Modern Critical Reshaping of Shakespeare

Shifting Perspectives on *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* Among 20th Century Critics

by Kjetil Skjønberg Hansen
Advisor: Juan Christian Pellicer

MASTER'S THESIS IN ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES

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Preface

Almost four hundred years after his death, Shakespeare remains a dominant figure in world literature and theatre, far moreso than any other early modern playwright. To what degree is this seemingly everlasting impact created through a reshaping and reimagining of his works from modern perspectives? How do Renaissance viewpoints relevant to *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* compare to modern ones?

This thesis approaches these questions by looking at how different modern critics perceive themes in these two history-based Roman tragedies compared to how they were seen in the Renaissance, including the perspective of Shakespeare himself. The topics being looked at include: the tyranny debate surrounding Julius Caesar and Octavius/Augustus as representatives of empire, divine 'kingship' and autocracy, a discussion of how Shakespeare presents rebellion and democracy in *Julius Caesar* and an exploration of Shakespeare's racial presentation of Cleopatra. In addition, this thesis also features an extensive analysis of the relationship between Shakespeare and his main source for the two plays, Plutarch. These questions are presented from multiple angles and perspectives, including different views found among writers of classical antiquity, Renaissance authors, modern scholars and, of course, my own personal views formed from taking all these different perspectives into consideration.

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I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Juan Christian Pellicer, who has been a great help every step of the way in the development of this thesis. I would also like to thank all my friends and family for their encouragement and support.

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Introduction

This thesis developed from a fascination for the phenomenon of Shakespeare's apparent timelessness, and a desire to approach and find some answers as to why this seems to be the case. The entire project started with an inherent interest in answering the following questions: why is it that 'He [Shakespeare] was not of an age, but for all time!', as Ben Jonson wrote[1]? Why has Shakespeare become such an overwhelmingly central figure in world literature? How did he become almost the sole representative of Renaissance theatre to enter the realm of popular culture beyond his own age? Why do his plays to a significant extent dominate current Western theatre and film tradition, while other vastly influential early modern playwrights such as Kyd, Marlowe, Jonson and Fletcher are now rarely adapted on stage or film? For some reason, Shakespeare seems to transcend his own age and cultural context unlike any other Renaissance writer. He is by far the most adapted playwright on both stage and film. We also possess very little concrete information about his life, and this means that much of the image we have formed of him in our popular culture is to a large extent based upon his almost mythical status as the very archetype of artistic, poetic genius that has been shaped over the last few centuries. Thus, I was intrigued by how modern society's underlying mentalities and perspectives have shaped how Shakespeare is viewed in our times and how this compares to the mentality and views present in Renaissance society as well as the perspective held by Shakespeare concerning topical issues in his own contemporary English society as they are presented within the framework of his plays.

In the end, I chose to approach my questions in the following manner: by answering the question of the extent to which our current understanding of Shakespeare is shaped by modern cultural perceptions of tyranny, autocracy, rebellion and race. By specifically looking at modern critical reception and comparing it to what we can recover or recreate of the 'original', Renaissance context, I would be able to forge the necessary connection between early modern reception and current perspectives, and, in the end, find some answers as to how we have adapted Shakespeare from the source material and into our own cultural context.

[1] Ben Jonson, 'To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare. And What He Hath Left Us', in *Poems*, Ian Donaldson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 307-310; 309.

There proved to be one problematic aspect to this approach, though, namely the very apparent lack of material about Shakespeare's plays among his own contemporaries, coupled with a lack of concrete information about his life. In the end, I decided to choose a different approach, so that my analysis and conclusions could avoid being based on assumptions and speculation. I chose to base my approach on what we do have some written evidence of, namely specific and topical philosophical, religious and political debates documented during the Renaissance and thematically present in the Shakespearean works under discussion. By then analysing how Shakespeare presented such topics of debate and assessing what his views were, it became possible to make a comparison between perspectives on topical Renaissance themes in Shakespeare and the ways in which these subjects of interest are seen in modern times. In addition, this has allowed me to consider whether certain elements in Shakespeare are seen as more topical now than they were when the plays were written. Conversely, this process also allowed me to approach the question of whether any of the topics being discussed were seen as more relevant in the Renaissance than today.

In short, the following questions were raised: what are modern Shakespearean scholars interested in when reading his plays and is there a change in what themes and discussions are seen as topical? What emerged was an analysis and comparison of perspectives on certain topical themes among Renaissance writers, in Shakespeare's plays themselves and in modern critical discussions of his work. It was apparent that by making such a comparison between early modern and current views of these themes present in Shakespeare, one could at least partially answer the question of the reasons for the quality of timelessness that adheres to a significant number of his works. By considering in what ways and to what extent we apply our own cultural background to plays that were written during the English Renaissance, an age whose political and social backdrop was significantly different from that of our current age, I would be able to study and gain some insight into the inner mechanics of how perspectives regarding certain questions that have arisen in modern liberal democracies have shaped how we approach and view the Shakespearean canon.

Naturally, as I would hardly be able to produce anything of substance about Shakespeare's entire body of work as a playwright, I narrowed down my focus to two plays: *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. There are, of course, many among his plays that could have been approached with my questions, but I decided to focus upon the two greatest among the Roman tragedies for several reasons. One very important reason is that it provided my effort with arguably the broadest scope of historical context. As I compared modern

critical reception concerning certain questions that are of import to these two particular tragedies with regard to Renaissance viewpoints on these questions, I could also assess how both Shakespeare and Renaissance society as a whole approached the classical era. Moreover, the significance of ancient Rome as an influence on pre 19th century English literature cannot be overstated. The 18th century in particular experienced a tremendous influence from the great poets who lived during the reign of Augustus. The works of Virgil, Horace and Ovid of Augustan Rome became significant models of influence for the Augustan era of 18th century English literature. Another important consideration that contributed to my choosing these two tragedies dealing with Roman history is that since my thesis would deal with a change of perspectives in the Western world, it would be of considerable relevance to look at plays that dramatized historical figures who have had an impact upon our history that has been matched by few: Julius Caesar and his successor, Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire. Moreover, the concept of empire, with its close link to concepts such as autocracy, dictatorship and power, is a subject that is widely discussed in modern society, and these two Roman tragedies based on Rome's late Republican history also discuss these topics to a significant extent.

Naturally, there are many other plays written by Shakespeare that could have been included in the discussion. The entire body of the history plays as well as several tragedies (such as *Macbeth, Hamlet* and *King Lear*) discuss subjects related to power, kingship, tyranny and usurpation. This is even true of some comedies; *The Tempest* and *Measure for Measure* are perhaps the two most obvious examples. Overall, there are many plays that would be worthy and deserving of examination to see whether we approach such questions differently than what was the case with Shakespeare and his contemporaries. However, due to space limitations, I felt that making a thorough analysis of two plays that are closely linked to one another was the correct manner in which to approach these questions.

Likewise, realistically speaking, only certain aspects of these two plays could be thoroughly examined. There are so many fascinating dimensions and issues present in these two tragedies alone that discussing them all properly using my approach would be likely to result in several volumes. In particular, I would have liked to use my approach in looking at modern reception of Shakespeare to make a more in-depth analysis of the tragic hero of each respective play, Brutus and Antony. They are certainly both worthy of chapters of their own, but unfortunately, the space constraints of the thesis would not allow for this to be accomplished. The same holds true for many thematic aspects within both plays. In *Julius*

Caesar, my method could have been applied to many more underlying thematic elements, such as friendship, betrayal, social struggles, rhetoric as well as countless other subjects. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, I would in particular have liked to look at the mythical aspects of the two titular characters, the gender question that has been raised by some modern critics, as well as the rivalry and contrast between Rome and Egypt. Unfortunately, again, several topics of importance had to be excluded or given less space than they truly deserved. It is also likely that the reader of this thesis will think of at least quite a few other subjects that could or should have been included. However, due to the aforementioned limitations and the overall broad historical and political scope inherent in my thesis, certain very important aspects of the plays regrettable had to be sacrificed.

Another important angle that I, unfortunately, had to exclude is that of theatrical performance. Indeed, the great variety of ways in which Shakespeare is presented on stage is a significant part of understanding modern cultural reception of his work. Undoubtedly, the rich and well documented history of Shakespearean stage adaptation from the Victorian era until today is in itself a fascinating subject that would deserve being examined more in the context of what I have done in this thesis. Undeniably, a look at how the ideas and themes I have discussed are presented in modern stage adaptations would have enhanced and enriched my entire project. The same is true of filmic adaptations, such as the 1953 version of *Julius Caesar*, particularly by examining Marlon Brando's iconic performance in the role of Mark Antony. However, again, due to space restrictions and the vast amount of perspectives and aspects that would be worthy of inclusion, some choices and sacrifices had to be made in order to make space for proper analytical work.

Before embarking upon the subjects that lie at the heart of this thesis, however, I feel it is important to again point out exactly why I decided to compare the viewpoints of Renaissance writers with modern Shakespeare scholars. After all, an obvious point is that the latter write about Shakespeare, while the former do not. Would it not be more logical and feasible to instead compare early modern and current criticism on Shakespeare? The answer to this is that there is a significant lack of empirical data which can give us an idea of the reception of Shakespeare in the late 16th and early 17th century. There were, quite simply, not many people at the time who wrote about him. Despite there being a solid basis for critical opinion from the 19th century and onwards, details on Shakespeare's life and sufficient sources concerning reception of texts and performances from the Renaissance are scanty. In truth, the greatest paradox concerning Shakespeare is that despite his status as one of the

foremost literary figures in the English language, Elizabethan and Jacobean contemporary sources about him as a literary artist are sketchy. Despite his cultural significance, he is in some ways an enigma. Beyond the facts that he was a businessman, playwright, actor, one of the co-owners of the Globe Theatre and probably attended grammar school in Stratford, relatively little in any detail is known about the contemporary reception of his work and the details of his life. What we do have to work with, however, are several sources that give us insight into Renaissance mentalities and the issues that were central in the everyday lives of many of his contemporaries. Shakespeare's plays, in addition to exploring general human issues, also participated in many topical questions that were debated during his lifetime. Thus, analysing how Shakespeare presented and interacted with topical spiritual or political themes that were discussed during his own age, and thereafter looking at how modern critics of Shakespeare approach these subjects, proved to be a far more feasible method of answering the questions I had posed.

It is my hope and wish that this thesis can contribute to an understanding of how our readership of older literary classics is shaped by our current cultural and historical surroundings. My impression is that many modern critics of Shakespeare can be classified into two groups: one that finds the historical context of utmost importance and one that approaches his works from a more personal and subjective point of view. Both approaches are entirely valid, and both have resulted in the production of much excellent critical material. What I feel that I have accomplished, however, is to approach the plays in a manner that merges the historical perspective with in-depth individual interpretation and analysis of different critical approaches. Overall, I feel that when one studies an art form such as literature, perceiving the work in question from as broad a perspective as possible yields the best results. This is what I feel I have accomplished with this thesis. It could easily have been a product that only focuses on textual analysis or the socio-historical context of the plays, and there would be nothing wrong with such an approach. But as my desire was to produce a text that took into consideration as many perspectives as possible, including from the text itself, history, religious/philosophical writings and critical reception, all elements so central to the background of both the plays I have examined, I feel that I to a significant degree have managed to go beyond my own personal relationship and impression of the texts when evaluating them. Certainly, while my method has made the process more challenging, taking all these perspectives into consideration has vastly enriched and enhanced, even changed, the way I see and understand both Shakespeare and the two plays in question, *Julius Caesar* and

Antony and Cleopatra. It is my hope that anyone reading this thesis likewise will appreciate the scope and breadth of perspectives that have been included in order to reach the conclusions I have made. I also hope the reader will find that my comparison of Renaissance and 20th century perspectives concerning certain thematic aspects within *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* provides interesting discussion and insight into how the mentality and spirituality of the two eras differ.

In short, here are the questions I will look at in this thesis: the tyranny question concerning both Julius Caesar and Octavius/Augustus and the aspect of divine monarchy that is relevant to both characters. I will also examine the question of rebellion in *Julius Caesar* and the race question in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The Classical Sources and the Caesars

The main source we have for both *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* is *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by the Greek historian Plutarch. Since my thesis as a whole will focus mainly on Shakespeare's depiction of Julius Caesar and Octavius, it is therefore natural to examine the relation between Plutarch and these two characters in the plays. To answer the question of how perceptions of power, tyranny, rebellion and race found in modern Western society have altered our views of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, one must first create a discussion of how Shakespeare dramatizes Julius Caesar and Augustus in both these tragedies. What follows in this introduction chapter is a comparison and link between Shakespeare and antiquity by examining the sources he used, among which Thomas North's translation of James Amyot's French translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* in particular is a key component. Though this chapter uses Plutarch extensively, it will not be a historical examination of his work. Rather, my interest in Plutarch as far as this thesis is concerned is the huge influence his work has on the development of Shakesperean Roman tragedy. My aim is also to gain a perspective of how Shakespeare and Plutarch appear to agree and differ concerning Julius and Augustus Caesar, and thereby attain a more significant analytical insight into the underlying thematic significance of these characters. Moreover, my overall concern is to examine how Shakespeare converses with and relates to the historical debate surrounding Julius and Augustus Caesar that existed among classical historians. In addition, this chapter will serve as analytical basis for both the chapters that follow it, where I will look at both the Renaissance and modern critical reception in

greater detail. However, as I have previously stated, I will first look at the texts in relation to Plutarch so that I can properly include the classical perspective which Shakespeare based his Roman plays on.

First, I feel it is important to give the reader a brief introduction to the classical sources written about these two historical figures, the founders of the Roman Empire, texts which may (or may not) have indirectly influenced Shakespeare in the shaping of the Roman tragedies. In this regard, the most significant point to remember is that there existed no such thing as a common consensus among the Classical historians. Some, such as Paterculus[2] and Cassius Dio[3] were staunch imperialists, portraying Julius Caesar and Augustus as saviours of a decaying Rome. Others, wherein the most famous example is Cornelius Tacitus, were clearly anti-Caesarean[4], presenting the two as tyrannical destroyers of liberty. Others again held a more mixed and 'balanced' view. In short, the historical sources indicate only a 'consensus' (if you can call it that) of strong moral ambiguity to the character of both these important historical figures while also reminding us of how subjective experiences and thought deeply influence our view of the past, and the fact that healthy debate concerning their characteristics has been present ever since their own times makes it all the more possible for modern readers to gain a more realistic image of the two.

Regarding most of the ancient sources, we cannot be entirely sure as to which or how many of them Shakespeare actually read himself, but we do know that what Ben Jonson famously wrote in his elegy to Shakespeare: 'And though thou hadst small Latin, and less Greek'[5] is to be taken with a grain of salt, especially considering what constitutes great knowledge of Latin and Greek today compared to the Renaissance. Through the English grammar school system as it existed at the time, Shakespeare would gain what with modern academic eyes would be considered a very respectable amount of at least Latin. According to Martindale and Taylor:

> It is very likely that Shakespeare would have read at least some of 'Cato, Corderius dialogues, Aesop's fables, Tullies [Cicero's] epistles gathered by Sturmius, Tullies Offices, de Amicitia, Senectute, Paradoxes, Ovid's *Tristia* and *Metamorphoses*, Virgil. Also *Terentius Christianus*.[6]

[2] Geoffrey Bullough, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare V: The Roman Plays: Julius Caesar Antony and Cleopatra Coriolanus*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 3-57; 9.
[3] Bullough, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 15.
[4] Bullough, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of* Shakespeare, 12.
[5]Jonson, 'To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare. And What He Hath Left Us', 309.
[6] Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor, *Shakespeare and the Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

I will not go further into detailing or assessing Shakespeare's classical knowledge. Rather, it is time to look at his sources for the Roman plays, of which the most significant one is Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, which is a text written in Shakespeare's own mother tongue, English. It is from this text Shakespeare has taken the essence of many of his ideas and characterisations of the Caesars and their imperial legacy. Thus, to gain a strong basis on which to discuss the modern perspectives of Julius Caesar and Octavius as Shakespearean characters, one must first look at the relationship between Shakespeare and Plutarch to establish a basis for analysing Shakespeare' own ideas concerning his characters.

Shakespeare and Plutarch's Julius Caesar

Despite being the titular character, Julius Caesar has a surprisingly small part acting-wise in the tragedy that bears his name. From a purely theatrical point of view, more significant focus is placed upon the roles of Brutus (the tragic hero), Cassius and Antony. However, Julius Caesar and the concept of absolute power/tyranny versus Republicanism and democracy are at the very heart of the thematic essence of the play. Thus, it follows that a comparison between how Plutarch (or rather, North's Plutarch) and Shakespeare deal with such themes is in order; to properly compare and contrast modern Western views with what Shakespeare presented in the plays, an analysis of how Shakespeare relates to Plutarch must first be established in order to discover Shakespeare's view regarding the figures two now recognised as the founders of the Roman Empire. North's version of Plutarch describes Caesar's rise to power as follows:

> This notwithstanding, the Romanes inclining to Cæsar's prosperity, and taking the bit in the mouth, supposing that to be ruled by one man alone, it would be a good meane for them to take breth a litle, after so many troubles and miseries as they had abidden in these civill warres: they chose him perpetuall Dictator. This was a plaine tyranny: for to this absolute power of Dictator, they added this, never to be affraied to be deposed.[7]

In this extract, North echoes the idea of Caesar's ascent to the position of Dictator as a negative assessment of power, or 'plaine tyranny' as he calls it, thus establishing a link between Caesar and the darker aspects of autocracy. Whatever else one might think of Caesar,

[7] Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar,* trans. Thomas North, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare V The Roman Plays: Julius Caesar Antony and Cleopatra Coriolanus*, Geoffrey Bullough, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 58-135;77-78.

one can briefly establish that by some historians, Plutarch included, his rise to power is seen as a development towards tyranny and a certain degree of loss of liberty. However, Plutarch also discusses the reason behind Caesar's tyranny. As Schanzer writes:

> He repeatedly emphasizes that it was Caesar's flatterers who were mainly responsible for making him hated, and he lays the blame above all at the door of his *bête noire*, Mark Antony. 'To conclude, Caesar's friends that governed under him were cause why they hated Caesar's government (which indeed in respect of himself was no less than a tyranny), by reason of the great insolencies and outrageous parts that were committed: amongst whom Antonius, that was of greatest power, and that also committed greate faults, deserves most blame' (*Antonius*, pp. 10-11). This ill agrees with the picture of Caesar as the merciful Physician. Yet, however divided in his attitude towards Caesar, Plutarch's prevailing opinion seems to have been that his offences were committed under the influence of bad friends and against his better nature and that, although his motives were unworthy, his influence upon the state of Rome was largely beneficial.[8]

He is an autocrat, and in Shakespeare's play, there is a sense that the glory of an entire nation is now being cast upon a single man. Shakespeare establishes this connection between Caesar and the loss of liberty through the following speech made by Cassius:

> [...]Now in the names of all the gods at once,
> Upon what meat doth this our Cæsar feed,
> That he is grown so great? Age, thou art sham'd!
> Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!
> When went there by an age, since the great flood,
> But it was fam'd with more than with one man?
> When could they say, till now, that talk'd of Rome,
> That her wide walks encompass'd but one man?
> Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough,
> When there is in it but one only man.
> O, you and I have heard our fathers say,
> There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd
> Th'eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
> As easily as a king.'[9]
>
> (1.2.146-159)

In the mind of Cassius, as a Republic, Rome's walls encompassed the glory and greatness of many names and the participation of many people in the power structure. Now the collective glory of Rome is being cast upon one single man, giving birth to a situation that

[8] Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, 1966(Abingdon, Routledge, 2005): 13.
[9] William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, T.S. Dorsch, ed. (London: Methuen & Co, 1972), 16-17.

bears resemblance to the pre-Republican kings of Rome and the deposition of the tyrant Tarquin at the hands of Brutus' own ancestor. Though Cassius must not be taken as a representative for Shakespeare's voice (nor must any other character for that matter), he in this scene introduces the debate of Caesar's accumulation of power and the conflict between tyranny and freedom that is at the centre of the moral conflict that torments Brutus and ultimately leads to his choice to betray Caesar and, as follows, his own downfall.

Plutarch, though noting Caesar's tyrannical rise to power, also praises him for his personality and efforts:

> And now for him selfe, after he had ended his civill warres, he did so honorably behave him selfe, that there was no fault to be founde in him: and therefore me thinkes, amongest other honors they gave him, he rightly deserved this, that they should builde him a temple of clemency, to thanke him for his curtesie he had used unto them in his victorie.[10]

Plutarch's judgment of Caesar firmly falls somewhere in between admiration for him bringing peace and order to a state torn by civil wars stretching back to the days of Marius and Sulla, his clemency towards his enemies, and his general character. He does not, however, shy away from recounting some of Caesar's more tyrannical aspects, such as his persecution of Marullus and Flavius and his raging speeches against the people: 'Cæsar was so offended withall, that he deprived Marullus and Flavius of their Tribuneshippes, and accusing them, he spake also against the people, and called them Bruti, and Cumani, to witte, beastes, and fooles.'[11]

Thus, what emerges from Plutarch's descriptions of Caesar is a mixture of admiration and dislike. As stated by Ernest Schanzer:

> In Plutarch's attitude towards Caesar dislike and admiration mingle, much as with Cicero. The dislike comes out strongly already in the opening pages of his *Caesar*, when he tells us that 'Cicero, like a wise shipmaster that feareth the the calmness of the sea, was the first man that, mistrusting his manner of dealing in the commonwealth, found out his craft and malice, which he cunningly cloaked under the habit of outward courtesy and familiarity' (pp. 5-6). He makes it clear that for him Caesar's chief fault lay in his devouring ambition. In the *Marcus Antonius* he comments: 'But to say truly, nothing else moved him to make war with all the world as he did, but one self cause, which first procured Alexander and Cyrus also before him: to wit, an insatiable desire to reign with a senseless covetousness to be the best man in the world' (pp. 9-10). And in the *Caesar* he tells us: 'But the chiefest cause that made him mortally hated was the covetous desire he had to be called king: which first

[10] Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, 78.
[11] Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, 81.

> gave the people just cause and next his secret enemies honest colour, to bear him ill will' (p. 90).[12]

Both these aspects of Caesar, the honourable, benevolent ruler and the tyrant who desires kingship for himself, are also present in Shakespeare's tragedy. In embracing this ambiguity, Shakespeare creates a difficult conflict for his Brutus character, one torn between his desire to protect the Republic and admiration for Julius Caesar, the man who forgives his enemies and offers them his friendship and who has shown extensive generosity to Brutus, Antony and many others among his friends. However, Caesar is a man who is also obsessed with his ambition of becoming a king and who actively seeks to destroy the republic Brutus not only loves and believes in, but one whose it is his ancestral duty to protect, again echoing the legend of his forefather deposing the tyrannical last king of Rome, Tarquin. The moral ambiguity of Caesar's imperial ambition not only creates an interesting dimension of characterisation concerning Shakespeare's version of Caesar, but becomes the focal point of the very conflict that rages Brutus' conscience. Caesar and his imperial ambition are not mere thematic aspects within the framework of the play, but the basis for the very central conflict within. Thus, *Julius Caesar* explores age-old themes: liberty versus tyranny, order versus anarchy, personal relationships versus duty, and so forth. The inherent brilliance in Shakespeare is that he presents this conflict without actually taking sides; concerning Caesar, he agrees neither with the condemning Tacitus or the praises of Dio. Shakespeare takes the middle road, giving us a Caesar that is simultaneously praiseworthy and an enemy of freedom, views that are entirely dependent on one's perspective and which part of the play is under review. In the Shakespearean canon, Caesar is neither an archetype of virtue or villainy, being neither a vile Iago nor a saintly Cordelia. Though Shakespeare clearly takes many liberties with history, he has also clearly captured the essence of the enigmatic debate of what kind of man Julius Caesar was.

In aiming for moral ambiguity, Shakespeare even seems to have slightly altered the Plutarchian source material, as exemplified in the scene where Caesar rejects the crown offered by Mark Antony:

> *Casca*. Why, there was a crown offer'd him; and, being
> offer'd him, he put it by with the back of his hand,
> thus; and then the people fell a-shouting.
> *Bru*. What was the second noise for?
> *Casca*. Why, for that too.
> *Cas*. They shouted thrice: what was the last cry for?

[12] Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, 12.

> *Casca*. Why, for that too.
> *Bru*. Was the crown offer'd him thrice?
> *Casca*. Ay, marry, was't, and he put it by thrice, every time gentler than other; and at every putting-by, mine honest neighbours shouted.
>
> (1.2.217-227)

In Shakespeare's play, no motive is given for Caesar's rejection of the crown. Is he benevolently rejecting the concept of autocracy, not really seeking to become king after all? Or is he pressured by the Roman people's anti-monarchical sentiments, refusing the crown simply to mask his own ambition? Shakespeare is deliberately unclear on Caesar's motives and omits showing the scene, leaving it to his audience to decide the matter. This is an alteration from Plutarch, who explicitly gives Caesar's ambition as the reason for his rejection of the crown:

> Whereuppon there rose a certaine crie of rejoycing, not very great, done onely by a few, appointed for the purpose. But when Cæsar refused the Diadeame, then all the people together made an outcrie of joy. Then Antonius offering it him againe, there was a second shoute of joy, but yet of a few. But when Cæsar refused it againe the second time, then all the whole people showted. Cæsar having made this proofe, found that the people did not like of it, and thereuppon rose out of his chayer, and commaunded the crowne to be caried unto Jupiter in the Capitoll.[13]

Plutarch, though having mixed views of Julius Caesar, clearly in this instance portrays him as a man driven by ambition for kingship as well as a populist who will only do so if the people of Rome are in agreement and desire monarchy. Plutarch's Caesar here shows political cunning and deception, and is a man who judges and measures whether the collective will of his people is ready for him as a monarch, thus recognising them as his chief political allies. In contrast to Plutarch, who outright portrays Julius Caesar as ambitious, Shakespeare establishes ambiguity regarding this question as well. The conspirators many times state that Caesar is ambitiously seeking kingship, but is this really true, or is Caesar content with his current position and desirous to limit his position to that of a dictator? Viewing Plutarch's description of the scene, it can be more definitely inferred that Caesar wants to be 'crowned', but restrains himself from realising his desires upon seeing the displeasure of the Roman people. Whether Shakespeare's Caesar desires kingship or not, however, is a more debatable affair. In the service of drama, Shakespeare contrasts Plutarch by not outright stating Caesar's

[13] Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, 81.

motivation for rejecting the crown. This kind of dramatic manoeuvre is typical Shakespearean, promoting a 'greyness' of moral dilemma that allows the viewer or reader, depending on how the play is experienced by the individual, to make up his own mind as to whether Caesar is a man to be highly regarded or not. In doing so, Shakespeare creates a more difficult dilemma facing his tragic hero, Brutus. In Renaissance drama, the voice of characters and their true inner psychology and motivation of a character is often exposed through the format of the soliloquy, through speech directed towards the audience. In short, the soliloquy is the dramatic equivalent of the 'I' voice that is present in the literary first person perspective, containing the individualistic and subjective impressions experienced by the character in question. Shakespeare knew when to properly use the soliloquy and when to avoid it. In a play like *Hamlet*, the soliloquies of the main character are so central to the play that several of the most famous moments of it are entirely devoted to the main character, Hamlet, sharing and exploring his thoughts, philosophy and inner conflicts through monologue. The soliloquies are also important concerning villainous characters like Richard III and Iago, who make the audience a direct participator in their mischievous plots and schemes, making us privy to information that is excluded from the unwitting ears of any other character on stage.

In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is the character who shares his inner thoughts and conflicts with the audience in this manner. Caesar, however, is not granted such moments by Shakespeare, and as such, we cannot enter the inner machinations of his mind or his true aims and desires. This was undoubtedly a deliberate move by Shakespeare, and a very sensible one for a play that he aimed to have the conflict between tyranny and freedom as its central focal point. In doing this as well as reducing Caesar to a supporting character while focusing on what turned Brutus into a murderer, Shakespeare presents the dilemma of Caesar and empire as an ambiguous political debate, one that reflects the contrasting opinions of the ancient historians themselves.

As naturally follows when Shakespeare commits to moulding a morally ambiguous Caesar, Brutus' act of murdering his friend also becomes ambiguous, thus treading upon diffuse territory that exists somewhere in between brute, treacherous murder and selfless sacrifice and tyrannicide. Had Shakespeare openly declared Caesar's tyrannical ambition via for example an extensive soliloquy, we could more easily have justified his murder as an act for the common good. However, by making us, the audience, unaware of Caesar's true, subjective motives, and thus being able to judge Caesar based only on action rather than

exposition of his inner thought processes, a moral ambiguity is created that allows for vast differences in opinion. Brutus' act of regicide, being thus like Caesar himself shrouded in ambiguity by Shakespeare, fits perfectly with the Shakespearean chief thematic aim in *Julius Caesar*, namely to create a discussion around the concepts of tyranny, imperialism, monarchy and democracy. In doing so, Shakespeare creates an important distinction from the Classical sources. As Bullough writes:

> By the end of the classical epoch the main features of the chief characters in the fall of the Republic were well established. Usually two aspects of each of them were contrasted. Julius Cæsar appeared as a man of paradox. On the one hand there was general agreement on his martial skill, energy, eloquence, power over his legions and the plebeians; on his kindness to his friends and soldiers, his moderation in diet, his frequent clemency. On the other hand he was widely regarded as capable of great ruthlessness, a despiser of religion, lustful, guileful, above all ambitious. Opinions were divided on whether he sought the Civil War and Pompey's death, but most ancient writers agreed that inordinate ambition was his lifelong driving-force; he could not bear to be second, and he wished to rule the state, possibly as hereditary monarch, certainly as a 'tyrant' in the Greek sense of the word. Though some writers thought his murder might be justified, the majority regarded it as a wicked act.[14]

In his portrayal of Brutus, Shakespeare thus removes himself from the majority view among ancient historians in not condemning Brutus for the murder of Caesar. Traditionally, the betrayal has usually been seen as a vile act. For instance, Dante condemns Brutus in the *Inferno* as one of history's most despicable traitors, as he leaves him to be tortured by Lucifer himself in the deepest pit of Hell along with Judas and his co-conspirator Cassius. Shakespeare, however, is not out to condemn, but rather to create debate and discussion concerning his thematic material. Thus, he presents Brutus in a balanced and unorthodox fashion, as an idealistic, but naïve man who genuinely believes that his actions contribute to the common good. Yet, his act of murdering his best friend is in itself treacherous in nature, and the murder only leads to more chaos and bloodshed for Rome. Brutus is also morally corrupted by the murder, being haunted by his own conscience as well as the ghost of Caesar himself. Thus, not only is the nature of Caesar as a man ambiguous in *Julius Caesar*, but the very act of brutally murdering and removing him from the power structure is presented as one of ambiguity as well. In short, Shakespeare's Caesar is fairly representative of the multiplicity of views on Julius Caesar throughout the ages leading up to the Renaissance. As Bullough writes:

[14] Bullough, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 17-18.

> In classical times he was praised or blamed as the pivot of Rome's transformation from Republic to Empire. In the Middle Ages he was a figure of bizarre legend. In the Renaissance he was regarded in the light of new political theories and of a new study of ancient documents; and the opposed view of him then formed endured until the nineteenth century, when opinions as diverse as those of Mommsen and Oman were still possible.[15]

Given these distinctions and the many shapes the character of Julius Caesar has undertaken throughout history, it is vital to acknowledge that the fame (or infamy) of Caesar is so vast that the character holds almost a legendary appeal. The very sound of that name, 'Julius Caesar', conjures up certain images of empire, glories and conquest, as well as being perhaps one of the foremost names associated with totalitarianism. It is also important to consider, when viewing Shakespeare's portrayal through the goggles of liberal democracy, that Caesar's legend transcends the ages, and that we are not only perceiving Shakespeare's Caesar through our own eyes, but also with eyes that are influenced by the Caesar myth that has perpetually been connected to the name throughout the preceding ages. The past and future are not as separate as they often seem, and our very society is a culmination of centuries, even millennia of various influences and developments. Julius Caesar is central to the development of Western society and culture, and his legendary status has developed from a multitude of cultural elements, a legend in which Shakespeare's play actually has contributed to constructing in a significant manner. 'Et tu, Brute?', a citation not found in any of the classical sources, has somehow often been mistaken for one of the famous historical quotes said to have been uttered by the man (though most of them are probably also fictional). As stated by Greg Woolf, the origin of popular culture's connection of the quote 'Et tu, Brute?' to Julius Caesar is derived from Shakespeare[16]. Thus, Shakespeare's Caesar has influenced our perception of the historical Caesar, and at the heart of our understanding lie two millennia of works by historians, playwrights, film directors, poets and novelists. From the view of modern liberal democracy, modern depictions in documentaries, television and film continue to shape our view and image of Caesar. These perceptions are not only shaped by academics, literary classics or contemporary critics, but also by the general populace via popular culture. Recent generations may just as likely think of Caesar as he was portrayed in the popular TV series 'Rome', while someone living in the 1950's may be reminded of the filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's play from that era starring James Mason and Marlon

[15] Bullough, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespearem*, 4.
[16] Greg Woolf, *Et tu, Brute: The Murder of Caesar and Political* Assassination (London: Profile Books, 2007), ix-x.

Brando. Others may be reminded of other modern adaptations of *Julius Caesar* in either the cinematic or theatrical medium. In short, the past is very much alive, and the cultural images of the 'Caesar myth' and the way in which it has existed as an influencing factor for Shakespeare must be accounted for when considering the present views concerning *Julius Caesar*, as our understanding is not only formed by looking back at the past from the present, but is the result of two millennia of accumulated experience and views. While dealing with the entire historic/mythic background of Caesar would be to go beyond the scope of this thesis, looking at what Shakespeare accumulated from his sources (Plutarch, more or less) and how he in turn altered their content and 'message', gives us a proper basis for judging the various views presented by modern critics and judge how and whether modern perceptions have changed our understanding of the plays. We will get back to this in Chapter 2. For the present, however, it is time to look at the relationship between the Shakespearean tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra* and Plutarch to make a similar analysis of that play's representative of autocracy and empire: Julius Caesar's heir, Octavius, better known by his later title, 'Augustus'.

Shakespeare, Plutarch and Octavius

The central question in this section's analysis of Shakespeare and his sources will be: who is Shakespeare's Octavius? Who is he compared to the historical Octavius as Plutarch perceived him? And what will a comparison between Shakespeare's characterisation of Octavius Caesar and that of Plutarch reveal? Overall, these are the questions I will attempt to answer in this section, or at the very least raise an analytical discussion of in order to gain a more wholesome picture of how Shakespeare presents Octavius and empire in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

There is little doubt that historically and symbolically, the Roman Empire is perhaps one of the foremost political institutions that has been linked to the very image and idea of empire and autocracy. With this also being the central conflicting issue where historians and other writers have differed in their views throughout the ages, gaining a more complete perspective of where Shakespeare stood regarding the two founders of the empire will yield a strong basis for proper analysis of perspectives found in modern liberal democracies.

In describing Octavius' personality, Plutarch writes the following: 'He was very modest and continent in all the parts of his life, saving that he was somewhat given to women

and play: for the rest, he liked not great pallaces, but was contented with meane lodgings.'[17] Plutarch presents Octavius as a man with a strong Stoic side to his personality. Above all, he professes a life of modesty and avoidance of excesses, reflected in his simple standards of living and clothing. In this regard, Octavius (at least as Plutarch understood him) is the opposite of the vanity seen in later emperors like Nero and Caligula. More relevant to *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, it puts him in a position that is in stark contrast to Antony's luxurious, lustful and excessive Egyptian lifestyle. Overall, Shakespeare's Octavius shares the Stoic moderation of his Plutarchian counterpart, so much so that Shakespeare omits entirely the notion Plutarch makes of his interest in women. In short, the Octavius we meet in *Antony and Cleopatra* is even more focused on strict moral code than his Plutarchian counterpart. Whereas Plutarch describes that Octavius had few indulgences, Shakespeare's Octavius possesses literally none. His stoical nature is expressed in his judgment of Antony:

> CAESAR
> You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth know,
> It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate
> Our great competitor. from Alexandria
> This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
> The lamps of night in revel; is not more man-like
> Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he; hardly gave audience, or
> Vouchsafed to think he had partners: you shall find there
> A man who is the abstract of all faults
> That all men follow.[18]
>
> (1.4.1-9)

As a staunch disapprover of Antony's excessive lifestyle, Octavius displays a world view that is based upon strict morale, discipline and duty to the state. In the service of drama, Shakespeare here slightly alters his source material to make Octavius an even stronger and more distinct foil to the tragic hero of the play, Mark Antony. In doing so, he creates a more apparent and notable division between the structure and discipline of Rome and the passionate indulgence of Egypt.

Structure and planning is a central part of Octavius' governance and life in both Plutarch and Shakespeare's presentation. He has plans for the future, plans that include an end to the turmoil and civil wars that have plagued Rome since the days of Marius and Sulla.

[17] Plutarch, *Life of Octavius Cæsar Augustus*, trans. Thomas North, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Geoffrey Bullough, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 321-23; 321.
[18] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders (London: Routledge, 2006), 113-114.

Octavius Caesar is a visionary, and he intends to bring order to a Rome that has been ravaged by civil war:

> CAESAR.
> The time of universal peace is near:
> Prove this a prosp'rous day, the three-nooked world
> Shall bear the olive freely.
>
> (4.6.5-7)

The Pax Romana, which is what Shakespeare is alluding to, will be Octavius' foremost triumph in the future, when he will be known as Augustus, princeps of Rome. Shakespeare's image of Octavius thus includes a strong reference to the future, and embraces the idea of Octavius as an accomplished and stable ruler once his principate is established. Indeed, it seems that Shakespeare describes the Augustan future of Rome with a certain sense of glorification and idealisation. One day very soon, when the violent civil wars are put behind Rome, there will come a better age, one that represents peace, cultural growth and stable government. Shakespeare's idea of Augustus as an enlightened imperialist and a bringer of peace and stability bears a certain similarity to Plutarch: 'And that afterwards so long as he commanded alone, he did so firmely establish this Monarchie, that notwithstanding the infinite troubles received under other Emperours, yet it stood upright and in so great prosperitie for so many hundred yeares.'[19]

Stability, constancy and prosperity; these are the underlying significant views of Augustan imperialism as presented by both Plutarch and Shakespeare. Shakespeare, however, omits the problematic element of autocracy that Plutarch briefly mentions: 'notwithstanding the infinite troubles received under other Empereurs…' Plutarch here highlights a problematic aspect concerning autocratic rule that is not present in Shakespeare's play, namely the horrible consequences that can arise in a society that places unlimited power in the hands of the wrong individual. Thus, while praising Augustus, Plutarch also notes that one consequence of the transformation of the Roman state into what he calls a monarchy is that Rome in the future would too often be plagued by tyrannical, paranoid and megalomaniacal emperors. Dramatically speaking, while it would not be necessary for Shakespeare to include such problematic elements of Augustan imperialism, the fact that he has chosen not to is worth mentioning. Still, it is clear from a theatrical point of view that it makes more sense for

[19] Plutarch, *Life of Octavius Cæsar Augustus*, 323.

Shakespeare to focus upon the present world of the play rather than give too much space to what would exist in the future. Perhaps more importantly still, it is a manoeuvre that firmly places Octavius as the play's formal antagonist. For more than anything, Shakespeare's Octavius embodies strictness, discipline, self-sacrifice and modesty, elements that are lacking in Antony's reckless life of excess. It is feasible to see what Shakespeare has aimed for in this instance: a battle between two opposites. For as much as Antony allows the Roman Empire to fall apart from his own carelessness and lack of Roman discipline, and as much as he decidedly is the one and only obstacle to Rome's rise to greatness, Antony possesses qualities that neither Octavius nor the Roman Empire he created can ever hope to have: warmth, joy, friendship and, as Cleopatra displays towards the end of the play, the kind of true love that exists between the famous pair. Octavius' life and character are devoid of these singular qualities. While Antony commands self-sacrificing friendship (i.e. Enobarbus) and sexual relations with Cleopatra, the actual administration of stately affairs lies entirely with Octavius. In turn, he as a Shakespearean character becomes the sole element of constancy, reliability and stability within the world of the play.

Conclusion

Having now made a brief introduction to how Shakespeare has operated with the source material on his Caesar figures in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is time to make a brief assessment of what this exercise has accomplished. As stated in the introduction, the aim of my thesis has been to include as many perspectives as possible in the construction of my arguments. Since Plutarch's perspective is so vital to the background of how the Roman tragedies have taken shape, it is central to include it in the discussion of the two Caesars. Moreover, the discussion of the relation between Shakespeare and Plutarch I have discussed in this chapter represents a starting point for what will be of major significance in the ensuing chapters of my thesis: namely the debate surrounding the two Caesar figures of the play and the problematic issues of tyranny and Augustanism.

Chapter 2: The Tragedy of Julius Caesar

Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to answer the question concerning how modern perceptions of *Julius Caesar* have changed by dividing my discussion into three relevant topics: the tyranny/tyrannicide debate, the concept of divine monarchy, and rebellion. Since we, as previously mentioned, unfortunately are lacking information concerning reception of the plays from Shakespeare's own time, I have instead chosen to present opposing points of view concerning these topics from the Renaissance, analyse where Shakespeare stands regarding the topic being discussed and compare the Renaissance discussion to the modern critical approaches and tendencies in perceiving the play. In doing so, one can assess whether or not there is a shift in topics of interest and whether some aspects of the play are given more focus from critics than others, thereby answering whether there has been a change in perceptions of the play by comparing what questions are deemed important today to the ones that appear to be more relevant to the Elizabethan age. This chapter will also raise the question of whether or not some of the topics present in *Julius Caesar* are more relevant to our age than the Renaissance.

Julius Caesar: Tyrant or liberator?

The first question I will embark upon concerning *Julius Caesar* is that of tyranny. In order to answer this, it is important to evaluate and discuss this concept with a specific focus upon the Elizabethan era and the Shakespearean perspective on the concept of autocracy and tyrannicide as a starting point. As the influence of the play in the collective social consciousness of Julius Caesar as a man and a myth is profound, not to mention the impact of the ongoing discussion during the last two millennia of whether he was a tyrant or not, let us therefore delve into the discussion of tyranny as it existed in the Renaissance. In the English Renaissance, there was a vivid and present debate of tyranny, a debate in which Shakespeare took part. As stated by Miola:

> The question of tyrannicide (with all of its attendant inquiries) preoccupied the England of Shakespeare's time as it did the rest of Europe. The homilies against rebellion, the doctrine of passive obedience, the rhetoric of the divine right theory, the ubiquitous condemnation of civil strife-all evidence presumptively the vitality and importance of the tyrannicide question in England.[20]

Furthermore, the conflicts between Elizabeth I and both the Puritans and the Catholics were based upon perceptions of tyranny, which reached a critical point when she was excommunicated by Pius I for being a 'tyrant' and radical catholic Robert Person suggesting that Philip I should invade England and usurp her rule.[21]

The question of whether Elizabeth I's rule was tyrannical is a complex one. The Elizabethan age was marked by fear of rebellions and uprisings, and anti-rebellious propaganda in the form of the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion* was promoted by the government. There is also some evidence of censorship concerning the London stage, as exemplified in the removal of the deposition scene from early versions of *Richard II*.[22] Despite this, ideas like free speech were not alien to Renaissance England, as demonstrated by Thomas Wilson in 1553:

> Freenesse of speache, is when we speake boldely, and without feare, even to the proudest of them, whatsoever we please, or have list to speake. Diogenes herein did excel, and feared no man when he sawe just cause to saie his mynde. This worlde wanteth such as he was, and hath over many such, as never honest man was, that is to say, flatterers, fawners, and southers of mennes saignyes.[23]

Thus, while remembering that there were certain restrictions during the Elizabethan age concerning what one could freely utter against the monarch, freedom of speech was not an unknown concept, and was certainly embraced by authorities such as Thomas More.[24] Definitions of the concept may have varied throughout the ages, however, and there certainly exists debate today as well as to what extent limits should be placed upon it. Therefore, the concept of 'tyranny' regarding the reign of Elizabeth I must be placed into its proper context, for while the monarch wielded more power than her present counterparts, it was also an age where our modern Parliamentary system was starting to take shape. The role of Parliament

[20] Robert Miola, 'Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate', *Renaissance Quarterly* 38.2 (1985), 271-289; 271.
[21] Miola, 'Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate', 271.
[22] Janet Clare, 'The Censorship of the Deposition Scene in *Richard II', Review of English Studies* 161 (1990), 89-94.
[23] Parkin-Speer, Diana, 'Freedom of Speech in Sixteenth Century English Rhetorics', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12.13 (1981), 65-72; 67.
[24] Parkin-Speer, Diana, 'Freedom of Speech in Sixteenth Century English Rhetorics', 65.

included active legislation, but it was also a system which had its fair share of problems. As stated by Joan Kent:

> IN THE LATER years of Elizabeth's reign and during the reign of James I and the early years of the reign of Charles I the house of commons heard the reading of numerous bills on matters of personal conduct; among them were regulation against excess in apparel, drunkenness, swearing, bastardy, absence from church and the profaning of the Sabbath. Although the Commons passed bills on some of these subjects, and some of them became law, many of the proposals on the regulation of personal conduct met with opposition in the Lower House. A large number of them were defeated. Many of the bills were redrafted or heavily amended and sometimes carried over from session to session before they received the Commons' approval. Some of the legislation which passsed the Lower House may have had the support of only a minority of members, of those who were particularly interested in a bill and consistently present to give it their support; some of the division figures indicate a very small attendance in the Commons.[25]

As stated earlier in this chapter, many of Shakespeare's plays, including *Julius Caesar*, actively participate in the debate concerning tyranny and tyrannicide in Renaissance society, and it is through exploring this debate and examining whether or not the question of Caesar's tyranny is different from that seen in Shakespeare that one can seek to answer such questions. The central question here is as follows: where does Shakespeare stand in relation to the tyranny question as seen in his presentation of Julius Caesar as a character within the play? To make a relevant comparison to modern critics and outline the similarities between their debate and the one found in the Renaissance, and thus deduce how perceptions regarding the play have changed, we must first assess where exactly Shakespeare stands regarding the question of tyranny.

In general, the tyrant is perceived by Shakespeare in a negative light, as an utterly violent, vain, sadistic and destructive force. As Mary Ann McGrail writes concerning Shakespeare's views on tyranny:

> Shakespeare sees tyranny as the greatest political danger, most common, and as at the heart of human unhappiness. The exaggerated proportions of the tyrant – the large injustice of his desires and means of satisfying them – magnify this problem. To the tyrant the universe seems cold, and keen awareness of this indifference intensifies his impetus to situate himself firmly in the world, which requires satisfaction of expansive desires for love and honour. Why not choose tyranny? What is the basis for a rejection of tyranny? The simple answer is that it is a tragic way of life as Macbeth, Richard, and, in part, Leontes show.[26]

[25] Joan Kent, 'Attitudes of Members of the House of Commons to the Regulation of "Personal Conduct" in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England', *Historical Research* 46.113 (1973), 41-71;41.
[26] Mary Ann McGrail, *Tyranny in Shakespeare* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 162.

The question, however, remains as follows: how highly does the importance of Julius Caesar as a character rank as an aspect of the tyranny debate? McGrail writes that:

> The Question of the importance of establishing reputation for a great political man is a main concern of *Julius Caesar*, a play in which the titular character has few lines and is killed a third of the way through. The play is more about the reputation of Julius Caesar than the man.[27]

As much valuable insight as McGrail has concerning the four plays she examines (*Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*), she underestimates the relevance of Julius Caesar as a figure in the question of tyranny. His role may be minute compared to other Shakespearean 'tyrants', but since the play explores the moral justification for Caesar's murder, the little evidence we do have of what kind of man Caesar is becomes invaluable in our judgment of his antagonist, Brutus. Our individual choices to side with or against Brutus hinge entirely upon our impression of Caesar's moral character. In fact, *Julius Caesar* is not based upon Caesar's reputation, but the question of what his true character was, and whether he deserved his fate. One simply cannot remove Caesar from the equation. In fact, the very essence of the thematic conflict at the centre of the events chronicled in the play is all about the question of tyranny.

Julius Caesar, with its central thematic discussion of the validity of Caesar's rule, raises the following questions to the audience: is he a tyrant or a benevolent dictator? Is he the usurper of the Republic, or is he the one who is being usurped? Is his murder justified, or is it a thoroughly vile act? According to Miola, Caesar displays traits that are clearly tyrannical:

> Shakespeare's Caesar has some of the salient characteristics of the tyrant in practice. He fears plots and conspiracies, twice observing early in the play that such men as Cassius are "dangerous" (I.ii. 195, 21o). Despite stirring denunciations of fear, Caesar orders a sacrifice in response to the unnatural portents of the storm. Calphurnia persuades him of the threat to himself and he fashions an excuse for staying home, "Mark Antony shall say I am not well" (II.ii. 55). He shows superbia, arrogant pride, another distinguishing characteristic of the tyrant. Shakespeare's Caesar considers himself a special creation,far superior to ordinary mortals.[28]

Miola excellently argues that the character of Julius Caesar as presented by Shakespeare displays archetypal tyrannical traits. Undoubtedly, his innate fear of plots and conspiracies are characteristics that can be interpreted to bear the solemn mark of tyranny from a classical perspective. His persecuton of Marullus and Flavius can be mirrored in the

[27]McGrail, *Tyranny in Shakespeare*, *74.*
[28] Miola, 'Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate', 280.

writings of ancient historians, seeing as one of the sole issues on which they share a general consensus is the utter condemnation of political persecution, in Rome known as 'proscriptions'. From Marius and Sulla to figures like Antony and Octavius (whose relevance to the topic will be explored in Chapter 3), the role of the political persecutor is almost universally viewed with disgust. In Roman terms, this inhibition of free speech and opposition is what constitutes tyranny. In short, their definition was, surprisingly enough, not too different from our own views concerning authoritarian dictatorships in the modern world. Truly, Caesar here represents what Classical historians would deem to be tyranny in practice.

Shakespeare's Caesar, in possessing a fear of opposition and rebellion, is clearly developing in an authoritarian direction towards such display of tyranny, a direction that opposes the view of Caesar as a man who shows his enemies forgiveness and leniency. This is a view that is at least partly justified by the play – Caesar is a tyrant in the making. While many aspects of Caesar are ambiguous, one issue seems very clear: Caesar's extensive arrogance and delusions of godhood are what lead him on a path to self-destruction. However, there are certain aspects to Shakespeare's characterisation of Caesar that complicate the issue. To be fair, Miola himself touches upon these issues:

> A significant point of dispute in the tyrannicide debate was the controversial assassination of Julius Caesar. Unlike Nero, Domitian, and Caligula-all universally reviled as hateful tyrants-Caesar evoked the full spectrum of Renaissance opinion and so did his assassination. Salutati, for example, praised Caesar as "the father of his country, the lawful and benignant ruler of the world" and justified Dante's consignment of the traitors Brutus and Cassius to the lowest circle of hell.[29]

Covering a wider spectrum of historical opinion than the universally condemned emperors, Caesar as he appears in the play is an enigmatic character that cannot be fully associated with the Renaissance ideal of either the benevolent autocrat or a tyrant. While the label of tyranny is justified based on some of the evidence inherent in the text, one must not fail to note that Caesar possesses many traits of the benevolent autocrat as well. His inclusion of the Roman people in his will shows a genuine consideration for their cares and interests. In addition, his loyalty to them is certainly more stable and reliable than vice versa. However, Miola's has a point with his views, namely that Caesar's extensively pompous arrogance, is his tragic flaw and a catalyst for his own tfall. Miola brings up many interesting and relevant points regarding the tyranny debate. However, as the following example showcases, he does

[29] Miola, 'Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate', 272.

express a certain bias concerning his ideas of Shakespeare's characterisation of Julius Caesar, namely a tendency towards assuming that Shakespeare embraced the idea that Caesar is a tyrant:

> The self-love so flagrantly evident in Caesar's disregard for senatorial authority and for kingly virtue appears earlier in more subtle and more dangerous form. Caesar, we are told, puts the tribunes Murellus and Flavius "to silence" for pulling scarves off his images (I.ii. 285-86). Shakespeare changes Plutarch's "diadems" to scarves to stress the triviality of the offense and thus to underline the severity of the punishment. Whereas Plutarch tells us that Caesar deprived the tribunes of their office (V, 63), Shakespeare leaves their fate ominously uncertain, hinting at the possibility of murder. These alterations portray Caesar as vain, ruthless, and unjust, as a tyrant who capriciously punishes citizens who displease him.[30]

This viewpoint, though not without basis in textual evidence, is problematised by Shakespeare's deliberate interest in turning his Caesar into a less obviously tyrannical figure than that seen in his Plutarchian source, a point I have explored in great detail in the introduction to this thesis. Therefore, it must suffice to say that Shakespeare does not pick any sides regarding the tyranny question, as he is far from an obvious tyrant of the Macbeth or Richard III caliber. Thus, having established the Shakespearean view of Caesar's tyranny as deliberately nuanced, let us move on to another topic, namely the question of whether Caesar can be seen as a sort of 'prototype' for fascism. Being closely related to the concept of tyranny, the idea of fascism in relation to Julius Caesar as a character is a similar and relevant topic of discussion. The tale of the fallen Roman dictator continues to fascinate well into our own age. In a 1951 article, modernist author E.M. Forster briefly tells of his amazement of seeing how a play about a murder that took place two millennia ago can continue to fascinate and live well into our own times, having through Shakespeare become such a significant part of English culture that it is being re-enacted in school plays.[31]

In his article, Forster touches upon an important aspect. For Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is indeed a central element of what constitutes the modern English speaking image of Caesar. As Forster himself continues by stating: 'And we to-day, though we may not rank it with the Great Four – *Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth* – always hail it as a typical example of his genius, and are excited when the curtain rises[32]'.

[30] Miola, 'Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate', 281.
[31] E.M. Forster 'Julius Caesar', in *Shakespeare: Julius Caesar, a Casebook*, Peter Ure, ed. (London: MacMillan and Co, 1969), 60-64.
[32] Forster, 'Julius Caesar', 61.

However, Forster also touches briefly upon a subject of interest as far as perspectives in modern liberal democracies are concerned, namely the subject of how what was then fairly recent events may shape our subjective perspectives and views. His impression of Caesar is as follows:

> Do you detect a contemporary voice here? I do. It is Mussolini's. His infirmities are insisted in: his epilepsy, his deafness. He is pompous, conceited, showing-off, dictatorial. Indeed, some modern producers have stressed this and have presented *Julius Caesar* as a study in Fascism[33].

This debate being described by Forster is an interesting one. Considering what we have already established concerning Shakespeare's interpretation of Plutarch, can we comfortably place him alongside Mussolini as a sort furerunner of fascism? Undoubtedly, certain aspects of the historical Caesar can at least be compared to fascism. Certainly, Mussolini himself wanted to establish such a connection, as seen in this quote found in Kenneth Scott's 'Mussolini and the Roman Empire': 'Fascism's revived consciousness of the ancient glories of Italy, of the Roman Empire… continuation of this tradition by… the Fascisti struggle for a new Imperial Rome[34].' The fact that Scott himself seems to regard these goals of Mussolini's with a sense of optimism confirms how the Italian dictator managed to impress this propagandic image of himself upon the world. Though it could be argued that Mussolini embraced the connection because there is a certain resemblance between himself and the ancient dictator, this can also easily be attributed to the megalomaniacal and pompous nature of the Italian fascist, who wanted to mirror himself in the image of central historical figures in the service of moulding them into his own propagandic nationalist doctrine. Also of importance concerning the historical Caesar is that Pliny, while praising Caesar, also notes that Caesar through his wars killed 1,192,000 people.[35] From a contemporary perspective, this raises the very unsettling aspect of genocide in Caesar's Gallic campaigns.

The question of fascism is ultimately one that is closely linked to that of tyranny. Considering the experiences seen last century, fascism stands as the main representative of the traumatic experiences our modern society have endured during World War II. Forster's perspective of loosely creating a connection between Caesar and Mussolini is certainly an understandable one from someone writing in 1951, only six years after the Second World War had ended. As Zvi Yavetz writes: '…historians who lived through the Hitler period and had

[33] Forster, 'Julius Caesar', 64.
[34] Kenneth Scott, 'Mussolini and the Roman Empire', *The Classical Journal* 9 (1932), 645-657; 646.
[35] Zvi Yavetz, 'Caesar, Caesarism and the Historians', *Journal of Contemporary History* 6.2 (1971), 184-201; 186.

personal experience of what a dictatorship meant cannot wholeheartedly praise one-man rule[36].' World War II traumatised the European political consciousness to such an extent that there is almost a sense of collective trauma, perhaps even guilt, for allowing Hitler and other fascists to rise to positions that would ultimately threaten the world with massive destruction on a global scale. However, while being understandable, this perspective is one that raises numerous questions and is contradicted by many elements within the play. As has already been established in this thesis, Shakespeare's source, North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, displays Caesar as an admirable man, but also one with an unhealthy obsession with power. As has already been demonstrated, Shakespeare blurs the issue even further, directly contradicting Plutarch by not clarifying Caesar's motivation for rejecting Antony's offer of the crown, obviously desiring to strengthen the dramatic tension and conflict that troubles his protagonist Brutus by not making an exploration of Caesar's personal motivation and inner thoughts. Altogether, the issue of fascism, like that of tyranny, is problematic, as the play refuses to put a label on Caesar. At its best, it is a reimagining of the play's intent based upon modern experiences. At its worst, it can be seen to be imposing modern perspectives and experiences upon a play that was created in a world where the concept of 'fascism' was hundreds of years away from being formed.

Again, regarding the link being forged between the Roman dictator and tyranny/fascism by some modern readers, one must remember that Shakespeare's Caesar is and truly remains a character whose goals and motives are to a significant extent enigmatic. His motives and personality are rarely expressed and characterised by himself, but by the other characters in the play. Nowhere is the division also seen among ancient historians more representative than in the contrast between the funeral orations of Brutus and Antony. Brutus' utterance of 'Not that I loved Cæsar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Cæsar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?' (3.2.22-25) touches upon the very thematic heart of the play as well as the divided opinions among the ancient Roman historians as to whether Caesar was tyrant or liberator. Moreover, his justification for the murder seems to reflect Plutarch, who while an admirer of Caesar's many positive qualities, recognised that he also possessed some tyrannical traits. In comparison, Antony's speech, being more or less at least partly propagandic, represents the historical view that fully embraces the Caesars. It is also, more personally, the speech of a grieving friend, one who in the end turned out to be his most faithful ally and supporter. While he is an

[36] Yavetz, 'Caesar, Caesarism and the Historians', 186.

instigator for mob rule and civil war, it must also be recognised that Antony's desire to avenge Caesar is linked to Antony's nature as a dutiful soldier and faithful friend.

These aspects of Shakespare's Caesar, namely his display of clemency towards his enemies and generosity towards his friends, are traits that complicate the relevance of the fascist comparison. Caesar is upon many occasions described as a 'great friend' by both Brutus and Antony. Moreover, Caesar's tendency to forgive his political enemies was far from common in the cutthroat world of Roman politics, as exemplified by the many persecutions against political rivals committed by ambitious individuals seeking power in the latter days of the Roman Republic. Certainly, this is also clearly the opposite of practical reality in fascist regimes, where torture, murder and other forms of persecution towards opponents to the regime often commence at a very early stage. Still, Caesar displays very little clemency in practical terms throughout the play. He imprisons Marullus and Flavius for defying him. He also displays an utter lack of mercy when Metellus Cimber begs for clemency towards his banished brother. These are not the acts of a benevolent ruler, but of a tyrant. Caesar's capacity for forgiveness seems to be falling progressively along with his rise to the top of the political ladder. To Shakespeare, the forgiving Caesar seems to dwell firmly in the past, when he once forgave both Brutus and Cassius, the two now plotting to destroy him. Caesar may not quite have achieved the status of 'tyrant' yet, but he is dangerously close to treading upon the path towards tyranny. While there is ambiguity concerning Caesar's morality, there also seems to be the case that his rise to power is corrupting his honourable side.

Overall, in defence of interpreting Caesar as having semi-fascist traits, there certainly are aspects to Shakespeare's Caesar character that are undoubtedly similar to fascist dictators. Again one can point towards Caesar's imprisonment of his opponents, Marullus and Flavius, as an attempt to silence opposition that can be identified as similar to the political clime and oppression of freedom of speech present in fascism. Caesar is also, like Mussolini, exceedingly arrogant, though perhaps not without a certain degree of justification if the signs and omens linking his death to that of a cosmic event are interpreted as 'real' and supernatural within the universe of the play. Overall, though, Shakespeare's characterisation of Julius Caesar is far too nuanced to be placed under a condemning label like 'fascism'. Shakespeare clearly presents Caesar as a dangerous man and potential tyrant, but also as a man there is much to admire about. He has (at least in the past) shown a degree of leniency towards his rivals that is unheard of in fascism. He has a strong sense of generosity towards the people, as

showcased by the fact that he has included them in his will. He is a great and loyal friend, as is even admitted by Brutus in his funeral eulogy, where he praises Caesar and describes him as his dearest friend:

> *Bru*. Then none have I offended. I have done no more to
> Cæsar than you shall do to Brutus. The question of
> his death is enroll'd in the Capitol; his glory not
> extenuated, wherein he was worthy; nor his offences
> enforc'd, for which he suffered death.
>
> *Enter MARK ANTONY* [*and others*], *with Cæsar's body.*
>
> Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony,
> who, though he had no hand in his death, shall re-
> ceive the benefit of his dying, a place in the common-
> wealth, as which of you shall not? With this I depart,
> that, as I slew my best lover for the good of Rome, I
> have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please
> my country to need my death.
>
> (3.2.37-48)

Thus, linking Shakespeare's characterisation of Caesar to a representative of fascism/tyranny like Mussolini is an oversimplification of the brilliant and multifaceted presentation Shakespeare has of his character. It is seeing one side of the matter and ignoring the other. By doing this, one also in many ways imposes a modern viewpoint that specifically derives from the experiences of trauma faced by Europe after the Second World War. It is thus a prime example of a perspective of the play that derives from and is coloured by experiences and challenges faced by modern liberal democracies. As this perspective is not entirely agreeable in relation to what is actually found within the framework of the play from a larger perspective, it is a very good example of how our experiences can shape and alter our understanding of *Julius Caesar*. Thus, as a perspective, it is very understandable. After seeing the horrors autocracy can cause in World War II, it naturally follows that many would also condemn the historical Caesar, seeing that he is one of history's foremost representatives of the concept of autocracy. Thus, the 'fascist' interpretation is only partly true from the perspective of the actual text and its historical sources, but an excellent example of how not only *Julius Caesar*, but the entire Shakespearean canon is constantly updated and seen through the eyes of new ages and new experiences. There is always something relevant in Shakespeare, themes that transcend the boundaries of his own age, the Renaissance, and become relevant to new events experienced by the human race. Seeing the play from the

experiences of modern society is in itself a central part of the nature of *Julius Caesar* as it appears to us, and contributes to creating new debates and perspectives. Also, Shakespeare's nuanced and ambiguous presentation of autocracy in *Julius Caesar* certainly invites to such debate. As it stands, however, the link between Caesar as a Shakespearean character and fascism is oversimplifying the very complex, enigmatic and multifaceted characterisation that is created by the author.

Now it is time to put the main question to the test: has there, with modern critical reception in mind, been a change in topics of interest? To state some general tendencies and patterns, 20th century criticism revolves around either placing Caesar or Brutus as the 'hero' of the play, with an extended focus upon the character in question who is defined as the tragic hero. As in the classical age, there is no consensus as to whether Julius Caesar is a justified ruler or not. As with the two writers I have presented who vies Caesar as a tyrant, others like Sir Mark Hunter and Roy Walker suggest that the murder of Caesar was seen as a foul act by Shakespeare.[37] Based on the active debate surrounding tyranny in the Renaissance and its relevance to *Julius Caesar*, and considering the fact that there is no common consensus among modern critics as to whether Shakespeare's Caesar is a tyrant or not, the answer seems to be that little has changed concerning this particular topic. The tyranny debate is so much at the very heart of the conflicting issues in the play both concerning Brutus' conscience and the state of the world of Roman politics in general. The debate of tyranny is, in fact, as relevant now as it was during the Renaissance, the Roman Republic, and in fact, any age or human experience. What Shakespeare does is to focus on the debate itself rather than pass moral judgement or give clear answers, and it is up to us to make up our minds. One's moral judgment is entirely dependent upon one's point of view. As Rene Fortin writes: 'What has transpired in the play can best be described in terms of point-of-view strategy: the particular strategy of Shakespeare seems to involve the audience in the fallible judgments of the characters.'[38]

We, the audience, are practically involved in the proceedings in the play, and are invited by Shakespeare to morally judge what transpires on stage by our own moral standards. In the end, the discussion of tyranny seems to be unanimously declared as relevant by both our times and among our early modern counterparts. Thus, the very core of the play deals

[37] Mildred E. Hartsock, 'The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*', *Modern Laguage Association* 81.1 (1966), 56-62; 56.
[38] Rene E. Fortin, 'Julius Caesar: An Experiment in Point of View', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19.4 (1968), 341-347; 346.

with a topic that defines what is one of Shakespeare's main strengths, namely the use of thematic material that deals directly with human experience that transcends any age. All ages and all times have seen their own cultural declarations of tyrants, from the Romans (Tarquin, Tiberius, Caligula) to Renaissance England (Richard III) and modern Western Europe (Hitler, Stalin), and therefore, *Julius Caesar* remains one of the plays in the Shakespearean canon that seems to never wither in popularity. Indeed, though the historical context has changed and each age has its own practical representation of the almost universally declared despot, the central debate in itself has never really been altered in character nor relevance. It is not Shakespeare's aim to impose any moral judgement upon the audience; rather, stirring debate seems to have been his exact intention with the play. There are concepts within it, however, which may be more problematic to translate into our culture. One of these is the idea of Caesar as a divine monarch.

Divine Julius

In my preceding examination of Caesar as a tyrant, I have briefly mentioned the play's connection to the concept of divine monarchy. I will here further examine if and in what ways Caesar can be perceived as chosen by divine forces. For truly, he is an example of the divine monarch, a king chosen by the Heavens to be an upholder of peace, law and order on the mortal plane. Thus, the play also partly represents the view present in the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion* that the monarch is appointed by God, and that rebellion against him is a mortal sin:

> Thus doe you see, that neither heaven nor paradise could suffer any rebellion in them, neither be places for any rebels to remaine in Thus became rebellion, as you see, both the first and the greatest, and the very first of all other sinnes, and the first and principall cause, both of all worldly and bodily miseries, sorrowes, diseases, sicknesses, and deathes, and which is infinitely worse then all these, as is said, the very cause of death and damnation eternall also. After this breach of obedience to GOD, and rebellion against his Majestie, all mischiefes and miseries breaking in therewith, and overflowing the world, lest all things should come unto confusion and utter ruine. God foorwith by lawes given unto mankind, repaired againe the rule and order of obedience thus by rebellion overthrowne, and besides the obedience due unto his Majesty, hee not onely ordained that in families and housholds, the wife should be obedient unto her husband, the children unto their parents, the servants unto their masters: but also, when mankind increased, and spread it selfe more largely over the world, hee by his holy word did constitute and ordaine in Cities and

> Countreys severall and speciall governours and rulers, unto whom the residue of people should be obedient.[39]

In this section, I intend to take a look at the concept of divine kingship and discussions pertaining to it in the Renaissance, then draw comparisons to its nature as it appears in Julius Caesar. In the end, I will seek an answer to the question of how and whether the modern critical debate in comparison to the debate of divine monarchy as it appears in the play represents a change in perspective from the viewpoint of modern critics or not, and thereby assess to what degree this indicates a change in perception regarding the play. As a vital point to this , it is imperative to bring up the concept of the monarch's right to rule as God-given and sacred. As E.M.W. Tillyard writes on the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion*:

> The most interesting expansion of doctrine has to do with men's duties under a bad king. The homilist explains the dangers attached to any condonation to rebellion, however bas the ruler may be. Who, first, are subjects that they can judge if he is bad? They may easily mistake, for there are always wicked men around, very ready to take advantage of a prince vulnerable, whether through too great kindness, or the wrong sex. or too few years. And there will always be difference of opinion; so that if rebellion is once allowed against a bad prince, how can it in the end be preserved against a good? Moreover it is not blind chance but God who sends a bad prince, and he does it to punish at people's sins. To revolt is to add new sin not yet expiated.[40]

This aspect of the character of Julius Caesar, his divine right ro rule, his larger than life nature, is also an important side to his character. The declaration of being 'as constant as the northern star' (3.1.60) may be interpreted as signs of megalomaniacal inclinations from Caesar's side. However, coupled with Antony uttering the following prophecy, the view of Caesar as the 'Divine Julius' transcends beyond Caesar's own subjective frame of mind:

> *Ant*. O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
> That I am meek and gentle with these butchers.
> Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
> That ever lived in the tide of times.
> Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!
> Over thy wounds now do I prophesy
> (Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips,
> To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue),
> A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
> Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
> Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;

[39] 'An Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Religion', in William Shakespeare, *King Richard II* Updated Edition, Andrew Gurr, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 225-230; 226-227.
[40] E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1944), 73-74.

> Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
> And dreadful objects so familiar,
> That mothers shall but smile when they behold
> Their infants quartered with the hands of war,
> All pity chok'd with cusotom of fell deeds;
> And Cæsar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
> Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war,
> That this fould deed shall smell above the earth
> With carrion men, groaning for burial.
>
> (3.1.254-275)

Still, it is important to note that the perception of the monarch as divine was starting to fall by the wayside in Tudor England. At the time, Parliament started to have an ever increasing role[41], and the concept of absolute God-given right to rule was starting to slowly diminish. As demonstrated by the 17th century writer Francis Osborne, perceptions that placing absolute divine right upon a mortal as blasphemous certainly existed in the Renaissance[42]. For the intents and purposes of this thesis, one must therefore recognise that the idea of divine right was quickly becoming conservative during the reign of the Tudor monarchs, and was clearly a remnant from medieval times. Thus, for the sake of my further discussion of the question, I will at this early stage point out that I will refrain from imposing some generalised 'Renaissance' views on Shakespeare. Rather, I have here presented the central debate of the issue, which I will use to explore Shakespeare's position regarding the idea of divine kingship from textual evidence.

There is ample textual evidence in the Shakespearen canon as well as Renaissance literature in general of a strong presence of the concept of divine monarchy, especially in the history plays. Richmond's role in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* as England's saviour, Henry IV's transgression against Heaven's will by usurping the throne in *Richard II* and to a certain extent Spenser's *Fairy Queen*, a semi-mythic celebration of Queen Elizabeth I, all show that certain associations that linked the monarchy with God that were apparent in the Middle Ages still remained during the Elizabethan age.

The concept of the mythic, divine king is certainly also central in *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. In encompassing the mythic qualities of Caesar as a monarch who wields his

[41]Richard F. Hardin, *Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarchy in Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1992), 30.
[42]Hardin, *Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarchy in Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton*, 30.

sceptre due to some divine design, Shakespeare builds an image of a Caesar that treads the path between mortality and godhood. He is certainly 'larger than life', and he, while not exactly an immortal god, lies somewhere beyond the sphere inhabited by mere mortals. That is not to say that the comparison with fascism or tyranny previously explored in this chapter is utterly wrong; the 'fascist', or perhaps the more appropriate term 'tyrant' aspect of Caesar is indeed present in the play, as demonstrated by his persecution of Marullus and Flavius. However, Caesar's view of himself as a grander being is strangely enough not entirely inaccurate as well. There are for instance events preluding his death that cannot be described as anything less than supernatural:

> '*Cal*. Cæsar, I never stood on ceremonies
> Yet now they fright me. There is one within,
> Besides the things that we have heard and seen,
> Recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch.
> A lioness hath whelped in the streets,
> And graves have yawn'd and yielded up their dead;
> Fierce fiery warriors fought upon the clouds
> In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,
> Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;
> The noise of battle hurtled in the air,
> Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan,
> And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.
> O Cæsar, these things are beyond all use,
> And I do fear them.
> *Cæs*. What can be avoided
> Whose end is purpos'd by the mighty gods?
> Yet Cæsar shall go forth; for these predictions
> Are to the world in general as to Cæsar.
> *Cal*. When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
> The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.
>
> (2.2.13-31)

The element of the supernatural in the play cannot be explained away by viewing Caesar as merely 'pompous', as Forster describes him, a Mussolini with delusions of grandeur. There are many perspectives of Caesar's grandeur at work in the play besides those as perceived by Caesar himself. Despite all the supernatural portents, however, the fact that Caesar also exudes overt confidence and self-assurance must be taken into account. Caesar could easily be portrayed as a despotic mortal obsessed with power and delusions of godhood. On the other hand, the supernatural prophecies and portents can be interpreted as more than just mere superstition; while they can also be interpreted as coincidences, they can also be

seen as true, not from a realistic perspective, but 'true' within the world of the play and 'true' in the sense that it reflects upon certain ideas of monarchy's connection to divine will in the Renaissance. For instance, as J.E. Phillips states regarding Antony's funeral oration: 'Whatever his own motives, Antony's observations are sound from a political point of view. He recognizes the association between regicide and social chaos as almost any Elizabethan would recognize it.'[43]

Interestingly, this perspective of Caesar as a divinely ordained ruler is not only relevant from a firmly Medieval or Renaissance point of view, but also from a classical perspective, as this element is present in Plutarch's writings as well. As Schanzer writes:

> He appears undecided whether Caesar's rule at any time deserved the name of tyranny, but his prevailing opinion is that it did not. In the 'Comparison of Dion with Brutus' he declares his belief that Caesar 'rather had the name and opinion only of a tyranne, than otherwise that he was so indeed. For there never followed any tyrannical or cruel act, but contrarily, it seemed that he was a merciful Physician, whom God had ordained of special grace to be Governor of the Empire of Rome, and to set all things again at quiet stay, the which required the counsel and authority of an absolute Prince. And therefore the Romans were marvellous sorry for Caesar after he was slain, and afterwards would never pardon them that had slain him'. This passage also gives fullest expression to Plutarch's view of Caesar as the Man of Destiny, and of the whole drama of his rise to power, his establishment of absolute rule, and of the defeat of his assassins at Philippi, as the work of Providence.[44]

If the prophecies and cosmic events preluding Caesar's death are interpreted as 'real' within the world of the play, and they are so frequently displayed and so central as foreshadowing elements that there is a strong basis for such an interpretation, the murder of Caesar can be seen as a transgression against 'divine will', and while he clearly is mortal, there are inexplicable and supernatural forces at work behind the curtain, thus making Caesar much more than just a 'fascist' or a tyrant, seeing as the aggrandising of his person is not only embraced by himself, but by the cosmos itself. It all points to a very Renaissance-like view of the monarch as a stabilising element and regicide as a sinful corruption against the balance of the universe, no matter how noble one's intentions may be.

However, as mentioned above, while Caesar is aligned with cosmic forces, he does transgress against his own mortal role in the world. Caesar may be greater than the average man, but he is so in the sense of being king-like and not a god. From this point of view, the

[43] J.E. Phillips 'Julius Caesar', *Shakespeare: Julius Caesar, a Casebook*, Peter Ure, ed. (London: MacMillan, 1969) , 54-57; 57.

[44] Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, 13.

idea that Caesar is arrogant and delusional certainly rings true. Caesar may be divinely chosen and favoured by cosmic forces, but he arrogantly dismisses all the warnings issued: Calpurnia's dream, the chaos displayed in the natural world, both the warnings issued by the Soothsayer and the letter of warning delivered before he enters the Senate house. Thus, the previously discussed perspective of Osborne that it is blasphemous to consider kingship a divinely ordained position becomes a significant part of the debate within the framework of the play. Caesar may be guided by divine forces, but he is also, as displayed through his increasing arrogance and tendency towards tyranny in possession of a position that is, as stated by Osborne, 'a sacrilegious overcharging a single person with more honour and power, then so frail a creature is able to beare, without falling into the distemper of excesse.'[45]

This reckless dismissal of his own mortality is his most central tragic flaw, the catalyst of his fall. He is, as Plutarch wrote, a man to whom '…it was better to dye once, then always be affrayed of death[46]'. Overall, Caesar may share Mussolini's arrogance, but due to the cosmic and supernatural forces that are at stake, presenting omens that warn of the impending collapse of society, a certain amount of pomp and majesty is justifiable. It is when Caesar crosses the line from rightfully believing himself to be a monarch to perceiving himself as a god that he blasphemously transgresses his place in the ordered universe and overestimates his own value and position. Thus, Shakespeare's fictive portrayal of Caesar can also be interpreted to be influenced in part by the idea of the 'Divine Julius'. However, this must not be mistaken for Shakespeare presenting Caesar as a god; his Caesar is clearly placed in the realm of mortal men. Rather than fully being a god, Caesar has a streak of immortality to him, not as a god, but as a divinely chosen 'monarch'. He is chosen by a higher power, and the portents and signs preluding and following his death are divine warnings of the consequences of regicide. Thus, in summing up the argument, *Julius Caesar* is in many ways a play that ideologically places itself within the confines of divine monarchy. However, while Shakespeare seems to embrace Caesar as a divinely chosen king, it must also be noted that he considers the blasphemous side of Caesar as displayed when he assigns himself with godhood. This is also echoed by Cassius, who emphasises Caesar's mortality:

> *Cas*. I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus,
> As well as I do know your outward favour.
> Well, honour is the subject of my story.
> I cannot tell what you and other men
> Think of this life; but for my single self,

[45] Hardin, *Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarchy in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton*, 30.
[46] Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, 78.

I had as life not be as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.
I was born free as Cæsar; so were you;
We both have fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter's cold as well as he:
For once, upon a raw and gusty day,
The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,
Cæsar said to me, "Dar'st thou, Cassius, now
Leap in with me into this angry flood,
And swim to yonder point?" Upon the word,
Accoutred as I was, I plunged in
And bade him follow; so indeed he did.
The torrent roar'd, and we did buffet it
With lusty sinews, throwing it aside
And stemming it with hearts of controversy.
But ere we could arrive the point propos'd,
Cæsar cried, "Help me, Cassius, or I sink."
I, as Æneas, our great ancestor,
Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
Did I the tired Cæsar. And this man
Is now become a god, and Cassius is
A wretched creature and must bend his body,
If Cæsar carelessly but nod on him.

(1.2.89-117)

In the end, the problem inherent in the interpretation of Caesar as a tyrant is further complicated by his role as a divinely chosen monarch. Within the world of *Julius Caesar*, there is more at play than mere politics, and the signs of supernatural forces at work are clearly present throughout the play. It is therefore a mistake to perceive the play as merely political and secular, as Shakespeare clearly uses the supernatural as a method within the play to enhance its dramatic impact. Moreover, as shown above, the presence of divine monarchy related to Shakespeare's Caesar figure is strongly emphasised throughout the play.

How then does the idea of the divine right concept and rhetoric relate to the concept of changed perceptions? To see whether there has, in fact, been a change in reception, one must first again acknowledge that it is difficult, if not impossible, to attempt building an image of how audiences would have reacted to the play in the Elizabethan age. There is also a definitive lack of written material from the era about any of Shakespeare's play from which to form a basis. What can be done to answer the question of changed perspectives, however, is to compare the Renaissance disagreement of whether the monarch was divine or if he is a mortal committing blasphemy by viewing himself in such a light with the central

disagreement among 20th century critics of who the hero of *Julius Caesar* is. However, while doing this, one must also recognise that this is a comparison of modern critics writing about the play and writers of political philosophy in the Renaissance, making their subjects of discussion completely different. However, given that Shakespeare actively participates in the Renaissance debate concerning divine kingship with his portrayal of Julius Caesar, the comparison becomes highly relevant. Among writers who perceive Caesar as a just and rightful king, the idea of divine kingship is very much recognised. As Roy Walker writes:

> The assassination of Julius Caesar is seen as the archetype of dastardly and disastrous murder, a crime that threatens a state with civil war. The dead ruler becomes one with the stars, the visible signs of a divine order over-riding human affairs. Only the royal blood of England is more precious than Caesar's. These are the unmistakable poetic suggestions of the first casual references in the First Folio to Caesar and to Rome'[47]

As has ever been the case with the historical Caesar, disagreements concerning his moral nature are many. It must, again, be pointed out that that there is not any form of critical consensus as to Caesar being a tyrant. As Hartsock writes:

> The most commonly held interpretations of *Julius Caesar*, however variously they are extrapolated, may be put into a few categories. First there is the view that Caesar is "hero": hence the title of the play. Sir Mark Hunter is sure that Shakespeare considered the murder of Caesar to be "the foulest crime in secular history" and Roy Walker agrees that we are supposed to admire Caesar and to see him as "a great and good ruler. […] A second – and, in recent years, a more generally accepted – interpretation makes Brutus the focus of interest as tragic hero. Those who see him so, however, differ in their conceptions of his role.[48]

The fact that 20th century criticism has seen a tendency to move away from the question of divine kingship and seeing Caesar as the 'heroic' king possessing god-like divine right and into interpreting Brutus as the play's tragic hero is interesting in regards to assessing change in perspective. These perspectives usually put Brutus in a more sympathetic light as a man torn between loyalties.[49] This part of modern criticism, however, which seeks to understand the actions of Brutus, is very much at odds with the divine right rhetoric, according to which the uncrowning of kings is a blasphemous transgression against God's will; only he placed the monarch there, and only he has the right to unking him again. Like

[47] Roy Walker, 'The Northern Star: An Essay on the Roman Plays', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 2.4 (1951), 287-293; 288.
[48] Hartsock, 'The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*', 56.
[49] Hartsock, 'The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*', 56.

the question of tyranny, Brutus' dilemma of whether he is doing wrong in committing the murder of his friend or not is linked to his inner dilemma between Caesar's divine right and his own moral responsibility. This is an important point that deserves to be emphasised more by critics. However, in the increased focus on Brutus, the recognition of Caesar's role as a divine monarch has fallen more and more by the wayside, which is unfortunate, seeing as the conflict between Caesar's right to rule and Brutus' morals and duties is a central theme within the play. A proper understanding of both perspectives and how they interplay does, in fact, encompass the tragedy in a broader perspective while also actively inviting to further debate; without Caesar's more 'passive' role, the play would be empty, as would be the case if Brutus and his more 'active' role was absent. As Hartsock writes:

> It is the contention of this paper that the ambiguities of *Julius Caesar* cannot be resolved and that Shakespeare's use of his source shows that he did not intend for them to be resolved. This is not to call the play a dramatic failure: its history on the stage is potent refutation of any such judgment. It is to say, however, that any director or any critic who tries to unify the play by resolving its paradoxes is choosing a bias and closing his eyes to a part of the evidence and to what may be a deliberate and permanent suspension of all issues in the play. One cannot settle the matter by looking at any one of the four principal people: the meaning of one involves the meaning of all.[50]

This also raises another question: does the shift towards a more 'heroic' Brutus and a dwindling emphasis on Caesar's divine role among critics represent a change in what is considered 'interesting' from a modern point of view? More specifically, with the idea of divine monarchy being more or less archaic in our time, is perhaps that question not as relevant as it used to be? One might easily draw such a conclusion, and that because our society has shifted more and more away from monarchy, that it (perhaps) becomes one of those subjects broached by Shakespeare that we associate with history and fairy tales rather than our present reality.

Moreover, concerning Brutus, it is important to remember that Brutus is a highly flawed character that does not always live up to the standards of morality that has been established by his ancestor who dethroned the tyrannical Tarquin. Though he has good intentions, he is in may ways a hypocrite who at times behaves no less tyrannical than Caesar, turning the uprising against the dictator into his own, personal crusade. As stated by Gordon Ross Smith:

[50] Hartsock, 'The Complexity of *Julius Caesar*, 58.

> The conspicuous virtue for which Brutus had a reputation was recognized by the conspirators and they planned to make use of it (I.iii.161-64). What they apparently had not counted on was his assuming full control immediately. This assumption of control appears in everything, from major questions of policy to the most trivial matters. Although it does not appear until immediately after Brutus joins the conspirators, it is foreshadowed in the first scene. Cassis says to him: "You bear too stubborn and too strange a hand / Over your friend that loves you" (I.ii.35-36). In context this means that Brutus has been less friendly to Cassius than was usual, but on a more general level it describes perfectly the behavior that Brutus will display. The play contains at least fourteen ocasions in which Brutus proceeds to dominate or to domineer over his fellows.[51]

Moreover, in contrast to Caesar, he practically displays very little genuine friendship and care for anyone throughout the play:

> The self-righteous willfulness of Brutus stands most fully revealed to us in the second and third scenes of Act IV. Cassius comes charging down on the expectant (IV.ii.13-19) Brutus with the declaration, "Most noble brother, you have done me wrong" (IV.ii.37). Brutus' answer drips with injured innocence and unconscious hypocrisy: "Judge me, you gods! wrong I mine enemies? / And, if not so, how should I wrong a brother?" (IV.ii.38-39). This answer, so full of sanctimonious, imitation surprise, contains some fascinating assumptions, namely, that if one would not wrong an enemy, he could not wrong a friend, that Brutus never wrongs an enemy, and therefore that Brutus, like Caesar, "doth not wrong". But Caesar had been Brutus' friend, had shown him his love, and had advanced him to the praetorship; yet Brutus led the faction that murdered him.[52]

Thus, while the previously mentioned tyranny debate is ever active and similar in its basic nature, the question of divine monarchy is one Renaissance topic and an apparent aspect in *Julius Caesar* that appears to have lost a certain amount of interest among modern critics, who have more often than not emphasised the development of Brutus ahead of Caesar. This is very apparent and true when one considers how the play embraces the idea of divine monarchy, thus complicating Brutus' actions. Overall, perceptions surrounding the debate concerning divine kingship as present in the Renaissance and represented by the play have changed in the sense that the discussion is not given as much focus among modern critics as should hav been given its central thematic connection to the debate of tyrannicide that is apparent within the play. The emphasis seems rather to be towards the aforementioned tyranny debate and Brutus' character development than the question of divine kingship and whether Caesar is such a monarch or transgressing against the Heavens and sinning by

[51] Gordon Ross Smith, 'Brutus, Virtue, and Will', *Renaissance Quarterly* 10.3 (1959), 367-379; 368.
[52] Smith, 'Brutus, Virtue and Will', 371.

attempting to forge such a connection. Thus, the change among critics is that their views regarding *Julius Caesar* empasise a stronger focus on the questions of tyranny, tyrannicide and Brutus' character development. Overall, though some critics include the idea of sacred kingship as a part of their discussion of *Julius Caesar*, the subject is perhaps given less attention than it deserves. Without it, a significant part of Brutus' inner conflict remains unexplored, namely the question of whether the murder of Caesar is a transgression against divine will. Thus, perceptions have changed, and different elements within the play (such as the tyranny question) definitely seem to now be judged as more relevant than others to our modern, subjective experiences in general. Now, having looked at this, it is time to move on to the subject of rebellion.

Rebellion and Democracy

Concerning the debate of a shift in perspectives, rebellion is a thematic subject that a is of significant import to *Julius Caesar*. It is also closely linked to the tyranny debate. Ernest Schanzer, who sees *Julius Caesar* as a problem play, contributes to this argument by pointing out the various opposing opinions, presenting the contrasting views of Dover Wilson, who sees Caesar as 'a Roman Tamburlaine of illimitable ambition and ruthless irresistible genius; a monstrous tyrant who destroyed his country and ruined "the mighthiest and most flourishing commonwealth that the world will ever see" to Mark Hunter, who as previously mentioned considers Shakespeare's view to be that 'the murder of Julius was the foulest crime in secular history.'[53] However, if one is to answer to what degree perspectives among modern scholars have changed concerning the question of rebellion, we must first examine the topic of rebellion as related to the Elizabethan era, then look at the play and see what Shakespeare's stance is regarding the issue.

As can be seen in the earlier extract from the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion*, rebellion was considered a sinful and destructive practice. Furthermore, the concept of censorship previously mentioned in this chapter became an extension of the official condemnation of rebellion by the government. As stated by Janet Clare:

> … it is recorded that in 1581 'An Acte Against Sedicious Wordes and Rumors Uttered Against the Queenes Most Excellent Majestie' made it punishable by death to circulate 'any manner of Booke Ryme Ballader Letter or Writing, conteyning any false sedicious and slanderous Matter' which might lead to 'the

[53] Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, 10.

> encoraging stirring or moving of any Insurreccon or Rebellion within this Realme.[54]

The official point of view was clear: any writing containing elements that might be viewed as anti-monarchical was committing a sinful transgression against the peace of the state. The punishment was swift and brutal: death. Considering this, one can easily forgive Shakespeare for glorifying Tudor monarchy in his history plays through characters like Richmond. One may wonder whether he would have embellished in such glorification of the existing monarchy or not if the Elizabethan government had not committed to such strict rules of censorship. Also, moving back to the briefly aforementioned way in which Shakespeare represents the deposition of Richard II at the hands of Henry Bolingbroke as a mortal sin that results in chaotic civil war, one further sees how Shakespeare fully embraces anti-rebellion and the 'Tudor myth'.

For indeed, while it would be too far-fetched and one-sided to argue that Renaissance English culture universally condemned rebellion, there is certainly ample evidence to support a condemning view of rebellion in the Shakespearean canon. In his plays, we find all different character types imaginable; some are ambiguous, flawed and 'rounded' (i.e. Hamlet), others are almost saint-like (Cordelia), while others again are archetypal villains (Iago). What is particularly interesting is that to Shakespeare the rebel always seems to belong in the 'villain' category. A good example of this would be the Jack Cade rebellion in *Henry VI, Part 2*, where King Henry is presented as a meek and virtuous king (almost to an annoying extent) while Shakespeare's Jack Cade is thoroughly rough, unrefined and bloodthirsty. Both he and the people who follow him are merciless murderers, and Shakespeare embraces a view of the masses as impulsive, violent and uncivilised. The fickleness and unreliable nature of mob behaviour is moreover also present in *Coriolanus*, where the people quickly turn against the play's tragic hero, despite the fact that he is literally their saviour. Overall, Shakespeare's position against rebellion, which he throughout some of his plays presents as a violent and bloodthirsty affair, is that any uprising against a reigning ruler only results in mob mentality and civil war. One may wonder whether there is a certain underlying contempt for the 'masses' in their portrayal as primitive and violent in *Julius Caesar*. As Albert H. Tolman writes:

[54] Janet Clare, '"Greater Themes for Insurrection's Arguing": Political Censorship of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage', *The Review of English Studies* 38.150 (1987), 169-183; 169-170.

> In the first scene of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* the common people are depicted as if they were English mechanics. We are led to wonder whether the contempt expressed in this play for the vile-smelling and fickle-minded Roman mob represents Shakespeare's own attitude towards his humbler fellow-citizens.[55]

Now, moving on to the concept of rebellion as portrayed in *Julius Caesar*, one point that must be taken into discussion is that while Caesar may be seen as a sort of 'sacred king', this does not necessarily equate to him being a tyrant. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is perhaps not yet a tyrant, but is dangerously close to becoming one through his extensive arrogance and delusions of godhood. As *Macbeth* and *Richard III* clearly signify, Shakespeare holds no love for tyrants, presenting them as devious and destructive to both themselves and universal order, and it is a view in which the overthrowing of a tyrant at the hands of a noble and honourable man chosen by God, like Richmond in *Richard III*, is entirely justifiable. Indeed, Shakespeare loathes the tyrant and the rebel with equal measure. To him, they are both enemies to the order which both Imperial Rome and Elizabethan England believed in.

The idea of rebellion bringing nothing but devastation and destruction is certainly present in Shakespeare. The prospect of tyranny may be catastrophic, but the actions of the masses are throughout the play ever a disruptive and dangerous element. One must note their unreliable fickleness, their lack of loyalty and how easily they are manipulated. As Miola writes:

> Since no one could licitly slay a tyrant without the consent (express or tacit) of the people, Shakespeare's portrayal of the Roman citizens takes on special importance. After first appearing to celebrate Caesar's triumph, they, abashed by the tribunes' rebuke, quietly withdraw, only to appear again as the crowd thronging about Caesar, then Brutus, then Antony, then Caesar again. Their vacillation in the Forum scene, wherein they change from doubt to admiration to anger, and their cruel fury toward Cinna the poet characterize them as dangerously unstable. These incidents render meaningless the question about whether the people consent (expressly or tacitly) to the assassination. Such consent could be only capricious whim. Shakespeare's portrayal of the fickle mob here, largely an innovation from Plutarch, does not merely reflect anti-democratic prejudice or suggests the necessity for a strong ruler. Instead, it completes his depiction of a society without any divine or secular basis of authority. In the arbitrariness of their will the plebeians are the exact counterpart of the feckless Senate, the conspiring patricians, and most important, the ambitious Caesar. In *Julius Caesar* no trustworthy source of sovereignty arises to direct Rome; there is only the politics of the marketplace, a confusing cacophony of claims and counterclaims. In this world the origins

[55] Albert H. Tolman, 'Is Shakespeare Aristocratic?', *Modern Language Association* 29.3 (1914), 277-298; 277.

> of civil government and sovereignty lie in the possession of power, pure, simple and amoral.[56]

In the opening scene, Marullus points to the lack of loyalty and backstabbing nature of the Roman masses:

> *Mar*. Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he
> home?
> What tributaries follow him to Rome,
> To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?
> You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!
> Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
> Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
> To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
> Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
> The livelong day, with patient expectation,
> To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome:
> And when you saw his chariot but appear,
> Have you not made an universal shout,
> That Tiber trembled underneath her banks,
> To hear the replication of your sounds
> Made in her concave shores?
> And do you now put on your best attire?
> And do you now cull out a holiday?
> And do you now strew flowers in his way,
> That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
> Be gone!
> Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
> Pray to the gods to intermit the plague
> That needs must light on this ingratitude.
>
> (1.1.32-55)

The masses also readily abandon their mourning for and loyalty to Caesar as soon as Brutus has explained his actions to them:

> *1. Pleb.* Bring him with triumph home unto his house.
> *2. Pleb.* Give him a statue with his ancestors.
> *3. Pleb.* Let him be Caesar.
> *4. Pleb.* Cæsar's better parts
> Shall be crown'd in Brutus.
>
> (3.2.50-54)

[56]Miola, *Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate*, 288.

Their loyalty to Brutus is equally short-lived, as they quickly condemn Brutus and side with what will historically be known as the Caesarean faction after Antony's brilliant rhetorics:

> *1.Pleb.* Never, never! Come, away, away!
> We'll burn his body in the holy place,
> And with the brands fire the traitors' houses.
> Take up the body.
> *2.Pleb.* Go fetch fire.
> *3.Pleb.* Pluck down benches.
> *4.Pleb.* Pluck down forms, windows, any thing.
> *[Exeunt Citizens [with the body]*.
>
> (3.2.250-256)

What then ensues, civil war, is a direct result of the insurrection of the masses grieving the death of Caesar. Yet, this ensuing civil war is also a political machination from Antony's side to avenge his dead friend and consolidate his position of power in the post-Caesar Roman Republic. Yet, none of the chaos would have transpired had Caesar still lived. Who exactly is responsible for civil war thus becomes a complex issue. The blame partly lies with all three rebellious stages in the play, namely the transgression against Heaven through the conspirators murdering Caesar, Antony's calculated speech to inspire insurrection and the blind and maniacal fickleness and violent tendencies of the masses. Ultimately, Shakespeare presents the whole matter as one of complexity, and blame for the collapse of the ordered universe within the play can be placed upon several different heads, depending on one's perspective. What is most striking about the fickle disloyalty of the masses, though, is that it is the one element that is most recognisably 'fascist'. What is perhaps the most frightening aspect of the fascist wave that struck Europe in the 1930's is that it is a prime example of how easily the masses can be manipulated by a charismatic and powerful individual. Sadly, latter day history has proven that the ease at which the Roman citizens have taken up the mantle of violence for themselves was not an exaggeration on Shakespeare's part, nor was it an unrealistic view of the destruction human beings are capable of when acting under the sway of group mentality.

One constant issue in *Julius Caesar* is how characters constantly overstep the boundaries placed upon them by their position in the hierarchy of universal order. Caesar oversteps his position as a divine, yet mortal king-like figure through his delusions of godhood. On the other hand, the taint of rebellion as a sin is definitely placed upon Brutus and

Cassius, who thus in their own way transgress against cosmic law and Caesar's divine right to rule as king. The indication that the consequences of their actions reach far beyond the personal, even the political dimension, is a constant within the confines of the play. The cosmic events surrounding Caesar's death and the presence of supernatural forces are embellished upon in the following exchange:

> *Casca.* Are you not mov'd, when all the sway of earth
> Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,
> I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds
> Have riv'd the knotty oaks; and I have seen
> Th'ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam,
> To be exalted with the threat'ning clouds:
> But never till to-night, never till now,
> Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.
> Either there is civil strife in heaven,
> Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,
> Incenses them to send destruction.
>
> 1.3.3-13)

Once again, the events chronicled move beyond the mere mortal plane and into the supernatural realm of the gods. As Rome soon will be struck with civil strife, so the heavens themselves are at war. Alone and isolated, the words of Cassius may be seen as supernatural. However, when coupled with the appearance of the Soothsayer and the dreams of Calpurnia, the presence of the supernatural, the realm of cosmic godhood, becomes an active participant in the play. The murder of Caesar is not merely an act that upsets civil order, but one that also transpires into the world beyond the play, and the concept of regicide thus moves beyond mere tyrannicide and into the realm of transgression against universal order both on a civil, mortal plane and a cosmic one.

Overall, if one moves this back to the argument of Caesar as purely tyrannical, it becomes apparent that such an argument is further problematised by the dire consequences of the assassination itself. The resulting aftermath of the assassination is civil war and further struggles by ambitious individuals such as Antony and Octavius to fill the power vacuum left behind by Caesar. A 'Renaissance' interpretation of Caesar as a monarch and representative of cosmic order will see the murder as an ultimately vile and criminal act, despite Brutus' well-meaning justification for it. Furthermore, from this point of view, the actions of Marullus and Flavius are not those of liberators yearning for freedom, but rather instigators of revolt and anarchy. While they can be perceived as freedom fighters rising against tyrannical oppression, they can also be viewed as merely using rhetoric to protect their own position in

Roman politics, a position Caesar has challenged by becoming an ally of the people against the self-interest of the largely plutocratic senate.

The question thus becomes one of perspective: is freedom of speech and expression more important than stability and order, or is the overarching interest of society control and avoidance of rebellion and civil war?. A similar approach can be made for Caesar's suspiciousness towards Cassius. On one hand, it could be interpreted as a paranoid tyrant showing his fear of a strong rival. However, Caesar's distrust turns out to be very much justified, as Cassius is the catalyst of the entire conspiracy. This is not the paranoid distrust displayed by a tyrant like Nero, who was almost universally condemned by history. Rather, it is a perfect example of a true, instinctive gut feeling, as the threat that Cassius displays towards Caesar is very real, and from the very first scene of the play we are exposed to a senator who actively plots Caesar's destruction.

This anti-rebellious sentiment of Shakespeare has, by some modern readers, been viewed as evidence of hostility towards democracy and liberal freedom of speech. As Walt Whitman stated about the playwright:

> 'The great poems, Shakespeare included, are poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people, the life-blood of democracy. Shakespeare…seems to me of astral genius, first-class, entirely fit for feudalism…there is much in him ever offensive to democracy. He is not only the tally of feudalism, but I should say Shakespeare is incarnated, uncompromising feudalism, in literature…the democratic requirements…are not only fulfilled in the Shakespearean productions, but are insulted on every page. Shakespeare…has been called monarchical or aristocratic (which he certainly is).'[57]

The question of Shakespeare's anti-democratic leanings is thoroughly relevant seen from the contextual point of view that modern society brings about. When speaking of liberties and rights bestowed upon the individual, modern liberal democracies certainly stand out compared to the centuries leading up to our era. As a result of liberal ideologies and the right to vote being extended to all layers of society due to common people's movements to attain them, perhaps also partly as a reaction against the restraints put on such freedoms in fascist and Stalinist society, such concepts have become central to the ideological fabric of society. Thus, while it is true that Shakespeare is 'anti-democratic' in the sense that he is a sceptic and pessimist concerning the actions of 'crowds', the whole discussion must also be placed in a proper context. The Parliamentary system we live under and take for granted

[57] Tolman, 'Is Shakespeare Aristocratic?', 280-281.

represents an entirely different social context from that of Shakespeare's age. Our collective social consciousness knows liberal democracy as an established social structure, and it is what we are adapted to, whether one agrees with the system or not. In the same sense, Shakespeare knew and adapted to the political systems he knew, namely Tudor and Jacobean monarchy. To him, kingship and monarchy were as natural as it is natural to us that we are governed by a prime minister or president, his cabinet and a Parliament and/or Senate. Our age and perceptions are forged by our recent historical past and ideologies we have collectively embraced or rejected (social movements, liberal ideologies, Marxism, fascism, etc.) In fact, some aspects of Shakespeare are so 'modern' and so many of the themes he explores are so universally relevant to the trials and tribulations of mankind in general that it is easy to forget that his works are of an era which had a different recent history, power structure and set of ideologies. In particular, it is important to note that Elizabethan England was a country where the threat of rebellion and civil war constantly seemed to lure on the horizon. The fear of rebellion displayed by the government itself is ample evidence of this.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, it is well documented that the Elizabethan government sometimes took an active interest in censorship of theatre. These examples, combined with the fact that Shakespeare's company was continually on friendly terms with the government during its existence, to the point of being sponsored by James I himself and bearing the title 'The King's Men', it should not come as a surprise to anyone that Shakespeare's writings bear strong pro-monarchical traits. After all, he lived in a time when monarchy was the norm, was the co-owner of a theatre company ever eager to please and form alliances with the authorities and was probably familiar with the Homilies. From this point of view, Shakespeare's views of Julius Caesar as a king bearing the mark of divine right to rule and his murder at the hands of the conspirators as a transgression against universal law, makes great sense. It should not be expected that Shakespeare, despite his everlasting relevance to human society, should be able to view society through the eyes of democracy as it currently exists and is defined to us centuries before its appearance. At the time when *Julius Caesar* was written, the concept of 'democracy' as we understand the term was simply not a part of English cultural consciousness. Of course they also possessed ideas of justice, freedom and fair leadership, but these concepts can carry various different meanings depending on time, culture, the subjective individual and historical context. Though there certainly was no universal consensus of obedience to the monarch in Elizabethan times, as the various uprisings against the reigning queen clearly demonstrate, the important point here is that

Shakespeare certainly glorifies monarchy to a significant degree, a glorification that has at times been at odds with modern writers in characters like Prospero. Prospero, perhaps being Shakespeare's prime example of enlightened kingship and benevolent dictatorship, has also at times been perceived as a tyrant. Whether Shakespeare glorified monarchy out of genuine support for the current reigning monarch in question or because he did not want to upset the authorities is beside the question – what is important, from a literary point of view, is that Shakespeare's texts clearly demonstrate such sentiments, and that *Julius Caesar* is one of the plays that show evidence of such an ideal through the supernatural aspects present in the play. Overall, while the view of Shakespeare as 'anti-democratic' in the sense that he at times shows clear contempt and fear regarding the question of rebellion, the idea of bringing a discussion of democracy into the equation is definitely a reshaping of *Julius Caesar* into a modern framework and perspective. While there is nothing wrong with this manner of reception, and it is a genuine expression of how Shakespeare's work can efficiently be adapted into a thoroughly modern cultural context and thus inherently contains so much material of relevance that it transcends its age, it is also necessary to be reminded that such a 20th/21st century historical and cultural context is more remote from the consciousness of Shakespeare's age than may be apparent at first. In the case of 'democracy' as a term and in the modern sense of the word, it is so tied to Western culture of our own age that it is important to remember that the concept of democracy as we understand it did not exist at all during that age. It is vital to recognise that such views are modern, and not attempt to impose current mentalities upon literature that existed before such terms as we understand them today were 'invented.'

Now, having assembled and discussed Shakespeare's views concerning rebellion, the main question remains: in what ways has there been a change of perception among modern critics compared to the topical questions in the Renaissance pertaining the question of rebellion? Overall the question of rebellion itself is recognised, as shown in Harley Granville-Barker's in-depth analysis of Antony's rhetorical funeral oration, whipping the people of Rome into a frenzied mob.[58] The modern relevance of the question of the ease of the masses' embrace of the manipulating rhethoric of authorities is, in fact, still of great import, and the idea of Antony staging a propagandic display of Caesar's corpse to the audience is

[58] Harley Granville-Barker, 'Antony', in *Twentieth Century Interpretation of Julius Caesar*, Leonard F. Dean, ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 21-26.

emphasised in some modernised performances.[59] In fact, the question of propaganda and authoritarian manipulation of the people is perhaps more relevant than ever in an age where tyrants such as Hitler showed how much destruction can emit from such practices. As follows, it can be argued that the idea of rebellion is still seen as a vital point of discussion concerning the play, but is perhaps now seen in a bit different light. The Homily-preached view projected rebellion as destructive to the spiritual condition of the state and a sin against the judgement of God. To a modern audience, however, the uprising is all about the ease of manipulation as committed by Antony and him using the Roman commoners like pawns on a chessboard to both enhance his own political power and avenge his murdered friend. Not that this perspective did not exist in Shakespeare's mind while writing, but the interpretation is arguably more secularised; no longer is the religious doctrine of the Renaissance as relevant to our readings. Overall, the perception that rebellion is an important issue and a destructive force is still there. However, the nature of how it is viewed by many has arguably shifted more away from the religious rhetoric of the *Homilies* that is detectable throughout *Julius Caesar* and many of the history plays.

[59] Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Facing History, Facing Now: Deborah Warner's *Julius Caesar* at the Barbican Theatre, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.1 (2006) 71-85; 73-74.

Chapter 3: The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra

Introduction

In my approach to *Antony and Cleopatra*, I have an aim that is overall similar to that which I used in my assessment of *Julius Caesar*. By looking at Renaissance views on topics that are central to the structure of this late Shakespearean tragedy, I will analyse the text and discuss where Shakespeare stands regarding these questions. I will then take into consideration where contemporary critics stand in relation to these issues, with the overall aim of assessing whether there has been a shift in opinions or topics of interest. First, I will examine the topic of Augustanism as seen from Renaissance viewpoints in relation to Shakespeare's presentation of the character of Octavius and his rise to empire in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the second part, I want to look at the character of Cleopatra and make a comparison between Renaissance assessment of her character and questions concerning race. The structure of each section will be as follows: first I present different Renaissance view(s) on the subject in question and follow this up by analysing and considering where Shakespeare stands on the issue as seen in the play. Finally, I will consider modern critical views on these topics in regards to it. As stated, my overall aim is to use this to document the level of change in perception as well as topic(s) of interest among modern critics compared to active discussions of topics relevant to the play during the Renaissance.

Octavius: Rise of the Princeps

This section of the chapter on *Antony and Cleopatra* will explore Renaissance perspectives on Augustus, then analyse how Shakespeare's presentation of the Octavius character stands in comparison to these views. In the end, the perspectives of modern critics of the play will be discussed in order to deduce to what extent they represent change in perspectives and fields of interest. I will also discuss how the theme of divine kingship relates to Shakespeare's Octavius figure. However, to make my approach clear, this thesis will not argue that there is any formal link between the historical Octavius/Augustus and Early

Modern kingship. While the historical Augustus was successful in reforming the power structure of the Roman state for centuries to come, one of the few goals he ultimately failed to fulfil was the establishment of rule through direct bloodline descent, as both his grandsons died at a very young age. Though the evidence is hardly conclusive, there are some indications that Augustus may have desired to establish a system of monarchy. As E.T. Salmon writes:

> The evidence for Augustus' determination to be the monarch is clear and it is contemporary. Nicolaus Damascenus, who was personally acquainted with the Princeps, implies in the surviving fragments of his *Life of Caesar* that well before 31 B.C. Augustus had already made up his mind to be master of the state. Strabo, like Nicolaus, an exact contemporary, also has no doubts about Augustus' fixed monarchical intentions. The appeals, which the exiled Ovid addresses to Augustus *ad nauseam*, are the appeals of a subject to his monarch. Above all, there are the recorded words of Augustus himself. The *Res Gestae*, as Westermann pointed out years ago, reveals Augustus' monarchical outlook: it is significant that the only persons actually mentioned by name in that document as achieving memorable exploits are either the monarch himself or his intended successors in the position: viz. Augustus himself, Agrippa, Marcellus, Gaius, Lucius, Tiberius. No less revealing is the letter written by Augustus to his grandon Gaius in A.D. I, in which he calls his position in the State his *statio*: this military expression was commonly used to describe the position of Plato's philosopher-king. Then, too, one can adduce the famous edict which Augustus issued, possibly in 23 B.C. although the year is uncertain.[60]

As already stated in the introduction chapter, the viewpoints concerning the validity of the Augustan Principate are many and conflicting. Today, there is still a distinct tendency towards disagreement among historians. To some, he is one of history's most brilliant leaders, bringing much-needed peace and stability to a Rome that was ravished by war and discontent:

> History has seen Augustus Caesar as Rome's first *emperor*, who brought the city and the empire from the chaos of civil war to a system of ordered and stable government. Of the two names by which he is most commonly known, one (Augustus) was granted him by the senate and people in January 27 BC in recognition of his perceived achievements. The other (Caesar) was his family name, inherited as result of his adoption by Julius Caesar. Both names came to be used as parts of the nomenclature of emperors and their designated successors. Augustus' own career was taken as the standard for successful government; many of those who came after him – for example, Vespasian (69-79), and Hadrian (117-138) – attempted to set their own reigns on course by indicating that his would be the model for their conduct of government.[61]

[60] E.T Salmon, 'The Evolution of Augustus' Principate', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 5.4 (1956), 456-478; 458.
[61] David Colin Arthur Shotter, *Augustus Caesar*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2005): 1.

To others, he is seen as a deceptive man who managed to present his governance as one that was benevolent and supported free will while he in practice ruled by brute force. Similarly, the Renaissance was marked by conflicting perspectives and opinions regarding Rome's first Emperor. In *Poetaster*, Shakespeare's contemporary playwright Ben Jonson 'characterizes Augustus as a model of much that is good in the monarch and the state'[62]. In the play, Jonson describes the choosing of Augustan Rome as the setting in the following manner: 'And therefore chose Augustus Caesar's times, / When wit and arts were at their height in Rome.'[63] Jonson was not the only Renaissance figure to present Augustus in a positive light. In 1508, scholar Sir Thomas Elyot wrote the following about the two emperors Augustus and Titus:

> Each of them had a notable greatness of mind, and at the same time an incredible gentleness and leniency, so that they attached the affection of all by their kindliness towards the people, but they were also equally successful in dealing promptly with the greatest matters, when the situation demanded a man.[64]

Criticism of Augustus was also present in European Renaissance culture, and was often based upon utter condemnation of the ruthless proscriptions committed by the Triumvirate. As seen in a 1591 translation of Ariosto's 'Canto 35, v. 26' by John Harrington:

> *Augustus Caesar* was not such a Saint,
> As *Virgil* maketh him by his description,
> His love of learning scuseth that complaint,
> That men might justly make of his proscription;
> Nor had the shame that *Nero*'s name doth taint,
> Confirm'd now by a thousand yeares prescription,
> Been as it is, if he had the wit,
> To have been frank to such as Poemes writ.'[65]

Furthermore, voices of scepticism against the Augustan Principate were voiced by influential Renaissance figures like Macchiavelli.[66] Altogether, the debate of the validity of Augustus' empire was just as vivid during the Renaissance as during any other age. Opinions on the Princeps were divided, encompassing views ranging from Augustus as an enlightened

[62] Howard D. Weinbrot, *Augustus Caesar in «Augustan» England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 49.
[63] Ben Jonson, 'Poetaster', in *The Devil is an Ass and OtherPlays*, 2000, Margaret Jane Kidnie, Michael Cordner, Peter Holland, Martin Wiggins, eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-101; 97.
[64] Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 50.
[65] Weinbrot, *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England*, 66.
[66] Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*, 52.

and wise ruler to that of a merciless despot, and everything in between. An interesting angle of critical opinion appeared in 18th century Augustan literature:

> THE MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTION TO AUGUSTUS WAS NOT that he was a butcher, or a torturer, or a pathic, or a lecher, or incestuous, or a legacy-hunter, or a censor, or even a book-burner. Nobody is perfect, as the nation successively ruled by Oliver Cromwell and Charles Stuart no doubt remembered. The dominant objections were to his destruction of the balanced constitution of the Roman Republic, the fatal precedent he set for other rulers, and the establishment of the empire whose slavery and fall were inherent in its creation. Moreover, as either rhetoric, or genuine belief, or both had it, Augustus was consciously and maliciously guilty of murdering the republic. As Tacitus and Dio Cassius taught the eighteenth century, Augustus selected Tiberius knowing that he was evil, knowing that he would further ravage the empire, and hoping that his own memory would be further enhanced as a result of the contrast. Augustus' rule, then, served British theoreticians, historians, and politicians as a practical guide: it showed them what not to do in their own nation, and they saw what happened in Britain and France when Augustus' ways were followed.[67]

Though the Augustan era in English literature would not take form until more than a century after *Antony and Cleopatra* was written, it is an era that showcases more than any other what Augustus has meant to the English literary consciousness. Moreover, it enables us to more closely define different aspects of the Augustanism debate as it existed in early modern England. Though the idea that Augustus chose Tiberius due to some abstract scheme of placing a tyrant upon the throne to enhance his own reputation among future generations is highly speculative, it does represent an interesting angle to the 'anti-Augustan' side of the debate.

It is not the aim of this thesis to discuss the debate of the historical Augustus, however, but mainly to present it as a basis for discussion of the Octavius character in *Antony and Cleopatra* and the modern critical assessment of him as a dramatic figure. Therefore, let us end the historical discussion by stating that the heart of the problem of Augustanism is the debate of the first Emperor's moral character, and that the polar opposite views of Augustus as a benevolent autocrat or a tyrant are not necessarily mutually exclusive given the complexity of human thought and behaviour.

The question, then, remains: how can we gain an understanding of Shakespeare's stance concerning Augustanism? In order to do so, we must look at how Shakespeare depicts and chronicles the young Octavius Caesar's rise to power culminating in the death of the two

[67] Weinbrot, *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England*, 86.

famous titular lovers and the birth of the Roman Empire. Within the play, Octavius is in many ways a symbolic character in that he embodies the values embraced by Rome – stoic discipline, logic, structure and order. In many ways, he *is* Rome in a moral sense, being detached from the world of passion and spontaneity embraced by Egypt as represented by Antony and Cleopatra. The Rome he represents, however, lies in the future, while Antony is representative of traditional Roman virtues of heroic honour. As stated by Janet Adelman:

> Although Octavius is the spokesman for measure, he is by no means the spokesman for the idea of Rome itself: our sense of ancient Roman virtues comes not from Octavius but from the descriptions of Antony as he used to be. And in these descriptions, Rome itself is hyperbolical: Antony's excess is associated not only with Egypt and Cleopatra but also with his own past glory as a Roman soldier.[68]

From this point of view, Antony becomes the representative of the Roman Republic, with its glorious conquests (Carthage) and its brilliant generals (Pompey, Scipio, Marius, even Julius Caesar), but still a Republic that has now decayed into decadence and complacency. Antony is no longer the heroic general who fights alongside his soldiers, sleeps in rough surroundings and suffers the hard life of the soldier along with his men. He is now, ideologically speaking, an aging remnant of the golden age of the Roman Republic, and there is no place for him in Octavius' Rome. The semi-mythical heroic virtue he once possessed has, like the Republic itself, been corrupted by greed and luxurious indulgence. Shakespeare's Octavius, ever the play's embodiment of stoic discipline and cold, detached realpolitik, is ever offended by Antony's transgression against these values that he so fervently believes in and him having traded Roman values for Egypt and Cleopatra:

> CAESAR [Octavius] No,
> My most wronged sister. Cleopatra hath
> Nodded him to her. He hath given his empire
> Up to a whore, who now are levying
> The kings o'th'earth for war.
>
> (3.6.65-69)

Octavius thus emerges from the play as a very political and practical figure. He is a man with his own moral compass, a compass on which level-headed statesmanship, duty and moderation stand forth as essential values of proper governance.

[68] Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar*, (London: Yale University Press, 1973), 131.

And ‘proper’ indeed is the future Rome of Octavius. In the play, he becomes a saviour-like figure, and there is a certain sense of glory and final respite when he prophecies the future Rome under his leadership. Once again, the following quote becomes significant:

> The time of universal peace is near.
> Prove this a prosp’rous day, the three-nooked world
> Shall bear the olive freely.
>
> (*4*.6 5-7)

Octavius’ rise to power and his transformation into Augustus is to Shakespeare representative of a glorious golden age, one where ultimate peace and order shall conquer the chaos and civil war ravaging the Republic. His empire will usher in a new dawn, an era of moral virtue, wise leadership and peace – the Pax Romana. Moreover, to the more religiously minded Renaissance society, associations connected to the Roman Peace would also be linked to the birth of Christ during the reign of Augustus, a connection that is also mentioned in the Gospels.

Logically speaking, this speech of Octavius in *Antony and Cleopatra* seems to indicate a certain admiration for the future Rome governed by the princeps. It is a future that brings about a complete cessation of the endless civil wars suffered by the Roman state throughout the waning decades of the Republic. Indeed, the underlying threat of civil war is strong in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as the unity of the ‘three-nooked’ world is collapsing due to political rivalry. This strong presence of civil war is apparent in all of Shakespeare’s Roman tragedies. As J. Leeds Barroll writes:

> This conventional association of Rome with the idea of civil war is reiterated by Shakespeare’s choice of his Roman situations which are all significant moments in the strife of the city. *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* describe the last two decisive phases in the greatest cycle of internal conflict, while *Coriolanus* presents a situation of twofold importance. As Appian tells us (sig. A3), Coriolanus’s invasion was the only instance of armed civil strife in early Rome where most internal quarrels were settled by debate. At the same time, the creation of tribunes of the people, which first occurred at this time, was an innovation which was to generate lasting hatred between nobles and commons (cf. Carion sig. L3v). A man holding this office (Tiberius Gracchus) was to be the first victim of political assassination, setting off the long train of wars finally ended by Augustus. In this sense, Shakespeare’s ‘Caesar’ plays parallel his other historical work. The period between Richard II and Henry V was analogous to that between Caesar and Augustus, as it was regarded by

> Roman historians. In both cases the strife was ended by the accession of the ideal king.[69]

Several parallels to Shakespeare's history plays are indeed present in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Both the series of eight history plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III* and these two Roman tragedies commence with the dethroning of a ruler (Julius Caesar, Richard II) which becomes a catalyst for unrest and civil war (The war between the Caesarean faction and the conspirators, the war between Antony and Octavius and the Wars of the Roses). The historical Roman tragedies and the history plays also culminate in the ascension of a ruler who will finally bring peace and order to the state as 'prophesied' within the plays themselves. In the history plays, this ruler is Henry Tudor (Richmond) and, to a certain degree, Henry V. In the two Roman tragedies chronicling the waning years of the Republic, it is Octavius Caesar. Moreover, as with Richmond, the future of the Augustan Principate is an ordained fulfilment of destiny, as seen in the following exchange between Antony and the Soothsayer:

> ANTONY Say to me,
> Whose fortunes shall rise higher, Caesar's or mine?
> SOOTHSAYER
> Caesar's.
> Therefore, O Antony, stay not by his side.
> Thy daemon – that thy spirit which keeps thee – is
> Noble, courageous, high unmatchable,
> Where Caesar's is not. But near him, thy angel
> Becomes afeard, as being o'erpowered; therefore
> Make space enough between you.
> ANTONY Speak this no more.
> SOOTHSAYER
> To none but thee; no more but when to thee.
> If thou dost play with him at any game,
> Thou art sure to lose; and of that natural luck
> When he shines by. I say again, thy spirit
> Is all afraid to govern thee near him;
> But, he away, 'tis noble.
>
> (2.3.14-29)

Thus, Shakespeare presents his Octavius as a man ordained by the fates, a man who is destined to govern Rome into a prosperous future. Octavius becomes the benevolent autocrat with a divine right to rule, an archetype idealised by Shakespeare perhaps most notably in the

[69] J. Leeds Barroll, 'Shakespeare and Roman History' in *The Modern Language Review* 53.3 (1958), 327-243; 329.

figure of Prospero as seen in *The Tempest*. In particular, as argued by Dean Ebner, Prospero's story of Antonio's betrayal reflects upon the anti-rebellious message present in the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion*.[70] This, of course, once again establishes Shakespeare's view of kingship as something that is sacred and unshakeable. The idea of sacred kingship is also present in the heroic portrayal of Richmond as a saviour of England and the founder of the Tudor dynasty in the first tetralogy. In other words, he is a divinely ordained monarch. As E.M.W. Tillyard writes of Richmond:

> For the purposes of the tetralogy and most obviously for this play Shakespeare accepted the prevalent belief that God had guided England into her haven of Tudor prosperity. And he had accepted it with his whole heart, as later he did not accept the supposed siding of God with the English against the French he so loudly proclaimed in *Henry V*. There is no atom of doubt in Richmond's prayer before he falls asleep in his tent at Bosworth. He is utterly God's minister, as he claims to be…[71]

The extent of import concerning the history plays in this debate is that they can be interpreted as parallels to the Roman tragedies. Seen in this light, Augustus can be viewed almost as a classical mirror image of the English Tudor monarchy as presented by Shakespeare; as the ascension of the Tudors to the throne of England in the first tetralogy is presented by the author as an end to civil war and the spilling of English blood, so can the ascension of Augustus to the imperial seat of Rome be seen as an end to centuries of civil strife and the spilling of Roman blood. The parallel is certainly there when comparing the Roman and English 'histories'. From such a point of view, Augustus as he appears in *Antony and Cleopatra* can certainly be seen as a divinely ordained ruler.

This does not, however, necessarily imply that Shakespeare completely glorifies his Octavius, who is altogether not presented as very 'likeable' due to his almost complete distance to human emotions and passions. The only hint of emotion present is his expressed caring for his sister Octavia and his final abandonment of Antony as an able co-ruler due to his infidelity towards her. However, his marriage of Octavia to Antony can just as likely be seen as a mere political manoeuvre, Octavius using his sister for political means; did he do it with the knowledge that Antony would leap right back into the arms of Cleopatra, and thereby planned to use that as a pretext for seizing power for himself? Or is he genuinely furious towards Antony for betraying his sister and their new-found trust? As with the historical

[70] Dean Ebner, 'The Tempest: Rebellion and the Ideal State', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16.2 (1965), 161-173; 162-163.
[71] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 210.

Augustus, it is difficult to read any sort of motive into the actions of Shakespeare's fictionalised counterpart. It is difficult to judge him, as it is with any other character in the play, as the entire fabric of the narrative relies on ambiguity and the difficulty of accurate judgement of the characters. As Adelman writes:

> Our involvement in the shaky business of judging is essential to the play; and it depends on precisely that uncertainty about the characters which so often frustrates us. We know of Hamlet's or Edgar's designs because they tell us about them. We know when Iago is feigning honesty or Macbeth loyal hospitality; we know precisely to what degree we can rely upon Claudius's or Gloucester's or Othello's or Duncan's judgment of the situation. But we do not always know when Antony and Cleopatra are feigning; and it is essential that we should not know.[72]

While Octavius is not specifically mentioned here, the general idea presented can arguably be extended to include Octavius as well. Whereas Shakespeare in many other tragedies often uses the art of the soliloquy to explore and present motive, the characters of *Antony and Cleopatra*, including Caesar, rarely express any form of overall scheme or motive. Besides the speech previously quoted in this chapter where he outlines his vision of the future Roman Peace, Octavius' goals and motives are rarely 'visible'. The play is frustrating in the sense that it leaves unanswered many questions regarding the characters. Was Octavius' aim to become the sole ruler of Rome his plan from the very beginning, or were the constant problems and incompetence displayed by Antony the cause? Is Octavius truly the guardian of moral virtue he considers himself, or is he priggish and hypocritical in his judgement? Truly, Octavius can also be seen as a cold, clever and calculating political archetype. Certainly, there are aspects one may question regarding Caesar, such as the questionable and rather backstabbing nature in which he removes Lepidus from the Triumvirate. The fact that Lepidus, despite his minimal role, served an important function as negotiator and mediator between Antony and Octavius lends the whole scene a sense of injustice. Moreover, Octavius certainly takes on a hue of coldness and cruelty in the negotiation between him and Cleopatra:

> CAESAR Cleopatra, know
> We will extenuate rather than enforce.
> Which towards you are most gentle, you shall find
> A benefit in this change; but if you seek
> Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself .
> Of my good purposes, and put your children
> To that destruction which I'll guard them from

[72] Adelman, *The Common Liar*, 30

If thereon you rely. I'll take my leave.

(5.2.123-32)

Certainly, the above can easily be read as Octavius trying to force enslavement upon Cleopatra by threatening her children. Moreover, the whole exchange between the two is loaded with deceit and political cunning. The implication is there that, despite his many generous words, Octavius ultimately seems to desire Cleopatra as an adornment to his triumph, practically humiliating her into slavery. Cleopatra, on the other hand, seems to make a failed attempt at seducing him. Thus, Octavius certainly at times takes upon himself the role of the power-hungry tyrant. As Reuben A. Brower writes: 'in his characterization of Octavius and the makers of the new order, Shakespeare casts a cold eye on the course of empire.'[73] In fact, the contrast between Octavius' coldness and Antony's warmth creates a vast division to their characters. Shakespeare's Octavius, while definitely portrayed as a skilful, wise and sensible politician, is also unforgiving and judgemental. As a result, Antony becomes more sympathetic and heroic due to his human frailties and weaknesses. He is guided by feelings – love, friendship (as displayed in his forgiveness towards Enobarbus' treachery) and heroic idealism, the latter an honour which he manages to regain through his heroic, Roman-manner suicide. In short, it is Antony's humanity, his disposition towards strong emotion and yielding to appetite and temptation, that makes him a sympathetic character. This stands in contrast to Octavius, whose sternness, duty and perfect statesmanship in addition to an almost complete detachment from emotion, leaves him to be perhaps less identifiable, even less 'human' to the reader. Nonetheless, despite Octavius' cold detachment from the audience, he does end the play on a positive note, and seems to be genuinely touched and impressed by the brave suicides of Antony and Cleopatra:

No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. High events as these
Strike those that make them, and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall
In solemn show attend this funeral,
And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
High order in this great solemnity.

(5.2.358-365)

[73] Reuben A. Brower, 'Antony and Cleopatra: The Heroic Context', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Antony and Cleopatra*, Mark Rose ed., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 30-37;35.

Therefore, Shakespeare's take on Augustanism is as follows: he recognises Octavius as having a cruel streak. However, he also clearly celebrates the future Rome under Augustus as a world of benevolence and peace. Despite this, the play ends upon a bittersweet note, for the price of empire is the loss of passion, heroism and the Herculean warrior spirit of Antony from the Roman power structure. Left is the cold, but efficient and stable Roman Empire. It is certainly no surprise that Shakespeare may have seen the death of Antony and Cleopatra as the 'death' of the mythic, heroic and passionate elements of the classical world, as he himself was a poet whose arguably best works explores human passion, desires and emotional states. However, he also recognises that decadent hedonism results in bad leadership. What follows is that to Shakespeare, Augustanism may require a heavy price, but is ultimately a price worth paying due to the resulting peace and harmony that was so important to Renaissance consciousness. As Michael Steppart writes: 'On a personal level Antony's passion for Cleopatra—spurious as it may be—is sympathetic against Octavius's voidness of feeling, yet on a political plane Octavius is the better Emperor, with Antony foreshadowing a Caligula or Nero.'[74]

Having now delved into Shakespeare's perception of Octavius and the Augustan Principate, it is time to develop the thread of discussion towards the perceptions of Octavius in *Antony and Cleopatra* as shaped by modern (i.e. 20th century) critics. How, then, is Shakespeare's Octavius seen among modern critics compared to the debate and problem surrounding Augustanism during the Renaissance? And how do these critical views compare to how Shakespeare presents Augustanism in *Antony and Cleopatra*? Moreover, finally, is there a detectable change in opinion or field of interest? To what degree has there been an alteration concerning the question of Augustanism in *Antony and Cleopatra*?

To some modern critics, Octavius is indeed the destined and ideal ruler of Rome. As Northrop Frye stated about the world of Rome: 'Its commander is Octavius Caesar, the very incarnation of history and the world's greatest order-figure, a leader who is ruthless yet not really treacherous given the conditions of a ruler's task, who is always provided with all the justifications he needs for destroying Antony.'[75]

[74] Michael Steppat, *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra from 1607 to 1905* (Amsterdam: Verlag B.R. Grüner, 1980), 134.
[75] Northrop Frye, 'The Tailors of the Earth: The Tragedy of Passion' in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Antony and Cleopatra*, Mark Rose (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 113-117; 115.

Frye also fully embraces the view that Shakespeare's Octavius is a sort of saviour figure, calling him a 'secular counterpart to Christ'.[76] On the other hand, there is Brower's aforementioned view that Shakespeare views Octavius and his empire with cold eyes. To Adelman, Octavius is driven by a desire to 'subjugate Cleopatra and subdue Antony'.[77] Overall, concerning modern critics, little has changed in their perception of Octavius. Now, as in any other era, such perceptions are divided, and as shown above, the tendency clearly leans towards disagreement of whether Shakespeare glorifies Octavius or not. Thus, the debate concerning the moral virtue (or lack thereof) displayed by Augustus is just as frequently divided among 20th century Shakespeare critics as it has ever been to history. Shakespeare's Octavius is, as his historical counterpart, an elusive figure in the sense that he evades categorisation into any extreme, whether that category is 'tyrant' or 'wise monarch'. Robert P. Kalmey, however, writes that:

> […] it is a persistent commonplace in modern criticism to place Octavius in the role of an ideal prince who stands as the moral superior of the dissolute Antony, and who therefore deserves to accede to the governance of Rome because of his political rectitude and moral superiority.[78]

Many modern critics have identified Octavius not as a temperate and moral apogee in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but as its moral perigee. For example, he is seen by Robert Kalmey as the evil and impelling force of the material and base world against the increasingly transcendent love of Antony and Cleopatra.[79]

Indeed, opinions on Augustanism and how Shakespeare perceives it are as various among modern critics of *Antony and Cleopatra* as they have been to the historical consciousness and philosophical views of the Renaissance. Regarding perceptions that are largely in favour of Augustus' moral character, the tendency seems to be rather similar to that of the Renaissance, namely Octavius as a bringer of moral virtue, stability and peace to the chaotic world of the late Roman Republic. In this view, Octavius (upon becoming Augustus) is transformed into a saviour-like figure, and from a Renaissance point of view an upholder of the ordered universe. This aspect is, as shown above, certainly in consideration among the critics who favour Octavius as a morally just character. Regarding the views of Octavius that Shakespeare represents him as a morally questionable character, there seems to have

[76] Frye, 'The Tailors of the Earth: The Tragedy of Passion', 117.
[77] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra Updated Edition,* ed. David Bevington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 67-68.
[78] Robert P. Kalmey, 'Shakespeare's Octavius and Elizabethan Roman History', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 18.2 (1978), 275-287; 275.
[79] Kalmey, 'Shakespeare's Octavius and Elizabethan Roman History', 277.

decidedly been a change in perception as to why this is the case. To Maynard Mack, Thomas McFarland, Sigurd Burckhardt and Matthew Proser, Octavius is certainly seen as an antagonist to the transcendent love of Antony and Cleopatra.[80] This perspective of Octavius' Rome as base and material, an enemy to the elevated, transcendent and 'magical', is a different aspect of what is viewed as negative about Octavius' empire from the Renaissance discussion, where anti-Augustan sentiments mostly revolved around the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate. Rather, from this point of view, Octavius becomes the enemy of the play's aim to explore the theme of elevated love. His empire becomes one of strict boundaries and work ethic, an antithesis to any form of pleasure and indulgence. To Shakespeare's Octavius, hedonism is despicable and vile, a detriment to the state. Thus, judging the modern critical reception of the play, the viewpoints that are Pro-Augustan celebrate his moral character in the same way this has been done by the historians, philosophers and literary figures who during the last two millennia have viewed him in a positive light. The arguments ultimately bow down to excellent statesmanship, unquestionable leadership ability and strong moral discipline. As shown, some critics have also argued that Shakespeare presents him as a rightful, perhaps even divine 'king'. Thus, the Pro-Augustan views do, in fact, differ little from their Renaissance counterparts. The praise of Octavius is, in the end, based upon a Utilitarian perspective of him being exactly the kind of leader the unstable Roman state required at that point in history, and that Shakespeare supports such a view of him, a perspective on Shakespeare's Octavius that is certainly supported by internal textual evidence. The writers who feel that Shakespeare is Anti-Augustan, however, have introduced some new ideas to the forefront, namely the idea that Octavius represents the cold, cynical realism that is in enmity to the concept of divine love as it is presented in the play. Therefore, it can definitely be stated that new perceptions have definitely been established concerning Anti-Augustan views of the plays. Overall, however, if one is to judge this according to Shakespeare, it seems that he had conflicting feelings regarding the subject. From a political point of view, he embraces Octavius' future as Augustus and sees it as a parallel to how he viewed Tudor monarchy and Henry V in that it will save Rome from civil war and bring the world much needed peace and stability. At the same time, he genuinely admires the mythic, otherworldly mystique and the realm of feelings and human emotion that is Egypt and mourns its loss. This is even the case with Octavius himself, who displays general grief and

[80]Kalmey, 'Shakespeare's Octavius and Elizabethan Roman History', 277.

melancholy upon discovering the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra. It is, perhaps, not surprising that Shakespeare held such a view. After all, exploration of human emotion can be seen as the realm of the poet, and human frailty and troubles are instantly more identifiable than cold political reality. Thus, despite how critics may disagree concerning the justification of Octavius' rise to power, Shakespeare definitely seems to see the necessity of the peaceful order brought about by the future Augustan state. But at the same time, he mourns that it will be a world of strict order and discipline, a world without heroes like the Herculean Antony and the semi-mythic Venus/Freya-like embodiment of desire and love that is Cleopatra. In the end, despite conflicting and changing perceptions that are both pro and anti-Augustan, this seems to be Shakespeare's overall message and assessment. However, my examination into the critical views on the Octavius character has also briefly touched upon another debate, namely Rome's opposite: Egypt. It is now therefore natural to turn the discussion towards the realm of Cleopatra.

Cleopatra and Race

Before endeavouring to analyse how and whether the modern race questions regarding Cleopatra represent a change in perception regarding her character in Shakespeare, it is first and foremost a necessity to present the perspectives of the Egyptian queen in the classical world and the Renaissance. After doing this, I will examine how Shakespeare's portrayal of her compares to the Renaissance views, and then evaluate whether there is a change in perspectives and fields of interest regarding Cleopatra among modern literary critics. In doing this, I will also make an overall evaluation of the critical perspectives that are presented. However, first, I will briefly introduce Cleopatra from the perspective of classical Rome.

Seen from the perspective of historical and literary works of classical Rome, Cleopatra is generally not viewed upon with kind eyes. With the exception of Horace's description of Cleopatra's suicide as an act of braveness, there is almost universal condemnation of her among ancient Roman historians. As J. Leeds Barroll writes about the classical references to Antony: 'When he then united with Cleopatra, a malicious schemer hungry to gain control of the Roman Empire, there was little question in the minds of most writers as to which side they supported.'[81] Indeed, the hatred Rome bore for Cleopatra cannot be underestimated. According to Meyer Reinhold:

[81] Barroll, 328.

> The savage propaganda campaign unleashed against Cleopatra poured out a flood of extravagant indictments and recriminations (lust, whoring, incest, use of magic and drugs, drunkenness, animal worship rampant luxury) that have echoed down through the ages in history, literature and the popular image of her.[82]

Also of notable relevance to the topic of race which I will discuss in this section is that some scholars analyse the Roman fear of Cleopatra as evidence of a great fear of the 'Orient' among the Romans. As M.P. Charlesworth writes:

> After the battle of Philippi Antony had gone East as the general of Rome to carry out Caesar's plan of a national war of revenge upon Parthia and to reorganize the provinces; but such news as reached Rome showed him dominated by an Eastern queen, subservient to her wishes, parcelling out Roman provinces as kingdoms for her children, and recognising her as *Queen of Kings*. He and Cleopatra had appeared and been acclaimed as gods, as Dionysus and Isis; gods, that is, who would make the strongest appeal to all the old national and religious instincts of the Hellenised Orient.[83]

The view of Cleopatra in classical Rome thus becomes very clear; that of a bewitching foreign queen who ensnares powerful Romans in order to aggrandise herself and her offspring. To the Romans, the image was clear: a non-Roman, foreign queen held a trusted leader of Rome in her grasp, and in making her his queen, Antony was in practice saying that she now held authority in the Empire. To the Roman senate, it must have been appalling indeed to see such an alignment between their own kind, Antony, and the seductive powers of a provincial ruler.

Fresh in mind that among the Romans, Cleopatra was seen with a general sense of revulsion, let us move on to perspectives of the English Renaissance. By early Jacobean age in which Shakespeare wrote, perspectives regarding the Egyptian queen had started to change somewhat. As Eugene M. Waith writes: 'By the Middle Ages a more generally sympathetic view of her than that of the older historians was beginning to be expressed.'[84] This more sympathetic view of Cleopatra was also present in the realm of English literature, and can be seen as early as in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. Such portrayals of the two famous lovers, Antony and Cleopatra, were part of a rich tradition. As Donna B. Hamilton writes:

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[82] Meyer Reinhold, 'The Declaration of War Against Cleopatra'. *The Classical Journal* 77.2 (1982), 97-103; 97.
[83] M.P. Charlesworth, 'The Fear of the Orient in the Roman Empire', *Cambridge History Journal* 2.1 (1926), 9-16; 11.
[84] Eugene M. Waith, *Patterns and Perspectives in English Renaissance Drama* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1988), 58.

> IN *The Legend of Good Women,* where Chaucer gathers together tales of notable ladies who have suffered and even died for their lovers, the opening story is that of Cleopatra, "This noble quene," "fair as is the rose in May" who dies "with good chere,/ For love of Antony." We have been led to believe that Chaucer's account of Cleopatra as a faithful lady is unique, for Antony and Cleopatra were primarily of use to moralists and historians as patterns of unlawful love, greed, and ambition. Contrary to this assumption, however, there exists among the works of poets and storytellers writing of love a rich supply of references, as laudatory as Chaucer's, ranking Antony and Cleopatra with other famous lovers of antiquity as exemplars of truth and faithfulness.[85]

Now, before moving on to the subject of analysing modern critical views of Cleopatra, we must endeavour to see where Shakespeare stands on the issue. What type of character is his Cleopatra, and what is her overall role in the play? What is Shakespeare's take on the 'Oriental' aspect of Cleopatra as the Romans saw her? How does Shakespeare approach the question of race?

The question of race stands forth as a central topic in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cleopatra's association with the idea of the foreign and the 'Orient' is highlighted already in the famous opening of the play:

> PHILO Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eys,
> That and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend , now turn
> The office and o'er the files devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust.
>
> (1.1.1-10)

Philo's identification of Cleopatra as a 'gipsy' is of particular interest from a racial perspective. As a soldier, his perspective is that of a Roman commoner and his voice that of an ordinary, average Roman. In doing this, Shakespeare transports the Roman fear of Egypt into an early modern setting. As the Romans viewed Cleopatra as a temptress and sorceress who had bewitched Antony, so has Gypsy culture numerous times been depicted as mystical, exotic and sexual in English culture. Gypsy culture, having frequently been portrayed as magical, adventurous, passionate, but also with a sense of danger in English literary tradition,

[85] Donna B. Hamilton, '*Antony and Cleopatra* and the Tradition of Noble Lovers', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24.3 (1973), 245-252; 245.

becomes a kind of modern equivalent to Egypt in *Antony and Cleopatra*. These are, of course, stereotypes that are now seen as rather ridiculous, outdated and untrue, but at the same time, stereotyping and prejudice can be found in any human society (including our own), and while one may disagree with such generalising notions, they are a reminder that one should expect Shakespeare to hold certain views that were not only common during his own age, but were also expressed at least well into the 20th century. Another valid example of this is Shakespeare's anti-Semitism, especially in *The Merchant of Venice*. Unfortunate, yes, but something one may expect from a man who lived during the Tudor and Jacobean eras, and an important reminder that Europe's anti-Semitic history reaches much further back than the Holocaust. Likewise, the image of 'Gypsies' presented in English literarature, especially during the Victorian era with authors such as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot[86] give us some insight into the cultural stereotypes that often resulted in persecution and genocide against Gypsies in Europe. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt examine

> [...] the contrast between images of Gypsies produced by *gadzo* European artists over the centuries and those created by Romani themselves. The former give disproportionate weight to the tiny majority of the ethnic group who may in fact be thieves, tricksters and criminals. Furthermore, the overemphasis on the exotic, erotic and nefarious reinforces other existing cultural and literary stereotypes. Nineteenth-century images of Gypsies as synonymous with 'Bohemians' featured Gypsies as outsiders rather than as members of a separate ethnic group. The concept of the amorphous but different mass of nomads or fortune-tellers gave artists scope to recreate and reinforce images of Gypsies as colourful extras, projections of Orientalist fantasies.[87]

This description of the depiction of 'Gypsies' in European art and literature is very reminiscent of Cleopatra as a character in Shakespeare's play. She is indeed a trickster, and frequently acts in a manner that can be seen as manipulating and cunning. She sends messengers to tell Antony that she is dead to see his reaction. She betrays him at Philippi, and it is somewhat suggested that she has aligned herself with Octavius. She also attempts to switch sides by seducing Octavius when Antony has lost. Last, but not least, the Gypsy connection to the concept of the Oriental becomes of central importance, as this draws the line between the Roman fear of Cleopatra as an embodiment of the Greek Eastern Orient to later associations of Gypsies with the Orient. Thus, Shakespeare forges a connection between the classical and the modern in his depiction of Cleopatra, presenting us with a queen who

[86] Deborah Epstein Nord, 'Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing', *Victorian Studies*, 41.2 (1998), 189-210; 190

[87] Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt, *The Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter-Images of 'Gypsyes'/Romanies in European Cultures* (London: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 8-9.

represents the old in a new hue. The Gypsy connection to magic is certainly present in the play as an aspect of the character of Cleopatra, as shown in the following soliloquy:

> ANTONY Forbear me.-
> There's a great spirit gone. Thus did I desire it:
> What our contempts doth often hurl from us
> We wish it ours again. The present pleasure,
> By revolution low'ring, does become
> The opposite of itself. She's good, being gone.
> The hand could pluck her back that shoved her on.
> I must from this enchanting queen break off:
> Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
> My idleness doth hatch.-
>
> (1.2. 117-126)

Antony's sensation of having been enchanted by Cleopatra certainly agrees with the Romans viewing her as being in possession of powers of sorcery and magic as well as the similar perspective of Gypsies having a connection to magic. One must note, however, that this is not presented as supernatural in the practical sense of the word, nor was it probably intended to be so by Shakespeare. It can be attributed to the language of love, a manner of uttering oneself through transcendent figures of speech - it is the language of passion and the language of the poet; and, as stated by Adelman, the play is to such a significant degree about differing perspectives and judgments:

> Throughout, one man's meat is another man's poison. There is no room here for a moral scheme which tidily apportions the world according to vices and virtues. In that sense, the basis for judgmenet is itself continually challenged. Enobarbus says that Cleopatra "did make defect perfection" (2.2.231): "vilest things/Become themselves in her" (2.2.238-39). Even the Romans describe the lovers as creatures beyond the reach of ordinary judgment.[88]

This can be interpreted as the Roman side of Antony speaking. This is the cold, imperial logic of Octavius and Rome, which throughout the entire play is constantly at war with the kingdom of passion, Egypt, where Cleopatra sits on the throne, a battle that is at the centre of both the political struggle and the inner conflict of the play's tragic hero, Mark Antony. Again, we are talking of perspectives here and not sorcery in practical, supernatural terms, but rather as expressed through the 'magic' of language. It is a sentiment that is totally 'Roman' in nature, and one that fears and perceives the foreign queen as dangerous and capable of sorcery, echoing the fear and hatred of Cleopatra that can be seen among the

[88] Adelman, *The Common Liar*, 26.

ancient Romans. Thus, the evidence is there that the connection between Cleopatra and the magic, dangers and mystery of the Orient is present within the play, and has, in fact, always been present in perspectives regarding Cleopatra. In that sense, race becomes an important topic for discussion in *Antony and Cleopatra*. When it comes to skin colour, however, the issue become increasingly ambiguous. Historically, of course, Cleopatra did not have any African blood, and was descended from the Greek royal house of Ptolemy, notorious for their inbreeding. Logically, her 'look' was probably very much akin to the Greeks, and therefore not too different from the Romans. Thus, it makes sense to assume that the hatred the Romans bore for Cleopatra was not based on any form of prejudice against 'blackness', but rather quite simply her non-Romanness. Nonetheless, the concept of 'blackness' certainly becomes relevant through the Gypsy connection. As Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell writes:

> Egypt's ruin is neatly captured by the Romans' anachronistic references to Cleopatra as "gypsy". The gypsy figure, as represented in a wide range of early modern texts, conflates England's rapidly shifting responses to blackness and natural Egyptian wisdom and anticipates the issues raised in the writings of Browne and Bulwer. In 1547, Andrew Borde describes Egyptians as displaced nomads, identified by their "swarte" skin and an inherent falseness, for unlike other nations they "go disgysid in theyr apparel…. [and] Ther be few or none of the Egipcions that doth dwel in Egipt. Later texts not only associate gypsy figures with craftiness and lost origins, but also emphasize their artifice and complexion. In *Lanthorne and Candle-light* (1609), Thomas Dekker finds it particularly disturbing that one might perceive the gypsy's complexion to be "natural"…[89]

This, combined with Cleopatra at times being associated with blackness, lends credibility to the discussion of her concerning skin colour. However, it must also be noted that modern perceptions of 'blackness' do not translate to the Renaissance meaning of the term. Janet Adelman points out that Shakespeare did, in fact, use the word 'black' in relation to characters in many different ways:

> The word "black" in the sonnets or *Love's Labour's Lost* means simply "brunette"; when the king by implications compares Biron's love to an Ethiopian (Love's Labour's Lost 4.23.265), his exaggeration is as evident as Biron's. In *Midsummer Night's Dream,* this exaggeration is part of love's confusion.[90]

[89] Mary Floyd-Wilson, 'Transmigrations: Crossing Regional and Gender Boundaries in Antony and Cleoptra' in *Enacting Gender on the Renaissance Stage*, Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell, eds., (Chicago: The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1999), 73-96; 88.
[90] Adelman, *The Common Liar*, 184.

Adelman then goes on to list several more examples that Shakespeare's use of 'blackness' does not necessarily mean literal 'blackness', and ends with the following:

> If Cleopatra is "tawny" (1.1.6), so is Spain (*Love's Labour's Lost* 1.1.174): to the English, anyone darker than themselves is apt to be characterized as black. This point is worth making only because some recent literature on Elizabethan attitude towards race has assumed that every time Shakespeare said black he meant black. See, for example, Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black* (Kingsport, Tenn., 1968), pp. 8-9. In fact, when Shakespeare wants us to consider race as an issue, he makes the point abundantly clear: there is no mistaking it in *Titus Andronicus* or *Othello*. Jordan's comments on *Othello* are extremely useful (*White over Black*, pp. 37-39), but these comments cannot be extended to include all of Shakespeare's dark ladies.[91]

Therefore, considering that 'black' really more aptly means 'dark' in the context of Cleopatra, perceiving her as a kind of female Othello is not entirely accurate when Shakespeare's meaning of the term is taken into consideration. However, while this is the case, race certainly becomes an issue in the play because the Romans liken Cleopatra to a 'gipsy'. Thus, while race was not a concern for the Romans when they condemned Cleopatra as an enemy of Rome, Shakespeare's Cleopatra displays a connection between Cleopatra and Renaissance understanding of Egypt, a society where that ancient nation was perceived to be closely linked to the 'Travelling peoples'. As mentioned, many of the stereotypical elements of danger and magic traditionally connected to 'gipsies' by European cultures are present in Shakespeare's Cleopatra. In a way, Shakespeare places the Roman fear of the Orient into a modern context by translating it into the traditional association of Gypsies with the Orient that existed in early modern England, and which lasted all the way up until the modern age. However, Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra as possessing several stereotypical traits of a racial character must not be misconstrued as an unfavourable portrayal of Gypsy culture on Shakespeare's part. It must be stressed that this is merely the Roman perspective on Cleopatra, and Shakespeare's use of 'gipsy' is there merely to give an association to the 'foreign' and the 'Orient' as the Renaissance audience understood the terms. To Shakespeare, Cleopatra is far more than just a foreign witch. Her suicide is presented as both poetic and beautiful, and her final devotion to Antony clearly sees Shakespeare as ultimately sympathetic to her. To Shakespeare, Cleopatra is just as much the Chaucerian honourable woman as she is the foreign enchantress the Romans saw her as.

[91] Adelman, *The Common Liar* 185

How, then, does the question of race in modern criticism compare to the question of race as Shakespeare and the Renaissance saw it? Have perspectives concerning the race question in Shakespeare changed from 16th and 17th century writers, including Shakespeare? Undoubtedly, it must be taken into consideration that the concepts of 'race' and 'blackness' were seen differently in Shakespeare's time. As Renaissance England was far from the multicultural society that modern England is, their ideas of other cultures were often steeped in fantasies and racial stereotypes. To someone living in London in the early 17th century, who may not even have set foot outside the city, foreign lands and peoples must have seemed mysterious, adventurous and dangerous. Examples of this can be seen in early novels like *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Oroonoko* (1688). Undoubtedly, modern multiculturalism has to a certain extent increased familiarity to different cultures, as has the increased level of global communication. When Shakespeare's audience saw Othello the Moor on stage, we must keep in mind that most of them very likely had never seen or met a black man, and only knew about them and their culture(s) through fanciful tales fuelled by fear of people whose appearance and culture differ from oneself. Concerning the understanding of 'blackness' in particular, the modern understanding is to a certain extent different and sometimes misunderstood, as is the case with the aforementioned Winthrop Jordan, who sees Sonnet 130 as something 'Shakespeare wrote apologetically of his black mistress'[92], when it is very doubtful that Shakespeare can be interpreted to here mean 'black' as in the modern sense of the word, meaning 'African appearance'. The case seems to be that the term is occasionally misunderstood in Shakespeare, and as Adelman writes, 'black' in Shakespeare can mean anything from 'darker skin-hue than Europeans' to brunette. Even Othello as a character can possibly be read as an 'Arab' rather than an 'African', as understanding of many other cultures in Renaissance England was limited and as a result often generalised. Modern Western liberal democracies relate differently to the question of race – there is less trace of exoticism, and the last 50 years or so have seen an increased awareness and discussion of how racial stigma and delusions of superiority have led to oppression, slavery and genocide. Thus, Shakespeare allows us to see foreign cultures in a different light, namely from the perspective of a society that is currently trying to distance itself from stereotypes that were used to justify Europe's colonial project. Thus, the misunderstanding of the term 'black' as used by Shakespeare becomes a direct example of how some perceptions of race have changed since Shakespeare's time and how Renaissance understanding of 'blackness' has by some writers

[92] Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black* (Tennessee: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 8-9.

been reinterpreted from the perspective of attitudes towards blacks and African-Americans throughout the last five centuries or so, and is thus seen through the eyes of how racism became a hotly debated topic as a result of the civil rights movement of blacks in the 1960's. To us, the issue of racism has become such a vivid topic of debate, a debate that has a strong basis in reactions against the ill consequences of condescending attitudes that stem from colonialism and pseudo-sciences such as eugenics and phrenology. Not that our society is any less prejudiced than people during Shakespeare's age, but rather that Renaissance England judged the 'foreign gipsy' that is Cleopatra from a distance, in a more semi-mythical and fairy tale-like manner. In a sense, the racial judgement seen in Shakespeare and the Renaissance is thus more 'innocent' in that it does not bear the burden and knowledge of the horrible consequences that persisting negative stereotypes can result in. A good example of how fanciful ideas of how darker skin hues were attained could at times become in the Renaissance, one can refer to Sir Thomas Browne, who argued that Gypsies accomplished this by rubbing their skin in bacon and fat followed by exposure to the sun.[93] Today it will therefore be difficult to view the racial presentation of Cleopatra with the same view. In seeing the presentation of Cleopatra's 'gipsyness' and 'blackness', we are observing from afar a culture that took certain cultural prejudices for granted. Naturally, with our own cultural background, we cannot see it from their eyes, and as a result, discussions regarding Cleopatra's 'blackness' are now often marked by a retrospective analysis of Renaissance racial attitudes, as can be seen in what Kim F. Hall writes on Shakespeare:

> His language, typical of orientalist discourse, makes it clear that Shakespeare is at pains to have us see a black Cleopatra. For Shakespeare, as Leonard Tennenhouse notes, "Cleopatra is Egypt. As such, however, she embodies everything that is not English according to the nationalism which developed under Elizabeth as well as to the British nationalism later fostered by James"[94]

An interesting side to this discussion is whether it is possible or not to detach one's reading of the play from our modern context of deeper cultural awareness of issues related to racism; is it possible to read the race issue in the play with the same naïve, inexperienced mentality that was present in Renaissance society? Before embarking upon this question, it is important to note that in his description of Cleopatra as a 'gipsy', Shakespeare plays on racial stereotypes that also exist today. Regarding the Romani peoples, there are still many existing stereotypes, though they are now not so much about magic and mystery as charlatanism and

[93] Wilson, 'Transmigrations: Crossing Regional and Gender Boundaries in *Antony and Cleopatra*', 79-80.
[94] Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 154.

thievery. Little awareness has also been drawn towards the persecution of these peoples, which has continued up until current times. As Margaret Brearley writes:

> Because of their different cultural and linguistic background, Roma children are commonly classified as retarded; in Hungary in the mid-1980's, for example, 36% of all children in "special educational institutions" for "retarded or difficult children" were Gypsies, and 15.2% of all Rom school children were in schools for the handicapped (Crowe, 1995, p. 95). In the Czech Republic, some 20% of Gypsy children are sent to schools for the mentally handicapped [...] [95]

It is thus important to remind oneself that racial stereotyping is not really an isolated Renaissance issue in the context of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that it is in fact a problem in modern Europe as well. Considering modern Europe's historical background, we should be far more enlightened than we are concerning awareness of Gypsy stereotypes, especially due to Nazi Germany's genocidal campaign against them, but this is not always the case. Still, the modern racism debate inevitably colours our reading of anything that is related to race in Shakespeare. The racism debate in the latter half of the 20th century and onwards is such a big part of our modern culture that detaching ourselves completely from it and being able to read Shakespeare's depiction of race from the point of view belonging to a time when there was no such debate and where there (arguably) existed less awareness of certain fixed stereotypes would prove difficult, if not impossible.

Thus, the main difference in perception of race is as follows: while Shakespeare operated with race from his own society's established stereotypes, these stereotypes were likely seen as so 'matter of fact' that they were hardly controversial enough to encourage debate. In that sense, the topic of 'race' as seen in the play has become arguably more important as a subject of open debate given modern society's active discussion of the controversial topic of racism. In the end, therefore, while one must recognise that Shakespeare places his Cleopatra as a representative of the mysterious 'gipsy' Orient, modern society's wide discussion of racism arguably makes the race question a topic that is more actively debated today than in the English Renaissance.

Another distinct characteristic of Cleopatra is her passionate nature. She is the opposite of Octavius. While his world almost completely revolves around logic and order, hers is a chaotic world of strong, but fluctuating feelings. As a character, she truly dwells in

[95] Margaret, Brearley 'The Persecution of Gypsies in Europe', electronic text based on the original text, published in *American Behavioral Scientist* 45.4 at Sage Journals Online (http://abs.sagepub.com/content/45/4/588.full.pdf+html), last corrected Dec. 1 2001, accessed 6 Nov. 2011, 590-591.

the current moment, and she is able to make tremendous leaps in her emotional states; from sadness to joy, from generosity to rage, all in the blink of an eye. Shakespeare uses this to comical effect in the exchange between Cleopatra and the messenger after Antony has wed Octavia:

> CLEOPATRA: What say you?
> *Strikes him*.
> Hence, horrible villain, or I'll spurn thine eyes
> Like balls before me! I'll unhead thy head!
> *She hauls him up and down*
> Thou shalt be whipped with wire and stewed in brine,
> Smarting in ling'ring pickle!
> MESSENGER Gracious madam,
> I that do bring the news made not the match.
> CLEOPATRA Say 'tis not so, a province I will give
> thee,
> And make thy fortunes proud; the blow thou hadst
> Shall make thy peace for moving me to rage,
> And I will boot thee with what gift beside
> Thy modesty can beg.
>
> (*2*.5. 81-87)

In this scene, Cleopatra displays her temperamental nature, moving very suddenly from blind, impulsive rage to generosity and meek humility. To Shakespeare, Cleopatra is raw, pure emotion, and he brings these aspects of hers to the forefront. The realm of passion over which she resides is presented as equally beautiful and dangerous. On the one hand, hers is the realm of the poet, and her suicide is in itself both elevated and poetic. Despite Octavius' political victory, it is the passion and loyalty between Antony and Cleopatra that in the end are what will be remembered and immortalised. What Shakespeare seems to be trying to say is that through their passion, Antony and Cleopatra have managed to transform a devastating political defeat into a moment that will forever immortalise them into what they have ever seen themselves as and desired to become throughout the play: elevated, god-like beings of stories and legends.

Chapter 4: General Conclusions

Thorough study of literature is in many ways dependent upon context and perspective; context in the sense of understanding the historical and biographical background of the society in which the text in question emerged, and perspective in the sense of which viewpoint(s) one chooses to include in textual analysis. Throughout this thesis, the approach chosen has been one that would include as much historical and current contextual basis as I felt was possible. I also approached the two Roman tragedies I have written about with a desire to include and discuss as many differing perspectives as possible, including ones presented among the ancient Romans, Renaissance writers, Shakespeare himself, modern critical reception and my own personal perspective on the subjects I have discussed. Throughout this process, my own perspective of the two plays I have examined has changed and expanded through interaction with historical, philosophical and spiritual writings from classical Rome and Renaissance England as well as 20th century interpretations of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

There is, of course, an almost endless list of subjects that could also have been approached in this thesis, some of which I have described in my introduction chapter. However, my overall concern has been to ensure that my thesis consists of detailed discussion of the questions I have raised. In that respect, I have also avoided choosing 'random' topics from the plays, but rather ones that are closely linked both thematically and historically. All the subjects I have approached are unified not only in being discussions of Shakespeare's two Roman tragedies based on actual historical events, but moreover in the sense that I have approached the two plays by looking at perspectives related to questions of autocracy, empire, freedom and race. These have all been widely discussed political issues in post-World War 2 Europe and North America. There now exists an almost collective distancing and critical attitude towards our own fairly recent imperialist past and the delusions of racial superiority that has been used to justify persecution and oppression. As plays that dramatize the time period when the Roman Republic was disintegrating and end with the ensuing age of emperors, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* are particularly relevant texts in which to explore Shakespeare's relation to the Renaissance perspectives on autocracy and kingship. This is undoubtedly also an important reason for the continued relevance and popularity of these two plays. After all, the political entity that was the Roman Empire has had a

tremendous impact upon the development of European languages and history. In a sense, the Romans are still with us today, and Julius Caesar and Augustus remain among the most recognisable and influential figures in history.

Because these two figures are so closely linked to the concept of autocracy and have been widely debated since their own time, I endeavoured to make a thorough examination of them in a Shakespearean context. Throughout, Shakespeare manages to reflect upon the disagreements concerning the Caesars found among historians by strongly focusing on presenting them as morally ambiguous, something he accomplishes with his characterisation of both Julius Caesar and Octavius. Moral ambiguity is a strong defining thread that runs through both of these plays, and it is one that pertains to all the central characters (Julius Caesar, Brutus, Antony, Octavius, Cleopatra and Cassius). Regarding both Julius Caesar and Octavius, there is disagreement where Shakespeare's sympathies lay.

The significance of the tyranny debate that I have brought up in relation to Julius and Augustus Caesar in the two plays is not only important in being a central thematic subject in both *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, but moreover because it is a discussion that is relevant to any era or human society. The tyranny question that is at the heart of the central conflict revolving around Julius Caesar and the debate of Augustanism in *Antony and Cleopatra* is an important historical discussion that since ancient times has sparked disagreement and varying opinions. The discussion of what separates a tyrant from a benevolent ruler is ever an issue that is marked by disagreement. Some have viewed Julius Caesar and Augustus as liberators, others have seen them as destroyers of liberty. In the Renaissance as well, not everyone agreed that Elizabeth I or James I were great monarchs, as demonstrated by events like the Essex Rebellion and the Gunpowder Plot. This holds true for leaders in our modern world as well, where opinions of any current leadership varies depending on the individual in question, his or her self-interest and political ideology. Even fairly popular elected leaders usually face staunch opposition. On the other hand, even the most despised despot has his fair share of supporters. As in many of his history plays, Shakespeare discusses the complex debate of what constitutes 'good' leadership in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Julius Caesar*, he accomplishes this by making the topic of tyranny and tyrannicide the central moral conflict in the play, a topic which has timeless topicality in human society, including our own times. With the events that in the past few years have transpired concerning conflicts around the globe and the involvement of the West in the deposition of certain rulers, it is easy to see how the discussion of tyranny in

Julius Caesar is of tremendous import. Specifically, what are the consequences of rebellion and tyrannicide? Is the threat of civil war and ensuing chaos and turmoil in society a situation that is worse than living under a despotic ruler? These are questions raised by Shakespeare in the play, and they are moreover questions that are similar to some that have arisen from the aftermath of the Afghan and Iraqi wars. In light of ensuing, escalating violence, many have questioned whether the deposition of a tyrant can be justified if the result is even greater bloodshed and suffering than the people endured under his rule. Thus, in a way, Shakespeare describes a political reality we are very much familiar with. In the same way, he asks us, the audience, whether the moral position Brutus uses to justify the murdering of Caesar is, in truth, a justifiable path; is violence justified if done for a cause that is perceived as just? In short, the importance of the topics of tyranny and rebellion I have discussed are timeless and current to any human age and society. In *Julius Caesar*, we can easily perceive the tyranny question as one that can be approached from several perspectives including the turmoil of the late Roman Republic, the rebellious uprisings against Elizabeth I as well as the current era's military conflicts across the globe. Undoubtedly, this is perhaps the most central reason for *Julius Caesar* being Shakespeare's most popular Roman tragedy – there is a political reality to it that we can relate to. What this thesis accomplishes concerning the tyranny debate is to establish that the same debate concerning Julius Caesar that is found throughout history is also present among modern critics. My aim was to see whether perspectives among modern critics on the 'Caesar question' have changed in comparison to what was written on Caesar during Shakespeare's time, including the play *Julius Caesar*. In the end, I found that as the question of tyranny is one that Shakespeare approaches by presenting his central characters as morally ambiguous, thus deliberately creating a conflict regarding how we view Julius Caesar. The dividing opinions among modern critics regarding whether he (Caesar) is a tyrant or not is more about the moral dimension of the play rather than something that is influenced by the real world surrounding us; though ideals of modern liberal democracy are far removed from monarchical rule as it existed during the English Renaissance, they have had little effect on readings among modern critics. Ultimately, what this thesis has contributed to concerning the tyranny question in *Julius Caesar* is to create and elaborate upon a discussion of how exactly this subject contributes to the timelessness of the play and how the subject in itself represents a timeless debate between different and opposing viewpoints that have been expressed throughout the ages. The fact that modern critics are as divided as Renaissance

writers on the subject of tyranny says a lot about Shakespeare's ability to raise debate around topics that are central to any human experience and society.

The same level of moral ambiguity and unclear motives is as true concerning the character of Octavius in *Antony and Cleopatra* as it is with Julius Caesar. The debate surrounding the first Roman Emperor is one that has always spawned a significant amount of disagreement and discussion of the Augustan principate. Shakespeare again focuses on moral ambiguity, presenting us with a character who is equally a just ruler and calculated antagonist. The discussion of the Augustanism question is to a significant degree of vast import to the European cultural heritage. Thus, a detailed discussion of Octavius in the context of *Antony and Cleopatra* is justified, as it is a discussion that has rarely been approached in great detail. Compared to *Julius Caesar,* not much has been written that solely focuses on the imperial Caesar character in *Antony and Cleopatra*. As Shakespeare's presentation of Octavius gives us much insight into his political views, attitudes and how he involves the character into his own age as a symbolic link to Richmond and the Tudor dynasty, it is a topic that is deserving of more in-depth analysis than it has for the most part hitherto been given. As with Julius Caesar, however, the overall impression I have of modern critics is that there tends to be an almost equal sense of disagreement. That is not surprising, as this has always been the case whenever the topic of Augustanism has been brought up over the centuries. Shakespeare's Octavius, like his historical counterpart, is a figure whose moral character is ambiguous and difficult to assess. Regarding the debate surrounding Augustanism in relation to *Antony and Cleopatra*, my thesis has contributed with a comparable conclusion regarding the character of Octavius; opinions of him as a character in the play are as divided as among the historians. He is also a difficult character to approach due to the fact that the play is to such a significant extent a world in which there is no objective judgement (for more discussion of these ideas presented by Janet Adelman, see Chapter 3). This has led to him appearing as a rather enigmatic character throughout the play, a man whose motives to a large extent are unclear and distorted. What I, in the end, arrived upon is that modern critics who are more favourable towards Augustus emphasise his excellent statesmanship and utilitarian principles. On the other end of the discussion, some modern critics who are 'anti-Augustan' differ from writings on Augustus in past eras by focusing on him as a strictly literal figure. While Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is for the most part judged from a moral perspective, Octavius is arguably judged by many modern critics from his dramatic role as an antagonist to the two titular characters. By Adelman, for instance, Octavius is always seen as an opposite who is viewed

in relation to Antony and Cleopatra, and this is the case with many critical approaches and texts written about the play. I therefore deliberately chose an analytical angle where I could approach my study of Octavius from a different perspective, one that instead focuses on the legacy of the historical perspective (mainly Plutarch) and Renaissance writers. In the end, I also feel that it must be said that the discussion of Octavius is important because the study of perspectives on Augustus in English literature is in itself a wide-encompassing and fascinating field in light of his reign's tremendous influence on the development of English literary tradition. Both he and the Roman poets that wrote during his reign have had an impact on English literary history that must not be underestimated, especially during the 18th century.

The question of divine kingship and God-given right to rule is at the heart of both of the plays and Caesar characters. As discussed in chapter 2, modern critical perception has seen a tendency towards moving away from the discussion of the titular character in *Julius Caesar* and gone more towards a discussion of Brutus as the play's tragic hero. While this is a fully legitimate approach in that the text supports that Brutus is the play's central, tragic hero, the idea of Caesar as the equivalent of a sacred king as the term was understood in the English Renaissance must not be ignored. The reason for it increasingly falling by the wayside can, of course, be attributed to the idea of divine kingship being an archaic notion that is more or less irrelevant to the way in which our society currently functions. It is, nonetheless, a subject that is crucial in relation to the character of Caesar himself, and should thus be taken into consideration when approaching the play. Likewise, the character of Octavius in *Antony and Cleopatra* is presented as a parallel to Henry Tudor in *Richard III*, taking on the hue as the future bringer of peace and order. As a parallel to Tudor monarchy, Octavius becomes the destined saviour of Rome, a role that to Renaissance mentality would be further strengthened by the religious connotations due to the birth of Christ during his reign. This event would to Renaissance religious mentality enhance Octavius' connection to the concept of peace. Looking back on my research, I found that the discussion of sacred kingship has, perhaps, been pushed more into the background than it should, given the central role the concept plays in both plays. Moreover, by looking at the discussion of sacred kingship, we are given the opportunity to look at discussions that were more central to Shakespeare's time than our own. An examination of this subject in relation to the plays has revealed that some topics in Shakespeare may not be as relevant to our own present context as, for instance, the discussion of tyranny and rebellion. Is the aspect of divine monarchy within the plays lost on modern audiences due to its remoteness in time? Do modern readers or viewers as a result of this lose

some of the context that was originally intended? The answer here is that it is in some ways difficult to view literature written four hundred years ago on its own terms due to the fact that the intended audience and their original cultural context are so remote. Despite this, it must be said that, as demonstrated in chapters 2 and 3, some modern critics do discuss the aspect of divine monarchy within the two plays, but as a whole, this thematic element in both plays will probably not be 'obvious' to anyone not familiar with Renaissance divine right rhetoric or the historical context. In fact, the removal of the context in the mind of popular culture may be why some of Shakespeare's history plays (with a few notable exceptions) have not retained the popularity they enjoyed on the London stage during the Renaissance.

In my thesis, I have also approached the concept of rebellion in *Julius Caesar* and the discussion of race concerning Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Due to the strongly anti-rebellious doctrine that was promoted by the Elizabethan state, it is of particular relevance to *Julius Caesar*, where the nature and consequences of rebellion are thoroughly explored. The views presented in the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion* are to a significant extent confirmed by Shakespeare. In Shakespeare, the rebel is often portrayed as a primitive murderer who is just as morally deplorable as the tyrant. He is fickle, disloyal and impulsive. This has led some modern critics, such as Tolman, to suggest that this may reflect upon Shakespeare displaying contempt for the 'common' labourer in *Julius Caesar*. Walt Whitman developed this idea further by declaring Shakespeare as being anti-democratic (for a discussion of both, see chapter 2). These critical viewpoints compared to the fact people living in Renaissance England did not have many of the rights that we take for granted, such as freely being able to express views that are against the government, it is perhaps easier for us to react against Shakespeare's depiction of rebellion as an entirely destructive affair. Even the removal of scarfs from the statues instigated by Marullus and Flavius in the beginning of the play may have been seen as rebellious and dangerous, whereas we live in a society where this would very likely simply be seen as a protest. It should not be assumed that Shakespeare felt the same way about the affair. Overall, regarding the subject of rebellion and the portrayal of the Roman people, there is certainly an indication that some critics have reacted against the portrayal of the common man in *Julius Caesar*, thus showing that perceptions regarding the question of rebellion (at least compared to the 'official' Renaissance perspective) have changed to a certain degree. On the other hand, the mass control and manipulation of people seen in totalitarian states in recent history gives the discussion another angle and transforms it

into a comment on how mankind can at times be transformed from rationality into animalistic pack behaviour when acting under mass persuasion.

The race discussion concerning Cleopatra is one I wanted to approach because the 20th century is marked by an extensive debate of this question. From ideological delusions of racial superiority to movements that have the aim to raise awareness concerning the racism question and civil rights movements in the United States and elsewhere, racism was and still is a widely debated political topic. For this reason, I have looked at how Shakespeare has related Cleopatra to concepts such as 'gipsy' and 'blackness'. Historically, Cleopatra was Greek and not native African. However, regarding this question, I found that Shakespeare transfers the Roman fear of the Greek Orient into his own time by associating his Cleopatra with the stereotypes of Gypsies and the Orient in his own time. Of all the topics I have looked at, the one concerning race is definitely the one that displays the most significant shift in perspectives among modern critics. The Renaissance was marked by extremely naïve and fantastical views of Romani people that certainly are reflected in English literature as late as the Victorian age. In Renaissance terms, Cleopatra's 'blackness' really only means that she had darker skin colour than the average Englishman at the time. In Chapter 3, I have presented some of the fantastical stories of how Gypsy 'blackness' was seen as unnatural and a strange through an unrealistic fable of how this was attained by smearing the body with fat and exposing it to the sun. Overall, Renaissance society was not exposed to different cultures in the same manner people in our modern society are, and therefore painted their image of 'blackness' based on fantasies and hearsay. While they were not necessarily any more prejudiced, they certainly had less genuine interaction with distant cultures, making their cultural depictions of them rather fanciful and odd to our eyes. We must not forget that when the Renaissance audience first saw Othello on stage, most of them had most likely never seen a black man before. Therefore, my conclusion concerning the race question in *Antony and Cleopatra* is that the Renaissance context regarding it is one of extensive naivety and fairy tale-like perspectives on what is 'foreign'. Modern critical reception about the race question in Shakespeare certainly reflects a change in perspectives in that it is impossible to disregard current society's awareness of the tragic suffering caused by imperialism and racial ideology while approaching *Antony and Cleopatra*. The only manner in which we can approach the question is by recognising that the text was created in an era where many notions and prejudices concerning race that to us are fanciful and downright racist may have been seen as logical and obvious.

What has particularly fascinated me while working on this thesis are the multiple possibilities for further study and discussion in answering the question of change in perception concerning central thematic issues Shakespeare discusses in his plays. Though I have approached the subjects I have chosen for discussion in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* with a clear aim of detailed analysis, there is certainly room for further development and expansion. For instance, looking more closely at the Brutus character in *Julius Caesar* with the same angle of inquiry I have used while discussing Julius Caesar, Octavius and Cleopatra would undoubtedly further enrich my investigation and conclusions. How does Shakespeare approach Brutus as he appears in the classical sources? How does Shakespeare see Brutus compared to his contemporaries? How do 20th century Shakespeare scholars see Brutus compared to the Renaissance and Shakespeare? Are their attitudes to the 'Brutus question' indicative of a change in perceptions? While these questions have to a certain degree been approached in this thesis, expanding the whole project with a more detailed look at the Brutus character and his development would be justified. As I have outlined in my chapter on *Julius Caesar*, the latter decades have seen a tendency towards increased interest in the Brutus character. Considering that my approach to research has been to include as many perspectives on the issues discussed as possible, there certainly is a lot of critical and historical material to discuss the question of change in perception regarding his character.

The role of Antony also deserves to be looked more closely at. In particular, I find Steppart's statement that Antony is unfit to govern Rome because of his gluttonous personality echoes Rome's two most infamous tyrants, Nero and Caligula worthy of further examination. This intriguing idea of Antony and Octavius reflecting the huge contrast in levels of competence and temperance among the Roman emperors would be an interesting debate to approach in the future. Such a comparison between Antony and these two emperors would likely prove to be a very suitable extension to my discussion of Shakespeare and the tyranny question regarding both of his Caesar characters. If the opportunity for further work on my questions were to arise in the future, I can certainly see that this would be a topic that could lead to much fruitful discussion and textual analysis.

If I were to continue my line of questioning in future research, I would also have liked to include the topic of gender in relation to *Antony and Cleopatra*, seeing as quite a number of modern critics approach the play from perspectives related to that field of study. Moreover, as questions of gender equality have led to debate and social changes, this is a line of inquiry

that would prove an interesting basis for evaluating how perspectives have changed. As the discussion of race, it is a topic where many attitudes have changed due to social movements and political approaches to the question. Thus, the two discussions are in many ways thematically intertwined by being topical in modern cultural consciousness. Future inquiry into how modern critics relate and understand the gender debate compared to Shakespeare's position and how gender issues were seen in the English Renaissance. Many interesting questions would arise from such an inquiry. For instance, to what extent did the fact that Cleopatra and other women roles were written for teenage boys in Shakespeare's time form their perspective of the character compared to today, when actors (usually) play parts that are of the same gender as themselves? Does the fact that the role of Cleopatra has been transferred from boys to women in any sense affect how the text is understood? These are questions that it would be interesting to approach with a method that focuses on multiple perspectives.

The way I see it, the possibilities for future inquiry into the questions I have researched are many. Moreover, the general idea of approaching Shakespeare's plays from the perspective of how modern views regarding central themes have changed from how they were seen in the Renaissance is a manner of reading 'older' literature that gives one the advantage of considering a piece of drama from multiple angles and perspectives. It is an approach that allows for inclusion of many elements, including the relation between Shakespeare and his sources, the Renaissance context, the perspective of the reader and modern critical reception. For indeed, any drama that is still read and performed on a massive scale more than four hundred years after it was written, there is certainly a complex array of perspectives and backgrounds that have shaped its existence as it appears today. Indeed, the very concept of Shakespearen theatre is in itself to reshape and reimagine something that took form in a culture that was essentially different politically and ideologically speaking. Through Shakespeare's plays, the past speaks to us, and we interpret it with our own eyes, in some cases with a theoretical at best understanding of the contextual background. However, if we are able to apply enough critical insight upon ourselves to inquire into how the multiple perspectives of modern critical reception can give us some answers into how we see certain questions regarding power, government, rebellion, race and other political issues differently from how they perceived these questions in the Renaissance, we can gain some idea of how we shape early modern drama into our own current setting. And it is by understanding how we are different from Shakespeare's intended audience that we perhaps can come nearer to

understanding him and more closely approach being able to read the plays from an understanding of the perspective of the audience he had in mind while writing his many classic dramas.

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