyway to show he is not a willing bondman "I know/My answer must

⁴³ Julius Caesar (1.2.160-163)

⁴⁴ Julius Caesar (1.3.107-109)

⁴⁵ Julius Caesar (1.3.112-115)

be made. But I am armed/And dangers are to me indifferent.”⁴⁶ Even if there is little hope of saving the Roman republic, Cassius still must fight for it. He uses this threat to the republic to convince Brutus to help regain this virtue, reminding him “There was a Brutus⁴⁷ once that would have brooked/Th’ eternal devil to keep his state in Rome/As easily as a king.”⁴⁸ Cassius does not just think having a king is bad politically, but fundamentally un-Roman. It would therefore be impossible for Caesar’s rule to benefit Rome, since any material benefit Caesar brought would be undone by the moral destruction caused by bringing back a king.

Brutus hesitates to join Cassius because he still loves Julius Caesar.⁴⁹ Despite this love, he is concerned by Caesar’s increasing power “He would be crown’d/How that might change his nature, there’s the question/It is the bright day that brings out the adder.”⁵⁰ Brutus admits that, based solely on Caesar’s actions, there is no reason to think he will become tyrannical⁵¹, but is concerned power will make him “[scorn] the base degrees/By which he did ascend” (2.1.27-28). This speculation is the only reason he can think of to kill Caesar. This is similar to the argument the tribunes in *Coriolanus* make to the people to convince them to turn against Coriolanus. Junius had asked the people to consider the scorn Coriolanus had previously shown them and hoped to convince them that, because of this scorn, he would treat them poorly if he gained power “do you think/that his contempt shall not be bruising to to you/When he hath power to

⁴⁶ Julius Caesar (1.3.117-199)

⁴⁷ This is a reference to Lucius Brutus, one of Rome’s first consuls and a leader of the rebellion that drove the Tarquin kings from Rome.

⁴⁸ Julius Caesar (1.2.167-170)

⁴⁹ Cassius’ reference to Lucius Brutus becomes extremely important at this stage in the argument. He reminds Brutus of the glory of his ancestor who was famous for allowing his sons to be executed for treason. He earned great renown for observing these executions without any observable emotion, sacrifices his personal love for the needs of the republic. It is likely Brutus thought that he was following in his ancestor’s footsteps by killing his friend Julius Caesar to preserve the republic.

⁵⁰ Julius Caesar (2.1.13-15)

⁵¹ Julius Caesar (2.1.21-22)

crush.”⁵² This argument ultimately moves him much closer to joining the conspiracy than Cassius’ argument of republican jealousy.

Although Brutus is concerned Caesar might be crowned king, he does not think there are systemic problems with the republic. In his initial conversation with Cassius, Brutus claimed that “I do fear the people/Choose Caesar for their king.”⁵³ This would contradict his faith in the republic and indicate Rome was in a much more dire position than he initially thought. This faith in the people is not shaken as Brutus learns Caesar was offered the crown by Mark Antony. Instead, Brutus thinks the threat to Rome lies primarily with Caesar, who is the cause of whatever corruption exists within Rome. Although Brutus thinks the political situation in Rome is dire enough to justify killing a man he considers a friend, he does not distribute blame for this situation as liberally as Cassius. In fact, it is hard to tell if he blames anyone for the situation, holding Caesar blameless “And, to speak truth of Caesar/I have not known when his affections swayed/More than his reason.”⁵⁴ Instead, he views the necessity of killing Caesar as an unfortunate accident that developed independently of human agency. If Brutus blames anything, he blames ambition, but not Caesar’s ambition, saying “That lowliness is young ambition’s ladder/Whereto the climber-upward turns his face.”⁵⁵ Brutus treats Caesar’s rise to power like the development of a cancer in a body. He does not blame anyone for the cancer and thinks it can be defeated by surgically removing the cancer and allowing the body to heal itself.

As Brutus and Cassius continue their conversation, Caesar and Antony return, in the midst of a conversation about Cassius. Caesar warns Antony not to trust Cassius “Yond Cassius

⁵² Coriolanus (2.3.223-225)

⁵³ Julius Caesar (1.2.85-86)

⁵⁴ Julius Caesar (2.1.22-23)

⁵⁵ Julius Caesar (2.1.23-24)

has a lean and hungry look/He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.”⁵⁶ Caesar recognizes Cassius is unwilling to live as another’s inferior. While warning Antony about Cassius, Caesar says he would prefer to surround himself with men who are comfortable “Let me have men about me who are fat/Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights.”⁵⁷ Caesar cannot rule among men like Cassius. Antony is willing to live in Caesar’s shadow and having men like this is essential to Caesar’s rule. Fat men are not troubled when they behold another greater than themselves and cannot threaten Caesar’s ambition.

This revelation seems to be out of character for Caesar. It is the closest he comes to admitting fear and also the only truly private conversation he has.⁵⁸ Since Caesar must have known he had Antony’s admiration, it is possible this conversation was an attempt to instruct Antony’s character. Caesar paints a disparaging view of Cassius, and one he knew Antony would find repulsive. Caesar knew Antony too well to believe Antony would ever fear a man like Cassius. Instead, Caesar was encouraging Antony to be less like Cassius and to continue his pursuit of pleasure and amusement. Caesar praises Antony’s vanity in order to encourage him to become more vain. He wants Rome to be filled with vain men because such men are willing to trade their liberty for the objects of their vanity.

Although Brutus is eventually convinced of the need to kill Caesar he shows a strong distaste for the conspiracy required to plan the assassination “O conspiracy,/Sham’st thou to show thy dang’rous brow by night,/When evils are most free?”⁵⁹ The conspiracy is a necessary but shameful thing. Conspiracy cannot be honorable, because an act must be publically known in

⁵⁶ Julius Caesar (1.2.204-205)

⁵⁷ Julius Caesar (1.2.202-203)

⁵⁸ All of Caesar’s other conversation, including with his wife, are spoken in a loftier tone, as if he was addressing all of Rome.

⁵⁹ Julius Caesar (1.2.84-86)

order to receive honor. Although Brutus values honor highly, he thinks that he is sacrificing some of his honor in order to save the republic.

While planning the assassination, Cassius and Brutus disagree on several points which Cassius always concedes to Brutus. They first disagree over whether they should involve Cicero in the conspiracy. Cassius, Casca, Cinna, and Metellus all argue Cicero should be included because “his silver hairs/Will purchase us a good opinion/And buy men’s voices to commend our deeds.”⁶⁰ Brutus, however, disagrees and the other members of the conspiracy quickly agree to leave Cicero out. He does not wish to involve Cicero because he does not recognize how Cicero could aid the conspiracy. He expects his fellow citizens to be able to look on the situation disinterestedly and not be swayed by personal reputations. Therefore, there was no reason to involve Cicero. Furthermore, since conspiracy was such a shameful thing, it would be better if it was limited to the fewest number of people possible. He was willing to sacrifice his own honor for the good of the Republic, but will not ask Cicero to do so unnecessarily.

Brutus also disagrees with the rest of the conspiracy about whether Mark Antony should be killed. Cassius argues Antony must die because he is a “shrewd contriver” who would cause further problems.”⁶¹ Brutus immediately dismisses this idea advising the conspiracy to “Kill [Caesar] boldly, but not wrathfully/Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods/Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds.”⁶² Brutus does not consider Mark Antony to be a threat worth consideration because he does not share Cassius’ dire view of the state of the republic. Cassius believes Caesar was able to seize power because Romans have become sheep. Therefore, Antony would be able to take power in the same way Caesar did. Brutus, however, thinks Caesar

⁶⁰ Julius Caesar (2.1156-158)

⁶¹ Julius Caesar (2.1.171)

⁶² Julius Caesar (2.1.185-187)

is a singular cancer on an otherwise healthy city. Killing Caesar would be an unpleasant necessity, but it would be sufficient to save Rome and return it to its proper state. He does not think the people want a king, but is worried they want Caesar to be king. Once Caesar is dead there is no reason to fear the people would chose Antony for a king.

As Caesar travels to the Senate he meets the soothsayer who warned him about the Ides of March and publically taunts him to show he is above the fear and superstition of ordinary men. After this, a man named Artemidorus warns Caesar about the conspiracy in a letter. Caesar takes the letter but does not read it, claiming that “What touches us ourself shall be last served.”⁶³ He is presenting the people with the image of a new kind of ruler, one who is not bound by the usual constraints of human nature. All men are naturally subject towards fear and self interest, but not Caesar. Therefore he needs to subvert the republic because the republic was designed for men who are limited by the failings of human nature. If all men are afflicted with the vices of fear and self-interest the amount of power one man can gain should be limited. Since Caesar is able to transcend these things, however, he should not be limited by the ways of the old republic.

Before the conspirators strike they first beg Caesar to allow Publius Cimber⁶⁴ to return from his exile. Caesar is unmoved by these pleas, claiming he cannot change his mind because he is “As constant as the Northern Star.”⁶⁵ Again, Julius Caesar presents himself as a new kind of ruler, one un-swayed by human emotions. The passionate pleas of a distraught brother might move a man, but not Caesar. This lack of human emotions provides the conspirators with even more evidence that Caesar must die. Brutus had said earlier that Caesar only posed a threat

⁶³ Julius Caesar (3.1.8)

⁶⁴ This is the brother of Metellus Cimber, one of the conspirators

⁶⁵ Julius Caesar (3.1.66)

because increased power might change his nature “He would be crown'd/How that might change his nature, there's the question.”⁶⁶ In this interaction with Cimber, Caesar shows his nature has been changed, and he brags about this change as if it is a good thing. Brutus can now see Caesar is attempting to “bestride the narrow world like a colossus” just before the conspiracy kills him. By placing this monologue immediately before the assassination, Shakespeare demonstrates why the conspirators believed he must die.

Immediately after Caesar's death Cinna and Cassius want to proclaim the good news of Caesar's death to the entire city. Brutus, however, advises those present to remain calm “People and senators, be not affrighted/Fly not; stand still. Ambition's debt is paid.”⁶⁷ There is no need for frantic activity because Rome has just averted a crisis and life can now continue as if Caesar never took power. The people will turn against him as soon as they find out about his ambition. The work of the conspiracy is now nearly finished. All they have left to do is explain to the people the facts of the situation.

When Mark Antony returns and finds Caesar's body, he asks to be allowed to speak at the funeral. Brutus and Cassius disagree about this, but Cassius eventually relents and allows Antony to speak. Cassius is concerned about the influence Antony may have on public opinion “Know you how much the people may be moved/By that which he will utter.”⁶⁸ Cassius believes the work of the conspiracy is just beginning. He knows Rome has been debased enough to elevate Caesar as king. Therefore they might hate the conspirators for killing Caesar if their reaction is not carefully controlled. Brutus, however, is not worried the people will be sympathetic to Antony's argument if they know that Caesar wanted to be king. Therefore, there

⁶⁶ Julius Caesar (2.1.12-14)

⁶⁷ Julius Caesar (3.1.90-91)

⁶⁸ Julius Caesar (3.1.58-59)

is no danger in letting Antony speak, if Brutus can first “show the reason of our Caesar’s death.”⁶⁹ Hearing this reason will be enough to prevent any chance of Antony doing them harm. This disagreement shows Brutus’ misunderstanding of the Roman people. Caesar has bound the love of the people to himself rather than to the city. Brutus thinks that the people will support the killing of Caesar if they know that Caesar was bad for Rome. He does not understand that the people now think Caesarian rule and Rome are inseparable.

At Caesar’s funeral Brutus argues that Caesar’s death was necessary for the survival of the Republic, asking the people “Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead and live all freemen?”⁷⁰ Brutus tells the people he loved both Caesar and Rome, but was forced to chose his greater love of Rome when the two came into conflict. He expects the people to arrive at the same conclusion. The theme of Brutus’ speech is the fact that the conspirators have not caused any offense. He does not discuss any way in which Caesar’s death can bring positive benefits to Rome. He cannot do so because he does not believe Caesar’s death will do anything other than preserve the Republic as it always has been. Removing the cancer does not give the body new abilities, it only ensures survival.

Brutus is similar to Coriolanus in his understanding of the Roman people. Like Coriolanus, he has a high estimation of their capacity for virtue. He believes the people are capable of putting aside their passions and acting disinterestedly for the good of Rome. Since the people are Romans, Brutus believes they will share his virtue. Coriolanus also believes the people were capable of exercising the highest virtue, although not to the highest extent. The two are different because Coriolanus believed the people should share his virtue, while Brutus

⁶⁹ Julius Caesar (3.1.262)

⁷⁰ Julius Caesar (3.2.24-26)

believes the people actually do share his virtue. Because Brutus has such a high opinion of the people, he does not think Caesar's death will be a significant departure from the normal course of events in Rome. He expected the conspirators would kill Caesar, explain their reasons to the people, and go home without any significant change to Rome's political situation. He is not concerned that the people will not accept their reasons because he thinks the citizens will view the situation with the same disinterested patriotism he does. He does not expect the citizens to be swayed by either their own self-interest or the reputation of the speaker. Therefore, he is just as equipped to give the people the reasons for Caesar's death as Cicero would have been, making Cicero's involvement superfluous.

The plebeians do not understand Brutus' speech. They are impressed by his promise to die for his country and propose to make him Caesar. Now that Caesar is dead, the people's main concern is finding another man who can rule them in the same way. Although they are not yet mourning Julius Caesar's death, they now believe Rome ought to have a Caesar and, since the first Caesar is dead, they need someone else to fill that role. Once Brutus leaves, the plebeians discuss his speech and arrive at the conclusion that "This Caesar was a tyrant."⁷¹ Again they are using Caesar as a title rather than a name and, although they agree Julius Caesar was a tyrant, they still wish to make Brutus a Caesar because they think he would be a better Caesar. They are not concerned with freedom. Instead they hope to live under a Caesar who treats them well.

Mark Antony is able to turn the people against the conspirators because he knows them much better than Brutus. He knows they want a Caesar who will make their lives as comfortable as possible. Therefore, he does not need to convince the people Julius Caesar was not ambitious. Instead, he must convince them Julius Caesar was a kind and generous Caesar. He does this by

⁷¹ Julius Caesar (3.2.76)

reminding them of the services Caesar has performed for the plebeians, culminating in the reading of Caesar's will, in which he gave each citizen seventy five drachmas. Finally, Antony also acknowledges that Caesar is now a permanent political office in Rome, lamenting that "Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?"⁷² Rome's only political question now is who will be Caesar and what kind of Caesar that person will be. Antony successfully convinced the people Julius Caesar was an extraordinarily good Caesar, which causes them to seek revenge on the men who deprived them of that Caesar.

Following Antony's speech they seek this revenge as an indiscriminate mob, killing Cinna the poet for sharing a name with one of the conspirators. Unlike in *Coriolanus*, the citizens are unable to differentiate who is a threat to them and who is not. The citizens in *Coriolanus* believe Caius Martius is a threat to their freedom and work against him, but only against him. None of them even suggest harming his friends or family. In *Julius Caesar*, however, the crowd is not motivated by careful calculation of their own self-interest but rather a passion for revenge. This is the last appearance of the crowd in the play. They play no significant role in the following struggle between Antony and the conspirators. They become irrelevant because they have lost their capacity for rational political action.

At Caesar's funeral the life of the republic is extinguished. Before the funeral, revival of had been uncertain but this funeral represented the best opportunity Brutus had to save the republic. He had an opportunity during his speech when he convinces the crowd that "This Caesar was a tyrant."⁷³ He needed to seize this moment and promise the people a restoration of republican government to protect them from tyrants. Instead, Brutus walks away because he

⁷² *Julius Caesar* (3.2.266)

⁷³ *Julius Caesar* (3.2.76)

misunderstood the nature of the Roman people. He thought convincing them Caesar was a tyrant would be enough because he believed they would abhor tyranny and naturally think the republic was the alternative. He does not worry that the people could love Caesar once they knew he had been a tyrant so he leaves and gives Antony the opportunity to manipulate the people. Antony makes no attempt to refute the claim that Caesar was a tyrant. Instead, he argues that Caesar's rule brought good things to the people. He appeals to their passions rather than their republican virtue, killing off the best chance to save the republic.

Antony was not trying to save or destroy the republic. Instead he was attempting to avenge the great injustice of Caesar's murder. Caesar was Rome's greatest general and brought it grand and extravagant benefits. His assassination was therefore base and un-Roman. He claims in his funeral oration that, if he had Brutus' power of oration he would "ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue/In every wound of Caesar that should move the stones of Rome to rise and mutiny."⁷⁴ Antony believes the assassination of Caesar was such a heinous action that it should shake the city of Rome to its foundation. It was just that Caesar ruled Rome, both because he deserves it due to his virtue and because the rule of such a man would be good for Rome. The conspirators acted jealously and deprived Rome of this great man. Such an action cannot be justified on the grounds that it was good for Rome. Rome is a good city because it can produce men like Julius Caesar and because such men can rule in Rome. By slaying the man who had earned his place at the forefront of Roman society the conspirators acted contrary to the nature of their city.

⁷⁴ Julius Caesar (3.2.241.243)

In the next scene, Antony, Octavian⁷⁵, and Lepidus create a proscription list including relatives of both Antony and Lepidus. When Octavian suggests Lepidus' brother must die, Lepidus does not protest, but only insists Antony's nephew also die. These are not honorable battlefield deaths. They are condemning their relatives to die traitor's deaths as enemies of Rome. Neither Antony nor Lepidus has Volumnia's sense of familial honor. Volumnia understood honor to be a high end only achievable in the service of Rome and the honor or dishonor so achieved fell upon the entire family. Antony and Lepidus seem entirely unconcerned about their family's honor, which is how they can consent to the dishonorable deaths of their close relatives so easily. Fame and power have eclipsed honor as the principle of action for these prominent Romans. These passions are much more dangerous to Rome. Men who are passionate about honor know they can only achieve it by service and loyalty to their country. Therefore they will not engage in rebellion or undermine the foundations of the republic. Fame and power, however, can be achieved by tearing down institutions just as easily as by maintaining them. Since fame is held individually, Antony and Lepidus are able to condemn their relatives to dishonorable deaths without hesitation.

When Brutus and Cassius plan for the war with Antony and Octavian, Brutus is in an uncharacteristically bad temper. It is revealed later in the scene that Portia had recently killed herself, which is at least partially the cause of his bad temper. It is possible, however, that the tragedy of Portia's death compounded existing frustration about the effects of Antony's speech. Although he did not witness the speech, he must have observed its results. Antony turned the crowd against the conspirators, thereby disproving everything Brutus once believed about them. This would have been highly disappointing to him due to the political consequences but it also

⁷⁵ To avoid confusion with Julius Caesar, this character will be referred to as Octavian throughout, even after he takes the title of Caesar.

would have upset him personally. Brutus had spent years cultivating a reputation for honor and Antony quickly showed the people did not care about this reputation. Worse, Antony mocked Brutus' honor. It would have been better for Brutus if Antony had denied his honor altogether. This claim could be evaluated based on Brutus' actions and he would have the opportunity to vindicate himself. Instead, Antony bases his argument on the claim that honor does not matter and the people believe him. This demonstrates to Brutus that everything he believed about the Roman people was wrong.

During an argument with Cassius, Brutus claims that Cassius' threats "Pass by me as the idle wind/ which I respect not."⁷⁶ This language is remarkably similar to Caesar's when he denied Cimber's petition to allow his brother to return "I could be well moved, if I were you/If I could pray to move, prayers would move me."⁷⁷ Both Brutus and Caesar claim to be unmoved by forces that would move an average man. They are immune to the forces of fear and pity because both believe Rome requires them to be. Brutus claims he can ignore Cassius' threats because he is "armed so strong in honesty."⁷⁸ Both Brutus and Caesar think they are acting solely for the good of Rome. Despite this similarity, they end up on opposite sides in the great conflict for the fate of Rome. They are similar in their view of their own actions, however, they differed greatly in their understanding of the state of the Roman people. Caesar wants to act for the best interest of Rome and thinks he must rule the people as their superior in order to do so. He brags that he is immune to fear and "constant as the north star," suggesting that he thinks the people lack these virtues and therefore cannot govern themselves. Brutus believes the people are still capable of governing themselves, meaning that Caesar represents a usurpation of the proper Roman order.

⁷⁶ Julius Caesar (4.3.77-78)

⁷⁷ Julius Caesar (3.1.64-65)

⁷⁸ Julius Caesar (4.3.76)

After Caesar is attacked in the Senate, his last words are “Et tu Brute?--Then fall Caesar.”⁷⁹ He does not mention any of the other conspirators because he is not personally disappointed in any of them. He already knew Cassius was an ambitious and petty man but he thought Brutus was noble. Brutus is the only other Roman who cares more about the common good than his own private gain. Therefore, Caesar is baffled by Brutus’ presence in the conspiracy because he thinks the conspirators must be acting from their own selfish interest. Therefore, this line indicates Caesar’s surprise and disappointment in Brutus.⁸⁰

The other cause of Brutus’ anger is the recent death of his wife Portia, who killed herself in despair of Antony and Octavian’s growing power. However, shortly after revealing this he pretends to be surprised when one of his generals informs him about Portia’s death. This allows Brutus to put on a show of Stoic indifference to the news, saying “Why, farewell, Portia. We must die Messala/With meditating that she must die once/I have the patience to endure it now.”⁸¹ He immediately moves on to making plans for the war with Antony and Octavian. This performance would have given those present the impression that Brutus was a serious, dedicated man; willing to put the good of his country over his own private tragedy.⁸² This is an extremely political move on the part of Brutus. Shortly after, he argued with Cassius about the best course of military action. The fact that everyone in the room had just witnessed what appeared to be a selfless dismissal of Brutus’ personal concern gave him much more credibility in discussing military matters. This seems like blatant hypocrisy from the man who earlier had claimed he was

⁷⁹ Julius Caesar (3.1.85)

⁸⁰ Plutarch’s account of Caesar’s assassination supports this interpretation. He claimed that Caesar attempted to fight off the blows from all the other conspirators but submitted when he saw Brutus’ sword drawn. Caesar was surprised and saddened by Brutus’ role in the conspiracy.

⁸¹ Julius Caesar (4.3.118-120)

⁸² Like Lucius Brutus, he has now proven his ability to endure the loss of a family member without emotion for the sake of Rome.

immune to fear of Cassius' threats because he was "Armed so strong in honesty."⁸³ Until recently, Brutus had believed his most valuable asset was his reputation for honesty and nobility. However, at Caesar's funeral Mark Antony had clearly demonstrated this reputation did not have as much sway over the people as Brutus had believed. This leaves Brutus much less politically powerful than he believed. In order to remedy this he could either abandon any pretense of honesty and pursue power by taking bribes and stealing money or he could work to strengthen his virtuous reputation. He choose the second option, which may seem dishonest at first but, under the circumstances this was the more honest route he could have chosen.

Brutus is haunted by the death of Caesar in a way none of the other conspirators are. This may be because he was the only one who thought Caesar was noble. He did not share Cassius' envy towards Caesar and instead viewed his death as an unfortunate necessity. The night before the battle, Brutus sees the ghost of Caesar appear to him. He does not recognize the ghost immediately and demands to know its identity. Caesar's ghost responds by claiming to be "Thy evil spirit, Brutus."⁸⁴ This evil spirit proclaims it will see Brutus at Philippi, suggesting that Brutus will die in battle. The sight of Caesar's ghost troubles Brutus. Although he still believes it was just to kill Caesar, he is distressed by the consideration that it might have been in vain. He killed Caesar to save the republic and still believes the republic can be saved. However, if he loses at Philippi, the republic will fall even though Caesar was killed.

Brutus had a great respect for Caesar's nobility, asking Cassius "Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake."⁸⁵ Brutus still has not made any distinction between the man Julius Caesar and the title of Caesar which that man tried to assume, calling him Julius, which not even

⁸³ Julius Caesar (4.3.76)

⁸⁴ Julius Caesar (4.3.325)

⁸⁵ Julius Caesar (4.3.20)

Calpurnia or Mark Antony do. This initially conveys that Brutus had a close personal relationship with Caesar but it is hard to imagine that he would have had a closer relationship than either Antony or Calpurnia. The familiarity with which Brutus speaks of Caesar is likely caused by the fact that these are the two characters most similar in soul. Both believe Rome required them to save it by their own actions and both believe this requires them to put on a facade of being above the normal failings of human nature. Caesar acts as if he is above the human tendency toward self-interest and Brutus acts as if he is more honest than human nature allows. This would explain why he viewed the death of Caesar as such a tragedy. Cassius hated Caesar because he was too great. Brutus viewed Caesar as a great man with a tragic flaw. This flaw necessitated his assassination, but Caesar's greatness made his death a regrettable event.

At the battle of Philippi, the restoration of the republic is already highly unlikely. At Caesar's funeral the conspirators missed their best opportunity to inspire the people to re-gain their republican virtue. Instead, they allowed Antony to cement an indifference to tyranny in the people's minds. The only hope for the republic now rides on Brutus and Cassius defeating Antony and Octavian at Philippi, but, even if that were to happen, it would be difficult for them to restore the republic. Once they are defeated, however, the republic is beyond hope of restoration.

During the battle Antony's soldiers kill young Cato, the son of Cato the younger. This is the only battlefield death Shakespeare shows in this play. Cato is meant to symbolize the Republic, which meet its death at this battle. Before he is killed, Cato makes a bold declaration of resolve. This is wasted because the tide of the battle had already turned in favor of the enemy and Cato's bravery only leads to his death. Young Cato's last stand mirrors the actions of the

conspirators. Like Brutus and Cassius, he made a valiant stand for the republic, but like them he was too late and his resistance was futile.

Both Brutus and Cassius commit suicide in the final act. The order of their suicides reveal their different dispositions towards the republic. Cassius kills himself in the scene before Cato's death while Brutus does so in the scene following. If Cato's death symbolizes the death of the republic, Cassius despaired and killed himself while there was still hope for the republic. Brutus, however, only kills himself after the death of Cato and the republic. He had no other choice. He cannot live to be a prisoner and captive in Rome and he cannot live outside of Rome. Unlike Coriolanus, who is able to leave Rome when the people turn against him, Brutus needs to be in Rome to live well. This is the downfall of his moral system which places the good of his city as the highest moral action. Brutus does not know what to do when he can no longer be a good citizen of Rome. Coriolanus, however, is able to turn his back on Rome, saying that "There is a world elsewhere."⁸⁶ His understanding of virtue is not tied to a particular city so he is able to respond to the loss of that city in a way Brutus is not.

When they learn of Brutus' death Antony and Octavian have greatly different reactions. Antony speaks poetically about Brutus' virtue and praises him for acting in "a general honest thought/And common good."⁸⁷ Octavian is business-like, giving orders arranging for Brutus' funeral. He lacks Antony's ability to appreciate republican virtue and to feel remorse at the death of a virtuous enemy. Octavian honors a different kind of virtue than Antony, which was demonstrated earlier in the play when they argued about the merits of Lepidus. Antony

⁸⁶ Coriolanus (3.3.165)

⁸⁷ Julius Caesar (5.5.76-77)

disparages Lepidus as “A slight, unmeritable man/Meet to be sent on errands.”⁸⁸ He thinks Lepidus lacks some of the qualities that make a man, comparing him to an ass or a horse, capable of following orders but little else. Octavian, however, defends Lepidus, calling him a “Tried and valiant soldier.”⁸⁹ Lepidus follows orders quickly and efficiently, which Octavian finds a virtue while Antony considers it a vice. Antony is passionate and thinks such passion is virtuous.⁹⁰ Anything else seems to him to be “slight” and not fully Roman. Antony recognizes Lepidus’ proficiency in following orders but despises him for it. Subjects in an empire follow orders for two reasons; fear or personal loyalty to the man giving the orders. The first of these reasons is cowardly, while the second is simply un-Roman. A citizen in a republic will follow orders but does so out of loyalty to the people of that republic rather than loyalty to any one man. A man acting for these reasons takes on the character of the Roman Republic, its history, its people, and its gods. These things animate his soul and make him seem to be a great man. By contrast, men like Lepidus act in ways that shrink their souls because they lack the ennobling influence of the Roman Republic. He is now solely a creature of Octavian who, even if he is a great man, does not come close to surpassing the Roman Republic in greatness. This is different from when Antony served Caesar. Although Antony followed Caesar’s commands he did so because he believed Caesar was acting for the good of Rome. He believed Caesar was the “noblest man/That ever lived in the tide of times.”⁹¹ Therefore, although he followed orders, he did so as a freeman. Service to the republic almost always takes the form of service to a man or group of men granted

⁸⁸ Julius Caesar (4.1.14-15)

⁸⁹ Julius Caesar (4.1.32)

⁹⁰ Antony’s passion for great and glorious enterprises was so great that Plutarch suggests it gave Brutus reason to believe he might join them after the death of Caesar “For he did not despair but that so highly gifted and honourable a man, and such a lover of glory as Antony, stirred up with emulation of their great attempt, might, if Caesar was once removed, lay hold of the occasion to be a joint restorer with them of the liberty of his country.” This might have been possible had Antony not held Caesar in such high regard. Antony could not join any attempt to restore the republic that began with the murder of the noblest man in that republic.

⁹¹ Julius Caesar (3.1 282-283)

authority by that republic. This demands citizens use judgement to determine which men have the capacity to lead the republic well. By contrast, an empire does not give subjects a choice about serving the empire. The question about whether the empire rule is good for Rome is not considered because the good of Rome and the good of the empire are inseparable

Antony honors Brutus because he was one of the last truly republican political actors. He honors Brutus above the other conspirators because he acted for the good of Rome while the other conspirators killed Caesar for personal reasons. Brutus was the last person in Rome capable of acting on political principle alone and Antony laments this loss. Now that Brutus is dead, Roman politics will become filled with men like Lepidus who, without any political principles of their own, look for orders to follow.

Chapter III: Antony and Cleopatra

“Let’s not confound the time with conference harsh. There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch without some pleasure not. What sport tonight?”

Unlike the previous plays, which open with citizens discussing politics, *Antony and Cleopatra* begins with two Romans talking about the “dotage” of Mark Antony. Previously, the important questions of Roman politics had been about the life of the city. These questions were inseparably connected to the important people in the city, but were also bigger than them. Now, politics is in the hands of a few men, making the temperament of those men much more important. It is hard to imagine the citizens in *Coriolanus* concerned that one man seemed likely to withdraw from politics because the city was always greater than any one man. As a member of the triumvirate, however, Mark Antony’s dotage is critically important.

This scene takes place in Egypt, a province of the empire, rather than in Rome, indicating that this play is about the empire rather than the republic. The city of Rome has lost geopolitical importance, as both Pompey and Antony threaten Octavian without attempting to control the city. Furthermore, the city no longer has moral importance. In previous plays citizens had a moral idea of what the city of Rome meant. For example, Cominius praises his men for fighting well by saying they fought “Like Romans, neither foolish in our stands/Nor cowardly in retire.”⁹² He encourages his soldiers to act more virtuously by appealing to a set of Roman principles because he believes they share those principles. Similarly, in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius orders his actions based on an idea that Rome once stood for something and ought to stand for it again, lamenting about “What trash is Rome.”⁹³ He is able to call Rome trash because he believes it should be something nobler. These kind of considerations are absent from *Antony and Cleopatra*.

⁹² *Coriolanus* (1.6.3-4)

⁹³ *Julius Caesar* (1.3.112)

In Egypt, Antony has become so infatuated with Cleopatra that distractions from Rome irritate him.⁹⁴ This is due both to Cleopatra's stunning beauty and political changes in Rome since the death of Julius Caesar. Since the defeat of Brutus and Cassius, Antony is subordinate in Rome in a way he was never subordinate under the republic. Although he took orders under Julius Caesar he did so as a free man who recognized Caesar's virtue and freely chose to follow him. Under the empire Antony is still one of the most powerful men in the world. However, he is no longer free and must follow Octavian's orders as one who is unalterably inferior.

Despite Egypt's charm, Antony still wants to be a Roman. He recognizes he has been enchanted by Egypt and struggles to break free from her spell "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break/Or lose myself in dotage."⁹⁵ He says this in Cleopatra's absence and it directly contradicts what he said in her presence. When she is present he rejoices in his vanity "Let's not confound the time with conference harsh/There's not a minute of our lives should stretch/Without some pleasure now."⁹⁶ However, when he is removed from her enchanting presence he recognizes that this attitude is foolish.

Elsewhere, Pompey⁹⁷ is gathering strength for a rebellion against the triumvirate. Upon hearing that Pompey is gaining popularity among the people, Octavian expresses his disparaging view of the Roman people "This common body/Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream/Goes to, and back, lackeying the varying tide/To rot itself with motion."⁹⁸ Like Coriolanus, he despises the people for their political inconstancy. However, he does not share Coriolanus' belief that the

⁹⁴ When a messenger arrives from Rome in the first scene, Antony tersely responds "Grates me. The sum" (1.1.18). Hearing this news was an unpleasant necessity he wished to finish as quickly as possible.

⁹⁵ Antony and Cleopatra (1.2.111.112)

⁹⁶ Antony and Cleopatra (1.1.45)

⁹⁷ This is Sextus Pompey, the son of Pompey the Great who Caesar defeated before the beginning of the previous play

⁹⁸ Antony and Cleopatra (1.4.45-48)

people could be better. Coriolanus compared the people to hares that should be lions. Octavian has a much lower view, comparing them to a flag upon a stream that lacks any power to control its motion. Such a flag can only escape destruction if some outside force directs and protects it. During the course of the play Octavian will attempt to become that force.

Although Pompey was one of the last forces opposed to Octavian, he was not a principled defender of the republic and quickly makes a timid peace with the triumvirate. He does not even attempt to use his naval advantage to negotiate a more favorable peace, instead he is content to be an errand runner for Caesar, just like Lepidus. He is swayed by this temptation to make peace with the empire because it offers the appearance of peace and security. Since he was fighting for personal, rather than principled, motives, he can be bought off by an easy peace. The war he was fighting was petty and he was not willing to undergo great risks for it. This is a result of politics becoming more personal in the age of empire. Personal conflicts can sometimes be reconciled much easier than opposing political principles. Brutus believed that he was fighting for an important political principle and therefore could not compromise with Antony and Octavian. Pompey was not fighting for any principles and did not want to die for his cause. When offered a way to avoid conflict, he is therefore willing to accept and able to drink with Antony and Octavian as friends in the evening.

Octavian, however, does not enjoy the festivities because drinking impairs his mental capacity “I could well forbear-t/Its monstrous labor when I wash my brain/And it grows fouler.”⁹⁹ He cannot allow his reason to be compromised because his work is unfinished. His goal of universal peace has not yet been achieved but none of the others present have ambitions nearly so large. Pompey gave up his only ambition which had been to avenge his father while

⁹⁹ Antony and Cleopatra (2.7.102-104)

Lepidus never had any ambitions of his own. Antony's ambitions are more complex but he does not desire anything close to the scale of Octavian's plan for universal peace. Octavian therefore refuses to let down his guard like these other men.

At this meeting of the triumvirate, they also agree to solidify their alliance with a marriage between Antony and Octavian's sister Octavia. This upsets Cleopatra as she knows she must prevent Antony from becoming enticed once again by Rome. She needs to keep Antony under her control for the future security and independence of Egypt. She manipulates Antony's resentment toward Rome to win more of his loyalty, mocking him for his new role as Octavian's errand runner. She knows that if Antony decides to remain a Roman he must leave her, just as Julius Caesar left her. Therefore, she must weaken Antony's attraction to Rome. She does not attempt to become Roman in order to earn Antony's affection but attempts to dazzle him with her beauty and power. When she appears to him, her beauty makes the rest of the world seem ugly "The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne/Burned on the water. The poop was beaten gold/Purple the sails, and so perfumed that/The winds were love-sick with them."¹⁰⁰ Her beauty was so magnificent that she lent beauty to the river and winds around her. This enchants Antony in a way no Roman could.¹⁰¹

If Antony were able to break Cleopatra's spell, marriage to Octavia would seem to solve many of his problems. It would allow him to escape the dotage of Egypt and live in Rome as a

¹⁰⁰ Antony and Cleopatra (2.2.193-196)

¹⁰¹ The overwhelming power of Cleopatra's appearance can be seen by comparing the way those who have not seen her talk about her with those who have met her. Agrippa, a Roman who had never seen Cleopatra, believes Antony could easily leave Cleopatra. Agrippa thinks Antony's attraction can be explained entirely as lust. Julius Caesar, unlike Mark Antony, was able to leave Cleopatra entirely for the sake of Rome and Agrippa expects Antony will imitate Caesar. Enobarbus has seen Cleopatra so he understands Antony's attraction to her is much stronger than Agrippa estimates "Never he will not [leave her]/Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale/Her infinite variety/Other women cloy/The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry/Where she most satisfies." Enobarbus might believe Antony is affected by lust but he believes it is an extraordinarily powerful lust that will be impossible to break.

respectable citizen. Octavia is expected to make Antony forget Cleopatra “If beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle/The heart of Antony, Octavia is/A blessed lottery to him.”¹⁰² However, Octavia’s virtues bore Antony. Her beauty cannot rival Cleopatra’s stunning, goddess-like appearance. Antony also does not care for her wisdom. He wants rapid and decisive action, not the caution which wisdom might urge him to exercise. When he learns of Caesar’s death he does not carefully consider how he ought to act in this situation. Instead he chose to “Cry ‘Havoc!’ and let slip the dogs of war.”¹⁰³ This is an impulsive rather than a wise action. Finally Octavia’s modesty would probably appeal to Antony the least of all. When he “let(slip the dogs of war” in the wake of Caesar’s death he was not acting moderately. When he proclaims he wishes to spend the rest of his life in constant pleasure¹⁰⁴ he is being equally immoderate. In both peace and war Antony is uninterested in moderation. Therefore Octavia’s virtues do not appeal to him in any way.

Antony’s unbreakable attraction to Cleopatra is possible because he is disillusioned with Rome. He had been following the most glorious man in Rome, which allowed him to win glory for himself in Caesar’s service. After the assassination he had a great task in avenging the death of the noblest man who ever lived. Once Brutus and Cassius are defeated, however, the world seems stale without Caesar. No other man in Rome comes close to matching Caesar’s virtue. Furthermore, he has reason to doubt any man like Caesar could rise again. Caesar’s assassination showed his fellow Romans did not want to tolerate great men to rise. This showed him Rome was much baser than he first believed and meant that he would not be able to return to Rome. He loves Rome because it produces great men like Caesar. This makes him more of a republican

¹⁰² Antony and Cleopatra (2.2.243-245)

¹⁰³ Julius Caesar (3.1.299)

¹⁰⁴ Antony and Cleopatra (1.1.46-47)

than he realizes. Antony is a lover of the kind of men the republic produces but does not realize until too late that it was the republic that produced these great men. His time serving under Julius Caesar left an imprint on his soul that he refuses to let go of. He believed that Caesar was noble and that by serving Caesar he was acting nobly as well. After Caesar's death he longs for such nobility but can no longer find it in Rome.

Since he does not understand the connection of the republic to the cultivation of great men, Antony does not understand why Rome is now devoid of them. This leaves him discontented with Rome as there is nothing left to capture his imagination. The city had become filled with men like Lepidus rather than men like Brutus and Caesar. He is therefore left to look for something to capture his imagination outside of Rome and he finds it in Cleopatra. Cleopatra captures Antony's imagination because, like Caesar, she seems to transcend humanity. Caesar was god-like in his nobility and Cleopatra is god-like in her beauty. These virtues capture Antony's imagination and blind him to these people's flaws. He thinks that loving Cleopatra might therefore be glorious in the same way serving under Caesar was. This is difficult for him because loving Cleopatra is incompatible with loving Rome. This is much different than his love of Caesar, which complemented his love of Rome. He could love Caesar because Caesar was the best Rome could produce and Caesar did good things for Rome. His love of Caesar increased his love of Rome because he loved a city that could produce such a man and his love of Rome increased his love of Caesar because Caesar's success benefitted Rome. Loving Cleopatra was different because it forced him to abandon his duties to Rome. This is partly because she is the ruler of a country whose interests were contrary to the interests of Rome and also because Cleopatra and Egypt are inseparably connected in a way that no Roman was connected to their city. Cleopatra refers to herself as "Egypt" because she views herself as the state of Egypt.

Nothing about the state of Egypt could be greater than Cleopatra. No good Roman had this type of relationship to their city. No Roman was Rome because it was a republic composed of all its citizens which made it greater than any individual citizen could be.

Antony is uncomfortable with Cleopatra's relationship to the state of Egypt because it prevents him from loving Cleopatra without also loving Egypt. He is hesitant to do this because the state of Egypt lacks the greatness of the state of Rome precisely because it is entirely embodied in one person. This limits the extent to which greatness can develop in such a state. Rome can produce great men because men are allowed to be as great as the city, which is a high ideal. In Egypt, the state cannot be greater than the ruler because they are the same thing. Therefore, no one can rise to be great and glorious in Egyptian society because they cannot rise above the level of the ruler. The Egyptians portrayed in the play are vain¹⁰⁵ and cannot be otherwise because their regime will not allow them to rise. An earlier scene showed a group of Cleopatra's attendants harass a soothsayer, desperate to hear him predict a good fortune. Citizens of a republic have little cause to consult a soothsayer because they are capable of changing their situation by their own agency. Subjects of an empire who desire to change their situation, however, can only hope for the favor of the emperor or the gods. Therefore, the words of a soothsayer become much more important.

Furthermore, subjects in an empire are not expected to exercise the same kind of judgement as citizens of a republic. They are expected to wait for orders to follow. Antony's time in Egypt trains him to treat obedience as a virtue as Octavian does.¹⁰⁶ During Antony's

¹⁰⁵ In this context vanity refers to petty triviality rather than narcissism

¹⁰⁶ This was not always how Antony treated virtue in subordinates. During the battle at Philippi, Antony showed he was capable of recognizing and honoring virtue in soldiers when he says of an enemy soldier "This is not Brutus, friend, but I assume you/A prize no less in worth. Keep this man safe/Give him all

conference with Lepidus and Octavian, Antony dismisses a suggestion from Enobarbus, saying “Thou art a soldier only; speak no more.”¹⁰⁷ Enobarbus protests, claiming that he spoke the truth, but Antony insists that “You wrong this presence, therefore speak no more.”¹⁰⁸ As the republic transitions into empire, even a respected soldier like Enobarbus cannot speak with Caesar and Antony. Enobarbus cannot talk because he is a subject to be commanded rather than a citizen capable of thinking for himself. By silencing Enobarbus, Antony adopts Octavian’s view of virtue and abandoning his traditional republican view. The highest virtue Enobarbus can now have is obedience and anything more is considered an offense.

As war between Antony and Octavian approaches, Octavian’s taunts goad Antony into fighting at sea, despite his superiority on land. He risks his entire future on a battle in which he knows he is undermatched because he thinks he can overcome Caesar’s advantage at sea by relying on Cleopatra’s Egyptian fleet. This strategy fails because Cleopatra is a poor military commander. She orders her fleet to retreat from a winnable battle, which causes Antony to follow her out. He retreats because he overestimated the military implications of her divine beauty. He thinks of Cleopatra as a goddess on earth. As a goddess she must be superior to men in all ways, including her military judgement. It is inconceivable to Antony that a woman like Cleopatra would be inferior to a man like Octavian in any way.

After the battle, Antony recognizes his behavior was shameful “Hark, the land bids me tread no more upon’t/It is ashamed to bear me.”¹⁰⁹ When Cleopatra returns, however, Antony justifies his retreat on account of his love for her “thou know'st too well/My heart was to thy

kindness. I had rather have/Such men as my friends than my enemies” (5.4.27-30) Even though this man had a much lower rank than Antony he was able to recognize and honor him for his courage.

¹⁰⁷ Antony and Cleopatra (2.2.109)

¹⁰⁸ Antony and Cleopatra (2.2.111)

¹⁰⁹ Antony and Cleopatra (3.11.1-2)

rudder tied by the strings.”¹¹⁰ He dismisses the disaster of the battle on account of his passion for Cleopatra “Give me a kiss/Even this repays me.”¹¹¹ Antony’s shame is caused by the lingering influence of Rome on his soul. He knows he behaved in a way that no true Roman should. Romans like Coriolanus, Brutus, and Julius Caesar were all able to put aside personal concerns to act nobly. He, however, is unable to do this because the lure of Cleopatra is too strong.¹¹²

Antony discovers the next day that Enobarbus had abandoned him for Octavian. He laments the fact that “My fortunes have/Corrupted honest men”¹¹³ and orders Enobarbus’ treasure to be sent after him. It is hard to explain Enobarbus’ departure on any principled grounds. It seems he fled because he sensed Antony was likely to be defeated in the upcoming battle and his own personal fortunes would fare better with Octavian. However, it does not make sense that a man pursuing his own fortune would abandon all his treasure upon leaving Antony’s army. There must be some principle he believed he was acting upon. It is likely that he defected because recent events had led him to believe Antony was not worthy of commanding soldiers. Enobarbus does not become vain in Egypt as Antony does. Like Antony, his soul is still attached to Republican Rome. Unlike Antony, however, he is not enchanted by Cleopatra, which allows him to be attached fully to Rome with the distractions offered by Egypt’s pleasures. Earlier in the play when Cleopatra’s servants are pressing the soothsayer for information about their fortunes

¹¹⁰ Antony and Cleopatra (3.11.57-58)

¹¹¹ Antony and Cleopatra (3.11.72-73)

¹¹² The love portrayed in this play is much different than in *Julius Caesar*, where Portia earns Brutus’s love and confidence by her bravery and forbearance. Portia gave herself a wound in the thigh and hid it from her husband to prove she had the strength of a man. Portia is able to win over her husband by manly courage, as a Roman woman should. Cleopatra appeals to Antony because she is not a Roman woman. He is weary of Rome and is now primarily concerned with finding amusement, which Cleopatra provides. The Roman part of his soul recognizes this tendency as a vice but he ultimately chooses Cleopatra over Rome.

¹¹³ Antony and Cleopatra (4.5.16-17)

he does not participate, saying rather that his fortune would be to go to bed drunk.¹¹⁴ He still believes men are in control over their own fates. He does not need to consult a soothsayer because he already knows that drinking causes him to get drunk.¹¹⁵ Since he does not participate in the vanity that takes place in Egypt, he remains more Roman than Antony. He is therefore unhappy with Antony's despair on the eve of his battle with Octavian. Antony expects to lose the battle and says to Enobarbus that "Perchance tomorrow/You'll serve another master. I look on you/As one that takes his leave."¹¹⁶ Enobarbus chastises him for his un-Roman despair "What mean you, sir/ To give them this discomfort? Look they weep/And I, an ass, am onion-eyed. For shame/Transform us not into women."¹¹⁷ These are the last words he speaks to Antony. He goes over to Octavian because he believes Antony has become too soft. When Antony proves him wrong by returning his treasure to him, Enobarbus despairs. He abandoned Antony because he thought that he lacked nobility and, by sending back his treasure, Antony demonstrated he did still have some nobility. He remained loyal to Enobarbus even though he deserted him for Octavian. It was him, not Antony, who truly lost his principles and he comes to believe that Antony is "Nobler than my revolt is infamous."¹¹⁸ This realization is too much for Enobarbus to bear and he dies of despair.

Before the battle Octavian briefly reveals his true intentions for the current struggle. He claims that "The time of universal peace is near."¹¹⁹ He desires to fundamentally change the human political life. The Roman empire extends across the known world and Octavian thinks he

¹¹⁴ Antony and Cleopatra (1.2.43)

¹¹⁵ Enobarbus holds on to the republican view of fortune explained by Cassius in *Julius Caesar* "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars/But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (1.2.147-148). Both Cassius and Enobarbus dismiss the role fate plays in men's life and believe that men create their own fortune.

¹¹⁶ Antony and Cleopatra (4.2.29-31)

¹¹⁷ Antony and Cleopatra (4.2.35-39)

¹¹⁸ Antony and Cleopatra (4.9.19)

¹¹⁹ Antony and Cleopatra (4.6.4)

can bring universal peace to it. This would require his government to soften human nature and temper the passions that cause discord and war. This universal peace requires the Roman people to lose all their power in government. Octavian thinks the people are inconstant and incapable of rational political action “This common body/Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream/Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide/To rot itself with motion.”¹²⁰ This constant motion is not conducive to universal peace. The only thing that can bring the stability necessary for universal peace is the rule of one man. He is therefore able to leave the forms of republican government intact as these do not damage the cause of universal peace so long as they are merely ceremonial.

Antony cannot live in this world of universal peace because there are no longer any opportunities for glory. Such a regime would be boring and un-Roman. Rome was virtuous because it produced glorious men like Julius Caesar and allowed those men to rise. In Octavian’s empire of universal peace there would be no opportunity for men like Caesar to rise because there would be no need for glorious deeds. This project requires a dulling of the passions of human nature. Under Octavian’s universal empire, Antony would not be a virtuous citizen. This empire requires men like Lepidus, who can efficiently obey orders. Such men will be virtuous under Octavian’s regime because they enable him to bring about universal peace. Octavian believes such peace requires the people to submit to the rule of one man. In order for such a regime to function it needs obedient men.

When Antony dies, Octavian is moved to weep. He is saddened because Antony was the only other man in the world who could challenge him “The breaking of so great a thing should make/A greater crack. The round world/Should have shook lions into civil streets.”¹²¹ He

¹²⁰ Antony and Cleopatra (1.4.45-48)

¹²¹ Antony and Cleopatra (5.1.14-16)

acknowledges that him and Antony could not live in the world together “We could not stall together/In the whole world.”¹²² Antony could not remain alive without impeding his desire for universal peace. Antony is a soldier, whose favorite god was Hercules. Such a man would never be content to live as a subject in a universal empire because there would be nothing glorious for him to do in that empire. Therefore, either Antony or Octavian’s empire must be destroyed.

Octavian, however, laments the necessary destruction of Antony because Antony was a “brother” and a “friend.” No other man in Roman could be a brother or a friend to Octavian in his empire because no other man could be his equal. His rule can only survive if he is clearly the most pre-eminent man in the world. If there was another man who appeared able to rule Octavian’s time of universal peace could not last. The death of Antony, therefore was a tragic necessity to prepare the world for Octavian’s universal empire.

Although the republic died in *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* represents the death of the last remaining republicans in Rome. Antony could not live without the republic, but did not know he needed it. His soul had been shaped by the republic so that he was too attracted to greatness and nobility to be happy in Octavian’s universal empire. Antony’s disillusionment with Rome in this play is essential for understanding *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. In these plays it is easy to overlook the republican virtues shown by both the patricians and, in *Coriolanus*, by the people, because they are often obscured by the more obvious vices. *Antony and Cleopatra* highlights these virtues by depicting a Rome devoid of them. Antony wants to follow nobility but after the death of the republic cannot find it in Rome and is forced to look towards Egypt in his attempt to find something noble enough to capture his imagination.

¹²² Antony and Cleopatra (5.1.39-40)

Conclusion

“O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason!”

These plays indicate that Shakespeare thinks republics demand too much virtue to be sustained indefinitely. However, permanence is a poor measurement for a regime, as no human regime lasts forever. The Roman republic ought to be judged by the virtues and vices it cultivated in its citizens. Although republican government demands much of human nature, it produces men capable of meeting those demands. *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* depict four virtues produced by the Roman republic: courage, patriotism, love of greatness, and love of liberty. *Antony and Cleopatra* occurs after the death of the republic and shows Rome devoid of those virtues. They have been replaced by characteristics more useful to the empire and cause the remaining republican-souled men to despair.

The republican virtues are obscured somewhat because Shakespeare presents them most prominently in excess. Coriolanus is brave, but loves courage inordinately and mistakes prudence for cowardice. Brutus loves Rome, but his love of Rome blinds him to the city's flaws and cripples his attempt to save the republic. Antony loves greatness but in such a way that causes him to neglect the needs of Rome. The people in *Coriolanus* love liberty, but are so jealous of their liberty that they nearly cause Rome's destruction. However, Shakespeare also presents us with examples of these characteristics expressed at the virtuous mean. Cominius is brave but not reckless and he exercises his courage for the good of the city. Volumnia is a Roman patriot but is also aware of the city's flaws. Menenius loves Coriolanus' greatness but not to an extent that causes him to discard prudence. The conspirators love liberty enough to assassinate Caesar but not so much that they cannot respect greatness in other men. These characteristics are necessary for the republican regime but threaten the republic when they

appear in excess. Shakespeare presents these examples of the excess in order to better illustrate the virtue. Men like Coriolanus and Brutus are rare. It is more common for these virtues to manifest themselves to a lesser extent that is more beneficial to the regime, as in the cases of Cominius and Volumnia.

Romans are courageous because they love their country and believe they have a duty to fight for it. Their patriotism stirs them to courage because they believe their actions can tangibly benefit their country. When Coriolanus is praised for his courage he claims it was nothing remarkable because all good Romans should do their duty for Rome “I have done/As you have done--that’s what I can/Induced as you have been--that’s for my country”¹²³ Romans are also more courageous because the regime cultivates a manly independence in its citizens. The regime is built on the assumption that there is an inherent equality among men. This equality is not manifested completely throughout the regime¹²⁴ but is strong enough that republican Romans do not think that one man can rule the city. This is because they believe that all men are capable of virtue. This makes men eager to prove their virtue and inspires them to fight courageously.

Similarly, Romans are patriotic because they believe their city is good and that their own personal good is advanced by advancing the good of the city. Rome earns their loyalty by allowing them to protect themselves from tyranny. The clearest example of this is Volumnia. She encourages Coriolanus to fight for Rome because Rome needs brave soldiers. Although she believed Rome was good and worth fighting for, she did not allow this patriotism to blind her to the political problems of the city. Unlike her son, she recognizes that not every citizen can be virtuous and urges him to act prudently in light of this fact “Pray be counseled/I have a heart as

¹²³ Coriolanus (1.9.18-20)

¹²⁴ This can be seen by the distinct differences between the plebeians and patricians

little apt as yours/But yet a brain that leads my use of anger/To better vantage.”¹²⁵ She believes that Coriolanus has just cause to be angry, but knows that the people’s jealousy is too strong to be disregarded. She is therefore a much more effective political actor than Brutus. He fails in his attempt to restore the republic because his love of Rome prevented him from recognizing how far the republic had already degenerated. His calculations were based on the faulty premise that the republic was fundamentally healthy.

In addition to patriotism, republican citizens have a passion for their own liberty. This causes them to be jealous of anything they perceive as a threat to that liberty. This is a healthy passion to have in a republic, as it can prevent the rise of tyrants. However, Shakespeare uses the mob in *Coriolanus* to show the danger this passion can present if carried to excess. Their love of liberty makes them suspicious of greatness and unwilling to allow Coriolanus to remain in Rome unless he flatters them. This foolish behavior nearly causes the destruction of Rome. By contrast, Shakespeare also presents a healthier love of liberty in *Julius Caesar*. The conspirators who assassinated Caesar do so because they perceive that he has an ambition to be crowned. This is different from the people in *Coriolanus* because they first take time to carefully consider whether Caesar’s ambition would cause him to become a tyrant “He would be crown'd/How that might change his nature, there’s the question...The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins/Remorse from power.”¹²⁶ They recognize that, by making the name “Caesar” into a political title, Julius Caesar is attempting to undermine the republic by becoming greater than the regime. They are passionate to protect their liberties but do so in a careful, reasoned manner. The mob is excessively jealous of their liberty and is leads them to take rash action they later regret.

¹²⁵ *Coriolanus* (3.2.36-38)

¹²⁶ *Julius Caesar* (2.1.12-20)

The final Roman virtue is a love of greatness. This seems contrary to the love of liberty but is needed to balance out that love. Republics produce great men because they allow virtuous men to become great. This is not inherently a threat to the regime because the regime is greater than any one man could possibly be. Thus, if the republic is functioning in a healthy manner, great men strengthen the republic. Roman citizens love greatness partly because they know great men are good for the republic but also because they have ambitions to be great. In an empire, this is not possible because men are not allowed to become great. This can be seen in Shakespeare's presentation of Egypt. Cleopatra and Egypt are inseparable, making Cleopatra the greatest height that Egypt can produce. Menenius represents the healthy manifestation of this love of greatness. He recognizes and honors Coriolanus' greatness, but never thinks Coriolanus is greater than Rome. Antony carries this passion to excess. He recognizes Caesar as the greatest man in Rome but allows his love of Caesar to cloud his judgement and helps bring about the destruction of the republic.

Despite these virtues, however, republics are always threatened by the inconstancy of the people and the ambitions of the patricians. Roman rulers need the support of the people, but it is hard for virtuous men to maintain the support of base people. Coriolanus angers the people because he expects virtue from them. While the patricians need to guard against baseness in the people, the people need to be vigilant for ambition in the patricians. Men like Julius Caesar attempt to rule without restraining the people. He assures them of his esteem regardless of whether they are worthy of esteem, removing their incentive to behave virtuously. His rule does not depend on the people's virtue, which undermines any chance for them to become virtuous. The people corrupt their leaders by rewarding this kind of behavior with political power and these leaders respond by ruling as demagogues, further corrupting the people. This causes men

like Octavian to despair of Rome's capacity for reason and establish a government capable of protecting Rome from itself.

Given this danger, it might seem reasonable to believe the best thing a Roman patriot could do was find one man who would rule well rather than tyrannically. This would suggest that the best course of action for Brutus and Cassius would have been to allow Caesar to be crowned. The problem with this is revealed in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Caesar ruled by dispensing material benefits in exchange for political support which won the love of the people to himself, rather than binding it to Rome. Once Caesar was dead, therefore, the people would look for another man like Caesar, not a republican restoration.

Although the people desire another Caesar, his death brings about an empire devoid of men like Caesar. Weary of the strife brought about by the people's inconstancy, Octavian seeks to bring about a government that rules peacefully without relying on their political judgement. Caesar performed glorious deeds and strove to earn the people's love through extravagant acts of generosity. This behavior would be detrimental to Octavian's empire. Men like Caesar provoke inconstancy by vying for the love of the people through glorious deeds. This creates inconstancy because glory invites challengers. Pompey previously ruled Rome on the basis of his glorious achievements but lost power when Caesar's glory eclipsed his. In order to bring peace to Rome, Octavian must shelter it from the tumult of great men rivaling each other for glory.

While Octavian clearly desires to create an empire, Julius Caesar's motives are difficult to ascertain. He seems to have an ambition to be crowned¹²⁷ but never directly undermined the

¹²⁷ This ambition is not revealed by Caesar himself. Instead, Shakespeare presents the ambition through observations of the characters around him. First, when reporting on Caesar's reaction to being offered the crown Casca observes that "He fain would have had it" (1.2.250) Secondly, Decius Brutus was able to use the suggestion of the Senate offering Caesar a crown to entice him to attend on the Ides of March.

republic. Regardless of his intentions, Caesar's action destroyed the possibility for future republican government in Rome. It would be unfair, however, to blame the republic's destruction entirely on Caesar. He was only able to gain power because the republic was already in a precarious state. Cassius observed that Caesar was only able to rise due to Rome's degeneration "Why should Caesar be a tyrant, then?/Poor man, I know he would not be a wolf/But that he sees the Romans are but sheep/He were no lion, were not Romans hinds" (1.3.107-110) Cassius' judgement about Caesar may have been colored by jealousy but his observation of the Roman people appears true. Their reactions to the funeral orations show that the people want to be ruled and are looking for someone to rule them. If they were not already base, Caesar's attempts to rule them by appealing to their base passions would have failed.

This suggests republican government is not sustainable over long periods of time. The forces that tend to the destruction of republics are strong and the qualities required in order to maintain republics nearly exceed the capacity of human nature. The rise of Caesar was inevitable. The temptation to gain political power through Caesarian rule is too strong to resist forever. Once some patricians indulge this temptation there is little that can be done to preserve the republic. Men like Caesar will be able to gain so much power by ruling as demagogues that they can only be stopped through extra-legal conspiracies, as Brutus and Cassius attempt to do. Caesar introduces a new kind of political rule to Rome, which allows one man to become greater than the city. The idea of "Caesar" transcends the man Julius Caesar and creates an office which the city can no longer go without.

Finally, Brutus also observes that Caesar "would be crowned" (2.1.12) While neither of these instances offer conclusive proof of Caesar's intentions, they do seem to suggest his ambitions were too great to be achieved without undermining the republic.

Shakespeare uses the failings of Brutus and Coriolanus to show that republics cannot fix the failings of human nature. It can produce men of great virtue, but cannot produce men free of vice. These men cannot be successful politically because they each lack prudence, but in each case this lack of prudence is caused by an excess of the virtue caused by republicanism. Republics cultivate great virtue in their citizens, but cannot create perfect citizens. Although Coriolanus' courage and Brutus' patriotism end up hurting Rome, Shakespeare uses these examples to paint a vivid picture of these particular virtues so that their absence in *Antony and Cleopatra* is more sharp.

Although republics are difficult to maintain and place high demands on the capacity of human nature, they are still more consistent with human nature than Octavian's universal empire. This empire cannot tolerate great men and stifles men of great passion and imagination like Mark Antony. Men like Brutus and Coriolanus would also not be welcome in Octavian's empire because it desires docile errand runners like Lepidus. Octavian's empire neither demands virtue nor tolerates greatness. The only life left for his subjects is one of petty vanity. Antony's unhappiness in Egypt suggests that such a life cannot be ultimately satisfying.

Furthermore, *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests that the empire will suffer from similar political evils as the republic. The problems in the republic are caused by the defects of human nature. Peace and security are threatened by the jealousy, shortsightedness, and cowardice of the mob and their leaders. These same vices create conflict in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Pompey nearly brings the entire empire into civil war because he possesses these vices. The instability of the republic, therefore, should be attributed to the flaws of human nature, rather than a flaw in the regime.

Shakespeare shows that republics can produce greater virtue than empires. They allow the people to participate in their government, which requires a certain level of virtue. By requiring that virtue, the republican regime asserts that men are capable of meeting that standard. This encourages men like Brutus and Coriolanus to strive for great virtue. Additionally, republics give their citizens a liberty not seen in empires that they become attached to and attempt to defend. However, Shakespeare also cautions supporters of republicanism to consider the difficulties of successfully maintaining a republic. He points out a dangerous flaw in republican government which allows men like Caesar to seize power by encouraging the people to act as a mob. The preservation of the republic requires the people to remain loyal to the city more than to any one man. Julius Caesar is dangerous to the republic because he attempts to make the people more loyal to their "Caesar" than the city of Rome. The funeral orations show the extent of this degeneration as the people are more concerned about whether Julius Caesar was a good Caesar than whether his death was good for the republic. They have conflated Rome and Caesar. There is now little hope left for republican Rome. The people are too ready to be manipulated by men like Mark Antony to govern themselves. This lack of virtue makes defenders of the republic look silly and encourages men like Octavian to look for ways to move beyond republicanism and govern Rome without the people.

Republics therefore can only last as long as the city remains more important than any one ruler. It seems impossible for any regime to stave off this danger indefinitely. However, this does not necessarily mean republics are bad. No regime in the history of the world has been able to last forever. The important question to consider, therefore, is not whether republics can last, but what kind of government they produce while they last. Shakespeare shows that, while republics

might not be permanently sustainable, they produce better government and more virtuous citizens.

Works Cited

Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins.. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2011).

Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom. 2nd Ed. (New York: Basic Books. 1991).

Plutarch, *The Lives of the Notable Grecians and Romans*. Trans. John Dryden. Ed. Arthur Hugh Clough. 2 vols. New York: Modern Library, 1992.

Shakespeare, William. *Antony and Cleopatra*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Shakespeare, William. *Coriolanus*. (New York: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 2009).

Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*. (New York: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 2009).

Author Biography

Josh grew up in Ypsilanti Michigan and graduated high school in 2013. At Ashland he majored in Political Science and History. He was an Ashbrook Scholar, an Honors Student, Vice President of Student Senate, and a member of the club rugby team. After graduation he will spend the summer working as a mountain bike instructor at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico while looking for a job in state government in either Lansing or Columbus.