
Some Comments on *Julius Caesar*

Keiko Kamei

The following comments are made on love between Brutus and Portia, and between Brutus and Cassius, and on Lucius. These scenes are not necessarily connected with the main plot of the play, but they produce a sort of atmosphere and give a wonderful effect to it. Maybe the materials which I take for criticism in this essay are too partial, but although I quite acknowledge that the process of Brutus' mind, Antony's character which can be particularly argued in regard to his wonderfully vivid and skillful mourning speech for Caesar, and Caesar's weak but arrogant mind and manner — these are very pertinent materials for criticism, nevertheless, I cannot but admire and be deeply impressed by these by-players, that is, Portia, Lucius and Cassius* as well as those main characters, Brutus, Antony and Caesar. I admire Portia as an ideal of a woman and a wife, I love Lucius because of his childhood-innocence, and, admitting his faults in various points, yet I am touched to the heart by Cassius' true and sincere love and respect for Brutus in the quarrelling scene. Three of these comments refer all to Brutus. It is mainly for this reason: although the play is entitled after that historical personage, Julius Caesar, Caesar himself quits the stage early in the climax scene of murder in Act III with the words, "Et tu, Brute?", and it is true that Caesar is much impressed on us through Cassius, Brutus and Antony. Indeed, as G. Wilson Knight says,* one of the main personal themes is the Brutus-theme, and here I dare to follow it rather than to follow the Caesar theme.

Love between Brutus and Portia

Portia expresses her love to Brutus by saying that he should go to bed if he is ill, or by asking what the cause of his grief is. These anxieties

* G. Wilson Knight says at the very beginning of his treatise 'Brutus and Macbeth' in *The Wheel of Fire* (Methuen, 1960): "From the crystal lucidity, even flow, and brilliant imagery of the style of *Julius Caesar* stand out two main personal themes: the Brutus-theme and the Cassius-theme."

are sufficient for us to know how deeply she loves Brutus, but its climax comes in the following speech:

Within the bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,
Is it excepted I should know no secrets
That appertain to you? Am I your self
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife. (Act II, Sc. i)*

This violent and bold expression tells a wife's anger and grief which is derived from a woman's desire to be her husband's half all the time. And this anger is not a wife's complaint which is the essential weakness and feebleness of a woman, but, on the contrary, it represents the strength and determination of a woman stronger than a man's when a woman confronts a crisis — because her love is pure and true. Indeed what we find and sense here is Portia's strength, that is, the revelation of a woman's true and sincere love towards her husband. In answer to this, from Brutus' lips drop words which convey no less beautiful love than Portia's:

You are my true and honourable wife,
As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart. (ibid.)

It seems to Portia, however, that Brutus only tries to appease her; words are words, and she must find out and verify the reality beyond words — she is not quite satisfied yet. And therefore, with dissatisfaction which renders more strength to her words, she still continues this high-toned speech:

If this were true, then should I know this secret.
I grant I am a woman; but withal

* The text I quote here is the Arden Edition, *Julius Caesar*, edited by T. S. Dorsch (Methuen, 1964).

A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife;
I grant I am a woman; but withal
A woman well reputed, Cato's daughter.
Think you I am no stronger than my sex,
Being so father'd, and so husbanded? (ibid.)

In this speech Portia's pride can be sensed so strongly — her being proud of her husband and father, which comes to this that she also takes pride in herself. The repetition of "I grant I am a woman; but withal A woman....." is the very effective touch to convey the strong tone of her determined mind and manner. Moreover Portia makes her husband astonished by telling him that she has injured herself in the thigh, because she wants to make him believe her firmness.

Seeing such a wife as is not afraid of anything if it is for her husband, Brutus is moved and exclaims:

O ye gods,
Render me worthy of this noble wife! (ibid.)

The fact that Brutus does not reveal his secret to his wife is not because he does not rely upon her, but because his love to Portia prevents him from involving her in the trouble. Thus, love takes various forms when it is revealed; however, such a sympathetic and considerate love cannot satisfy Portia. She is not a woman who can sit being warmed by such a love only. In other words, she wants to make their love equal — love which always receives, or love which always gives, either of them is incomplete. Even if tragedy happens in the end, two lovers can be relieved and satisfied if only they can recognize in each other the true love which receives as well as gives. So Portia must make severe trial of her resolution to attain to this kind of love. That is to say, it is not only for Brutus but also for Portia herself that she must give herself "a voluntary wound in the thigh" to ascertain that she is firm enough to bear such a love and is strong enough to be equal to her husband.

But Portia must confess her weakness some time later, when she says to herself:

O constancy, be strong upon my side;
Set a huge mountain 'tween my heart and tongue!
I have a man's mind, but a woman's might.
How hard it is for women to keep counsel! (Act II, Sc. iv)

I must go in. Ay me, how weak a thing
The heart of woman is! O Brutus,
The heavens speed thee in thine enterprise!
(Aside.) Sure, the boy heard me. Brutus hath a suit
That Caesar will not grant. (Aside.) O, I grow faint. (ibid.)

In this scene Portia becomes again a common woman after she has surpassed it. She is "no stronger than her sex". It is true, however, that Portia is still strong in spirit, but being short of might and power, she cannot bear loneliness and kills herself by swallowing fire. If Portia were really strong as she tries to be, which is shown in her speech, she might not lose her life before she faces Brutus' death. Though she tries to be so, it is beyond her power. If she lived and saw Brutus' death, Portia might be more perfect. In this sense, Portia is indeed a woman having common weakness of human being, which means that she is a real human being who is unable to have godlike completeness.

The same is true of Brutus. In the quarrelling scene with Cassius, it is clear that such cruel remarks are made from his shock at hearing about Portia's death, and it may seem worthy of rebuke that so cool-headed a man as Brutus can be upset in such a way. This behavior shows, however, that Brutus is not a god but a human being, and Shakespeare always creates a character in his play to be a living, real human being. The following scene shows very vividly the reality:

Cas. I did not think you could have been so angry.
Bru. O Cassius, I am sick of many griefs.
Cas. Of your philosophy you make no use,
If you give place to accidental evils.
Bru. No man bears sorrow better. Portia is dead.
Cas. Ha? Portia?
Bru. She is dead. (Act IV, Sc. iii)

In this simple tone of "Portia is dead. She is dead.", we cannot help perceiving Brutus' deep sorrow and grief. The simpler and shorter the comment is, the more is felt grief. And this same tone can be heard when Messala tells him Portia's death:

- Bru. Now as you are a Roman, tell me true.
Mes. Then like a Roman bear the truth I tell;
For certain she is dead, and by strange manner.
Bru. Why, farewell, Portia. We must die, Messala.
With meditating that she must die once,
I have the patience to endure it now.
Mes. Even so great men great losses should endure.
Cas. I have as much of this in art as you,
But yet my nature could not bear it so.
Bru. Well, to our work alive. What do you think
Of marching to Philippi presently? (ibid.)*

Cassius still seems to be absentminded being faced with this news. On the other hand, Brutus tells them to go back to consider the work which is their present concern. Perhaps Brutus implicates that the work which concerns the living is of more immediate importance than grief for the dead. Here again Brutus tries to subordinate private feelings to public necessities. Because no other reason than this has caused Brutus to assassinate Caesar. Many respectable persons in Rome trust in Brutus and call him "noble Brutus," for he is such a man of ideal as is true and honest to his own belief which is based entirely on the public welfare; and if someone undertakes what Brutus thinks no good "for the general", Brutus cannot forgive it, because it is against his belief, and Brutus will do his

*In this passage (to say exactly, from 1.186 to 1.194), there seems to be a discrepancy, for Brutus has already told Cassius of Portia's death. It is suggested that the discrepancy can be explained only by the supposition that the copy from which the Folio was printed contained two versions of the account of Portia's death, of which one was a revision, and that both were printed by mistake. The Arden text gives a full detail of it in the footnote.

best to prevent it, or he may kill such a person, if necessary, even though Brutus loves him dearly. For this reason he has committed the murder of Caesar who is his friend and has trust in Brutus so much as to put him into a terrible dilemma. The following soliloquy of Brutus tells his suffering:

It must be by his death: and for my part,
I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general. He would be crown'd:
How that might change his nature, there's the question.

(Act II, Sc. i)

It is his art of living all the time to subordinate private feelings to public necessities. And when Brutus says, "Why, farewell, Portia……Well, to our work alive.", there sounds a mourning speech for his wife, which is just fit for Brutus who pretends to be soldierly, and also fit for Portia who is clever enough to know that Brutus would behave so when confronting her death.

In conclusion, Brutus and Portia are harmonized with each other better than any other couple in the world of reality. No other woman is more suitable for Brutus' wife than Portia, and as for Portia's husband Brutus is the best person. They are combined in the region beyond romantic sweetness. And this combination is made firm by their sincerity and nobility.

Innocent Lucius, the Servant to Brutus

Several times Brutus asks Lucius to play the instrument for him. A boy and musician — the combination of these two things is wonderfully plotted when we consider that music calms our mind and gives us spiritual ease and innocence. Lucius serves his master very earnestly, but he is still a boy. He falls asleep at once with so innocent mind. There is born one dream, one mystic world, I should say, whenever Lucius appears on the stage. It produces wonderful effect in this play to set the world of child, angel, against the background of the murder and the war.

It is said that Shakespeare had a profound knowledge of music. That famous comment on music given in Act V of *The Merchant of Venice* is

one example, and here, it is a beautiful scene that by his master's request Lucius takes up his instrument and plays the sleepy tune:

Bru.
Canst thou hold up thy heavy eyes awhile,
And touch thy instrument a strain or two?
Luc. Ay, my lord, an't please you.
Bru. It does, my boy.
I trouble thee too much, but thou art willing.
Luc. It is my duty, sir.
Bru. I should not urge thy duty past thy might;
I know young bloods look for a time of rest.
Luc. I have slept, my lord, already.
Bru. It was well done, and thou shalt sleep again;
I will not hold thee long. If I do live,
I will be good to thee. (Music, and a Song.)
This is a sleepy tune: O murd'rous slumber!
Layest thou thy leaden mace upon my boy,
That plays thee music? Gentle knave, good night;
I will not do thee so much wrong to wake thee.
If thou dost nod, thou break'st thy instrument;
I'll take it from thee; and, good boy, good night.
(Act IV, Sc. iii)

“Good night” is repeated here with the word “gentle knave” and it is really a beautiful scene. Brutus’ gentleness and Lucius’ naivete are finely harmonized themselves into music in this passage. Lucius, not only here but always, appears on the stage with his sleeping figure; and then the master and the servant will repeat this beautiful scene all the time. First of all he is introduced in this play by Brutus’ saying :

What, Lucius, ho!
I cannot, by the progress of the stars,
Give guess how near to day. Lucius, I say!
I would it were my fault to sleep so soundly.
When, Lucius, when? Awake, I say! What, Lucius!
(Act II, Sc. i)

And as soon as he finishes what Brutus has asked him to do, he begins to sleep, and that very soundly, however limited time he may have.

Bru. Boy! Lucius! Fast asleep? It is no matter;
Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber:
Thou hast no figures nor no fantasies
Which busy care draws in the brains of men;
Therefore thou sleep'st so sound. (ibid.)

Lucius is innocent enough to be all free from the trouble of the world, and how enviable it is to Brutus! Brutus must make his soul clean by this boy and show very generous and kind feeling toward Lucius. Lucius is an angelic existence in this play. Shakespeare, who never forgets to insert such a character as Lucius in any threatening and critical circumstance and shows his generosity, whatever the crisis, really deserves the name "our myriad-minded Shakespeare".

Love between Brutus and Cassius

Brutus and Cassius are brothers-in-law. This fact makes us free from fear that these two contradictory characters may easily separate from each other. It may be said that Cassius is such a person as Iago in the play of *Othello*, because, like Iago, Cassius will accomplish his purpose by fair means or foul; and his purpose is the murder of Caesar, one climax of this play, and the means he tries to adopt for this purpose is to have Brutus work for the conspirators. Thus he begins nicely to take Brutus in:

Cas.
And it is very much lamented, Brutus,
That you have no such mirrors as will turn
Your hidden worthiness into your eye,
That you might see your shadow. I have heard,
Where many of the best respect in Rome
(Except immortal Caesar), speaking of Brutus,
And groaning underneath this age's yoke,
Have wish'd that noble Brutus had his eyes.

Bru. Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
That you would have me seek into myself
For that which is not in me?

Cas. Therefore, good Brutus, be prepar'd to hear;
And since you know you cannot see yourself
So well as by reflection, I, your glass,
Will modestly discover to yourself
That of yourself which you yet know not of.

.....

(Act I, Sc. ii)

Cassius knows how to instigate Brutus. Though Brutus has already been meditating what Cassius tries to persuade him to do, no doubt Brutus might not have acted without Cassius' instigation. Once Brutus acts, he becomes the leader. So Cassius has only to have Brutus act. Since Brutus is too noble to ignore the wicked hand spreading toward the general good, Cassius makes use of this point to persuade Brutus. Cassius has succeeded in it, for Brutus has made up his mind to murder Caesar "for the general". But how he is suffering! —

Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar,
I have not slept.
Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council; and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection. (Act II, Sc. i)

Brutus is too noble and sincere to be a person of practical mind. Indeed, he is defeated in the actual phases of human life. And Cassius, on the other hand, does everything from a self-centered view-point and seems to have Brutus perfectly under his control until Brutus becomes one member of the conspirators; however, he must be defeated also, because he cannot manipulate Brutus on the last point, that is, though more than once he advises Brutus not to give his confidence to Antony, he cannot force Brutus to obey him. There are two great mistakes that Brutus makes after

Caesar's death, his refusal to let Antony be slain, and his consent to Antony's request for speaking at Caesar's funeral; in either case of which Cassius has given the better judgement, but Brutus always insists on his opinion which his too noble mind has set up. Cassius is a "great observer",* and it is part of the tragedy of Cassius that he always knows what should be done, but allows himself to be overruled by Brutus. It is because Cassius loves Brutus deeply and respects him very much, which is entirely shown in the famous quarreling scene of Act IV, where we are much moved by Cassius' good nature.

In this scene, Cassius is described not as a person of political affairs, but as a person full of love and friendship, and therefore, there is no finding Iago's nature in him. Furthermore, we are inclined to love Cassius better than Brutus in this same scene; in his humble bearing and remarks to Brutus, nothing can be found except his love towards Brutus. There is something true that touches our heart in Cassius' distress at being trusted by Brutus no longer, which reminds us of an image of a stray sheep, and makes us sympathize with him :

Cas. Come, Antony, and young Octavius, come,
Revenge yourselves alone on Cassius,
For Cassius is aweary of the world :
Hated by one he loves ; brav'd by his brother ;
Check'd like a bondman ; all his faults observ'd,
Set in a note-book, learn'd, and conn'd by rote.
To cast into my teeth. O, I could weep
My spirit from mine eyes ! There is my dagger,
And here my naked breast ; within, a heart
Dearer than Pluto's mine, richer than gold :
If that thou be'st a Roman, take it forth.
I, that denied thee gold, will give my heart ;
Strike, as thou didst at Caesar ; for I know,
When thou didst hate him worst, thou lov'dst him better
Than ever thou lov'dst Cassius. (Act IV, Sc. iii)

* Caesar says : He reads much, He is a great observer, and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. (Act I, Sc. ii)

And Cassius continues expressing his lamentation in excitement :

Hath Cassius liv'd
To be but mirth and laughter to his Brutus,
When grief and blood ill-temper'd vexeth him? (ibid.)

The more Cassius loves Brutus, the more excited and stormy he becomes, so these violent remarks prove his sentiment well. And after their reconciliation, each of them retires to his own tent, saying :

Bru. Farewell, good Messala.
Good night, Titinius. Noble, noble Cassius,
Good night, and good repose.

Cas. O my dear brother,
This was an ill beginning of the night.
Never come such division 'tween our souls!
Let it not, Brutus.

Bru. Every thing is well.

Cas. Good night, my lord.

Bru. Good night, good brother. (ibid.)

Their speech is full of beautiful friendship and love, and "good night" is repeated here, which produces some effect in it. And it immediately reminds me of that impressive farewell scene in Act V:

Bru. But this same day
Must end that work the ides of March begun;
And whether we shall meet again I know not.
Therefore our *everlasting farewell* take.
For ever, and for ever, farewell, Cassius.
If we do meet again, why we shall smile;
If not, why then this parting was well made.

Cas. *For ever, and for ever, farewell, Brutus.*
If we do meet again, we'll smile indeed;
If not, 'tis true this parting was well made.

(Act V, Sc.i)

These refrains convey a very beautiful tone. "For ever" and "farewell" are especially touching my heart and it is a wonderful speech to say to meet again with a smile. Both sound and content of the speech are impressive enough to move our heart deeply, and it is indeed suitable and well made as a farewell speech of beautiful friendship. We are deeply responsive to Shakespeare's poetic soul, his spiritual music.

As is seen above, as for worldly business, Cassius, who is an actual, practical person, surpasses Brutus, but as for a matter of soul, Brutus is an elder brother, while Cassius a younger one. Brutus' love to Cassius is such a great one as mother gives to her child, and Cassius' love to Brutus is that which a child requests of his mother; in such a relationship, both of them are combined.