

ARTICLE

**Deviating from the Deviant: The Masculinity of Brando in *Julius Caesar* (1953)**

RACHAEL KELLY, *University of Ulster*

**Abstract**

The cultural iconography of Mark Antony has, in the two millennia since his death, been heavily informed by the revisionist historiography of his political rival (and conqueror) Augustus Caesar. Political expediency in the early principate reconfigured Marcus Antonius' actions in the final years of his life in such a negatively gendered light that the projection of Antonius into Antony-on-screen can be considered a vehicle for the negotiation and exorcism of socio-cultural anxiety surrounding the performance of masculinity. So predictable and repetitive is the iconography of Antony-on-screen that its absence – indeed, its inversion – in Joseph Mankiewicz' *Julius Caesar* (1953) requires detailed investigation. This essay interrogates the non-diegetic discourse of masculine performance brought to Mankiewicz' movie through its star, Marlon Brando, and situates the movie in line with the socio-cultural and socio-political anxieties enacted in the Hollywood historical epic of the 1950s.

**Keywords:** Masculinity, Brando, historical epic, Mark Antony

“Upon Caesar’s return to Rome, after defeating Pompey in the civil war, his countrymen chose him a fourth time consul and then dictator for life... Thus he became odious to moderate men through the extravagance of the titles and powers that were heaped upon him.” Plutarch’s *LIVES*. (Mankiewicz, 1953)

In the two millennia since his death, the figure of Marcus Antonius (or Mark Antony) has come to occupy a key position in the western popular consciousness. The story of his love for the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, and their campaign against – and ultimate defeat by – the future Augustus Caesar has assumed a quasi-mythic status through repeated recycling through popular culture. Informed by Augustan revisionism, Antonius/Antony’s defeat was reconfigured as the inevitable outcome of his dissolute, un-Roman character flaws and his willingness to subject himself to the rule of a woman, herself written into Augustan mythos as the *cassus belli* against which no Roman distaste for war against Antony was sufficient to mitigate. This reconstruction of Antonius-as-leader into Antony-as-Embodiment-of-Roman-Gender-Anxiety has proved pervasive and enduring, to the extent that the latter has come to perform recognizable, familiar, and containable masculine deficiency on screen and beyond (Kelly, 2009 and Kelly, 2010). From Plutarch’s configuration of Antonius as a suitable avatar of “great virtues gone wrong” (Duff, 2002: 63), through Shakespeare’s “abstract of all faults, that all men follow” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, I.iv.8), and into the screen age, Antony-as-avatar functions both as a projection of Roman social mores (through his performance of Augustan invective), and, more specifically, as a vehicle for exposing contemporaneous anxieties about masculine performativity and normativity. Embodying Roman discursive tropes such as *incontinentia* (lack of personal control) and *mollitia* (effeminacy), screen Antonies continue the popular-cultural tradition of both literally and metaphorically translating Roman signifiers of deficient masculinity into cues that establish him as gender-deficient according to modern gender discourse: thus, for example, Antony (Raymond Burr) in *Serpent of the Nile* (1953) becomes disheveled in appearance during his sojourn in Alexandria, allowing his hair to grow out of his military (masculine-affiliated) buzz-cut into an altogether longer (feminine-affiliated) style, all the while embodying *incontinentia* in his indulgence of sensual excess through alcohol consumption and neglect of duty, and *mollitia* through his surrender to

emotional expressivity in despair. Likewise, Antony (Richard Burton) in *Cleopatra* (1963) inverts the trope of Cleopatra's bath of ass' milk when he muses on the relative efficiency of "the milk of a cow, a goat and an ass" for "softening the beard" (Mankiewicz, 1963), whilst adhering to Roman discursive projections through, again, an excessive alcohol intake – to the extent that it inhibits his ability to function as a military/political leader – and an expansive emotional breakdown in the wake of defeat at Actium. A similar tropology is to be found in the likes of *Cleopatra* (DeMille, 1934), *Cleopatra* (Roddam, 1999), *Imperium: Augustus* (Young, 2002), and *Rome* (2005-7), with the later texts specifically feminizing Antony's bodily appearance in Egypt, through make-up and flowing, ornate robes, to an extent that greatly outstrips the largely subtextual or implicit efforts of the earlier films.

Considered in line with the major screen productions of his mythology during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries<sup>1</sup>, however, the Antony of *Julius Caesar* (Mankiewicz, 1953) stands out as an anomaly. I have elsewhere (Kelly, 2009) argued in favour of a standard iconography of Antony-on-screen: enduring, predictable, and constant, and indicative of the wider gender anxieties enacted in the figure of Antony. A baseline tropology of Antony-on-screen is as follows:

- alcohol (ab)use
- lechery
- 'feminine' behaviour (tears, despair)
- all-consuming love
- feminized dress (including the use of cosmetics)
- political ineptitude (including individual responsibility for the breakdown of the triumvirate)
- the abandonment of Roman duty (or, more explicitly, Rome itself)

(Kelly, 2009)

---

<sup>1</sup> *Cleopatra* (1917), *Cleopatra* (1934), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945), *Serpent of the Nile* (1953), *Julius Caesar* (1953), *Cleopatra* (1963), *Cleopatra* (1999), *Rome* (2005-7)

Brando's Antony exhibits none of the above. Indeed, in many ways he might more properly be considered the reverse of the 'standard' Antony. He is not subject to fits of passion: Cleopatra is not present in Shakespeare's source text and nor is she referenced on screen; neither does Antony allow his emotions to dictate his judgment at any stage (quite the reverse, in fact, as we shall see). He does not abuse alcohol – indeed, he is rarely seen consuming alcohol at all, and then only in the presence of others who are drinking at a similarly sedate pace – nor does he display any overt sexual pathology on screen. His dress is not feminized. Finally, he is explicitly comfortable in the political arena and is semantically linked with and to Rome, both physically and metaphorically – which, as we shall see, may be key to understanding his anomalous positioning.

Why should one incarnation of Antony-on-screen so exigently depart from his standard iconography? Other Antonies may vary in the extent to which they conform to the above tropology, yet they consistently and overtly manifest the themes discussed. Brando's Antony is, without question, an aberration, and one that requires detailed examination. This essay will seek to position both the text as a whole and Brando specifically within the wider socio-historical context in an effort to describe the particular social and political anxieties expressed within the film, which are, as I will argue, quite different to the concerns most often embodied in texts dealing with Antony's mythology. As I will discuss below, the cycle of historical epics that ran from *The Robe* (1953) to *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) has as its governing imperative an interrogation of north American socio-political realities in the aftermath of the Second World War, of which the performance of gender norms is only part, and, indeed, often tangential to the socio-cultural anxieties expressed allegorically through Roman mythic space. Mankiewicz's movie, I will argue, complies much more coherently to this analytical framework than to the texts in which Antony most usually features. It is for this reason that I will argue that Brando's Antony – and Mankiewicz's movie – should be read separately to Antony's other textual incarnations.

### **Shakespeare and Antony**

Antony's iconography has been widely informed by his construction as Shakespeare's tragic, flawed hero in *Antony and Cleopatra*, itself a reception of the work of the second century Greek biographer, Plutarch. Plutarch's *Life of Antony* forms part of his *Bioi Paralleloi*, his sequence of parallel lives, which was intended to serve as a pedagogical tool in elucidating desirable and undesirable traits in the lives of the great men of history. As such, in his decision to select Antony as a suitable subject, Plutarch has already effectively handed the reader an ideological position: the fact of his inclusion is enough to underline his deficiencies. Moreover, as CBR Pelling states, in his introduction to his annotated *Life of Antony*, although Plutarch did not consciously aim to distort historical fact (Pelling, 1999: viii), he was not above omitting or economizing on the facts as he found them in order to better illustrate his point (Pelling, 1999: 33-36). The result is a text that specifically sets out to position Antony as an epitome of masculine deficiency, but one which has become, through centuries of cultural recycling, canonical. This is the text from which Shakespeare appropriated his tragic hero of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and which, through the persistent and pervasive presence of Shakespeare in western popular culture, has become the archetype of modern screen Antonies, ghosting his incarnations even through texts that make no overt claim to historicity.

The Antony of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, however, is a different beast. Shakespeare's source text is, again, Plutarch; yet the focus of the *Life* is Caesar himself.

In the first instance, Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* has an alternative moral focus at its heart, and, being so precisely duplicated in Shakespeare's play, this moral cannot help but be reproduced in the reception. With *Caesar*, Plutarch chooses none other than Alexander the Great as the first *Life* in the dyad, and uses this pairing to examine themes of power, popular adulation, and corruption. These are themes carried over into Shakespeare's treatment of the text, together with its exploration of idealized masculinity and the construction thereof.

In *Embodied Masculinity in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (2009), Lloyd Davis discusses the lengthy debate afforded to the performance of ideal masculinity within the play:

Everyone (that is, every man), regardless of rank, thinks might be able to claim [ideal masculinity], either for himself or to attribute it to another – the tribunes lionize Pompey, the populace Caesar, Brutus and Cassius try to claim it for themselves. There are many men but one ideal. Whose version of masculinity is the real thing? Which criterion is right? (Davis, 2009: 115-6)

He goes on to discuss the “one gender-world” of the play in which “homosocial bonds are acted out through fervent comradeship and enmity in politics and war....

Shakespeare depicts a somewhat similar world in *Coriolanus*, but both there and to a still greater extent in *Antony and Cleopatra* he develops the psychological, erotic, social and political impacts that women can have, notwithstanding (perhaps more on account of) the limitations and pressures brought to bear upon them. With an unwavering focus on men, *Julius Caesar* contrasts to both these plays, and to Shakespeare’s other works with classical settings (Davis, 2009: 119)

It is clear, therefore, that the gender focus of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar* is substantively different. This is, of course, to be expected, given the variant concerns of the Plutarchian source text: Duff notes that *The Life of Antony* (along with its partner text, *The Life of Demetrios*) is “the single extant pair of Lives which is explicitly said to be a negative example” (2002: 61), and it therefore follows that Shakespeare’s Antony, a reception of Plutarch’s, would be similarly concerned with the project of elucidating the flaws in Antony’s basic character that led to his ruin. While it is true that, in Plutarch’s estimation, Cleopatra was less a causal vector in Antony’s dissolution than her influence was a symptom of his general tendency towards vice, Shakespeare, in setting her name alongside Antony’s in the title, affords her a much more central role in the drama of Antony’s downfall and thus reconfigures the narrative as a discourse on the inversion of gender paradigms in the presence of the woman of power. Moreover, set in its historical context, the reason for Shakespeare’s exploration of this theme at this historical moment, becomes clear.

Bruce R Smith, in his study of *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Smith, 2000), discusses the levels of masculine anxiety engendered in early modern England by virtue of having a woman

sit in the position of ultimate power for the best part of half a century, noting that “The power she enjoyed at the apex of the social hierarchy caused anxieties about male privilege up and down the line” (Smith, 2000: 104). Written in 1599, *Julius Caesar* historically falls within the period of Elizabeth I’s reign, indicating, perhaps that the time was not yet right to begin to culturally unpack notions of female power and male privilege. *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, was written in the years following Elizabeth’s death (1606 or 1607, according to Pelling, 1999:37) and unquestionably supports a reading of anxiety surrounding the performance of masculinity in the presence of the woman of power. This, as we have seen, has been key to the construction of Antony-on-screen: his tragic arc is closely informed by his inability to privilege his (masculine) position as leader over his (feminized) incapacitating love for Cleopatra, for which he receives censure both by the narrative and other, less deficient, male players, and which deficiency is ultimately castigated and contained by his death.

Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, however, was first performed in 1599 (Humphreys, 1984: 1), during the life of Elizabeth I. Whether the gender anxieties discussed above were not yet fully recognized in the socio-political climate at the time, or whether they were recognized and considered too politically treacherous to address in popular culture at that moment, is outside the scope of this investigation. More pertinent, for the purposes of this argument, is the undeniable fact that, while both plays examine questions of leadership and ideal/deficient masculinity, the focus each text, and means of addressing these central concerns, is markedly different.

In keeping both with the socio-historical circumstances at the period of its construction, therefore, and the original moralistic intent of Plutarch’s *Life of Caesar*, it is much more appropriate to view Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, in Davis’ words, as “offering a sharp perspective on one particular code of aristocratic male conduct, shaped by Shakespeare’s reading of Plutarch and the society around him.” Davis continues:

While the play includes many different types of men and relationships, it does assume that, despite some crucial contradictions, the aristocratic code

with its specific kinds of male figures and notions of masculinity is extremely influential in determining the course of wider social events and people's lives (Davis, 2009:119)

This is not a study of masculine/feminine – as we have seen, the feminine is elided in favour of an examination of the idealized male. Moreover, there is, arguably, no single masculine ideal to which the (male) reader/viewer is presumed to aspire – several ideals are offered, all of them possible. Instead, the play examines the nature of power in constructing the ideal. Within this paradigm, the figure of Antony (and, indeed, the figure of Caesar) is subject to censure only inasmuch as he deviates from a presumed ideal ruler. His function is certainly far from that which he performs in *Antony and Cleopatra*. To fully discuss the mechanisms by which Shakespeare's later Antony comes to be privileged in popular culture over the former is not the purpose of this essay; for now, suffice it to say, that the de-Romanticized Antony of *Julius Caesar* is a poor prototype for the screen romances for which he is best known.

Why, therefore, should it be desirable to break with this extremely pervasive tradition of screening Antony-as-lover in favour of Antony-as-ruler in Mankiewicz' movie? This, as I shall now explain, is a function of the same socio-cultural dis-ease that would, conversely, go on to produce perhaps the most famous screen manifestation of Antony-as-lover in 1963's *Cleopatra*. However, the form, intent, and socio-political moment are subtly different, as I shall now discuss.

### **Post-war Anxiety and The Toga Movie**

To understand the divergent positioning of Antony-as-ruler in Mankiewicz' movie, it is important to understand the construction and uses of the historical epic, and particularly the screen reception of the ancient world. As scholars such as Maria Wyke (1997), William Fitzgerald (2001), and Monica S Cyrino (2005) have noted, antiquity has provided a convenient point of reference from which to explore and/or exorcise a host of modern notions that are too ephemeral or too controversial to address directly. Ancient Rome in particular has proved to be a particularly fertile mythic space from which to explore concepts of gender and



identity.

In order to unpack this configuration of Rome/Romanness – particularly in Hollywood’s screen mythography – we must understand the ways in which Republican Rome has been intrinsically woven into the fabric of the American national psyche since the days of the Founding Fathers, by appealing to an idealized concept of Romanness, or *romanitas*. As the United States of America sought to legitimate itself as a separate and autonomous state, it became necessary to articulate the common identity that marked the state and its populace as cohesive and unified, and established the tradition and rhetoric to which the American identity would adhere. Identification with an idealized Republican Rome provided the fledgling state with what Wyke has described as “a usable past – instant, communal history and cultural legitimacy in the eyes of Europe” (Wyke, 1997:15).

Some of the tropes of this identification are immediately obvious: the US system of government is based on the Roman Republican model, and elements of the nomenclature (Senate, Senator) have been borrowed from Rome. However, the thematic link extends to a deeper and more generalized identification with certain conceptualized motifs of Roman behaviour such as valour, liberty, civic responsibility, patriotism, and so on. These are reified in the American collective psyche as particularly ‘Roman’ traits worthy of emulating in the new American state, and thus forming the basis of the new American identity – separate to the early American notion of the British imperial identity (the vilified Other) which is associated with the worst excesses of imperial Rome. As such, key figures such as George Washington would have themselves depicted wearing the clothes of the Republican Roman elite in contemporary artwork, in order to emphasize their link to the idealized Roman *res publica* (see Wyke, 1997:16).

Moreover, since *romanitas* as a discursive practice is based on an almost fetishized

understanding of certain Roman behaviours and mores – both Republican and Imperial – it is therefore highly adaptable to political/socio-cultural need, and, indeed, this imperial/Republican polarity was invoked to express concerns with American expansion westwards in the nineteenth century (Wyke, 1997:17). “The Roman empire has been and continues to be an enabling device for comment on the present,” say Joshel, Malamud and Wyke (2001) in their introduction to *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (Joshel, Malamud & McGuire, 2001):

By displacing contemporary concerns into a recognizable and familiar past, and by projecting modern empires back onto an ancient one, popular representations allow audiences simultaneously to distance themselves from the past and to identify with it. Popular representations of the Roman Empire can conveniently exhibit the greatest extremes of political power, material life, and sexual behaviour. They can supply explanatory origins for modern social structures, validate or challenge their procedures, and make them the culmination of an ineluctable history, while audiences of these representations are shaped as knowing participants in a seemingly shared and prestigious cultural tradition. (2001:4)

Winkler (2001) expands. “Since the Silent Era, Hollywood has seen the Roman empire as an ancient parallel to modern military or totalitarian empires in general,” he says. “But after the experiences of World War II, the portrayal of ancient Rome in the films of the 1950s and early 1960s bears closer and more specific resemblances to Hitler’s Germany than to Mussolini’s Italy or the Soviet Union” (2001:51). This is critical for understanding the generic function of Rome in Hollywood: it is a means for obliquely expressing contemporary concerns, safely displaced onto antiquity as a means of disavowing their allegorical intent. Clearly, to insist that these films function solely as allegory is to deny the appeal of the spectacle the genre performs *par excellence*, but it is impossible to ignore the fact that cycles of “toga epics” (Fitzgerald, 2001:24) tend to coincide with periods of socio- or politico-cultural anxiety, in which the core identity of the American psyche is fundamentally challenged. In much the same way that the *film noir* is generally accepted as performing masculine anxiety about post-war female economic independence, so we can see that the post-war toga epic explores issues

of economic excess, militarism, Empire-building, religious faith, and tyranny. As Joshel, Malamud and Wyke argue, “the ancient past itself becomes a screen for the projection of contemporary concerns in ancient garb – a sort of retrofitting of the past with the present” (2001:3).

The period immediately following World War II was a period of unprecedented challenge to the American collective identity. The United States’ long-standing policy of isolationism had been obviated by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, and America’s reluctant entry into the war had resulted in a drastically shifted political landscape after the cessation of hostilities. Now a global superpower, and experiencing unparalleled economic growth (all the more notable by comparison to the privations of the 1930s Depression and shortages of wartime), the *romanitas* model of American cultural identity found itself severely challenged. From identifying *Americanness* with notions of virtue, patriotism, democracy and civic duty, the altered political landscape offered insidious hints of the Roman Imperialist vice that the founders had sought to reject. William Fitzgerald, in *Oppositions, Anxieties and Ambiguities in the Toga Movie*, describes it thus:

Clearly, the postwar years that saw the resurgence of the Hollywood epic carried with them anxieties about empire and wealth that are reflected in the representation of imperial Rome. Is the alternative to isolation a corrupting imperialism? Can prosperity be enjoyed without it devolving into a runaway consumerism? (Fitzgerald, 2001: 26)

The Hollywood epic, viewed in this light, becomes a vehicle for the performance and exorcism of these anxieties. Displacing socio-cultural concerns surrounding the nature of Imperialist decadence, vice and corruption onto the mythic space of ancient Rome allowed them to be obliquely voiced, interrogated, and, ultimately, resolved. Rome becomes both a warning from history and a reassurance: not only does it provide a script describing the descent into Imperialist excess (and therefore a means for avoiding a similar fate), but it also contains the threat and makes it safe. History has already spoken: Imperialist Rome did not survive its excesses.

### ***Julius Caesar (1953) And The Traditions Of The Toga Epic***

Given the plethora of screen adaptations of Shakespeare's various plays since the earliest days of cinema, however, it is important to note briefly that the historical epic is not the only available genre classification into which Mankiewicz' 1953 production may be placed. This is critical in interrogating Brando's performance of masculinity within the text, as issues of gender may be considered of particular importance to the toga epic, whilst being less significant to what we shall call the genre of Shakespeare-as-Pedagogy.

While there have undoubtedly been several major, profit-seeking adaptations of Shakespearian texts onto the large and small screen throughout the screen age, the politics and socio-cultural imperatives behind Shakespearian adaptations is often very different to those which inform the decision to produce an original reproduction of the Antony-myth. Jack J Jörgens in particular notes the danger of losing the essence of Shakespeare in "scores of studio TV productions and pedagogical 'Scenes from the Bard'" (Jörgens, 1998:22). This is not to say that we must assume that Shakespeare-on-screen is automatically the same as Shakespeare-as-pedagogy, but even the most critically acclaimed productions – for example, Jon Scoffield's celebrated 1974 screen production of *Antony and Cleopatra* – tend to be inescapably rooted in theatricality: Scoffield's screen production "flowed from a highly successful Royal Shakespeare Company stage production" (Crowl, 1994:153). This distinction is critical – Shakespeare-as-Pedagogy places the celebration of Shakespeare's genius as its key imperative and, I would argue, seeks to appeal to a demographic that consciously places equal worth on Shakespeare for Shakespeare's sake. The historical epic, on the other hand, targets a mainstream, commercial audience – possibly (but not necessarily) with some grounding in classical literature, but above all an audience that seeks to engage with cinema-as-spectacle. For this reason, without wishing to ignore the considerable significance of selecting the Shakspearean text for production, I align the Mankiewicz movie more closely with the latter genre, as indicated by the relatively high budget (\$2 million – Koller, 2000), the famous director, and the high-profile cast, which

includes James Mason, John Gielgud, Greer Garson, Deborah Kerr, and, of course, Marlon Brando.

This genre classification places the movie on a continuum of similar movies addressing, as I have shown, a series of socio-political anxieties about the changing nature of American society. Issues of gender, thrown into flux by the greater economic privilege afforded to women during the War as they were obliged to work outside the home, are no less evident within the genre's imperatives than concerns of imperialist decadence. Indeed, the historical epic is particularly well-suited to the alleviation of anxieties surrounding the erosion of male privilege by virtue of its ability to essentialize male/female gender roles and insist upon this essentialist gender positioning as key to constructing the mythic past. As Joshel, Malamud and Wyke argue in their introduction to *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, "Cinema's projection of the postwar American scenario onto antiquity, where good women are depicted as domesticators and bad women as women with public power, naturalizes and gives the legitimacy of history to the domestic reassimilation of American women into their traditional roles as wife and mother" (2001: 14). For this reason, and because of the critical importance of issues of masculine performance to the source text(s), we must assume that gender is key also to understanding the construction of *Julius Caesar* (1953).

### **Brando and Antony**

Moreover, as we have seen, the body of Antony is used specifically, throughout popular culture, to address concerns relating to paradigm performance of masculinity. The casting of Marlon Brando in this role would appear to confirm this reading. Brett E Carroll, in *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, says that Brando

has offered American audiences complex models of masculinity that reflect various transformations in American society. His characters have suggested the impact of post-war alienation and changing conceptions of sexuality in America.

Brando's portrayals resonated with broader contemporary cultural

messages and debates about masculinity during the 1950s. On the one hand, McCarthyism and Cold War rhetoric demanded adherence to traditional concepts of familial and nationalist virility. But at the same time, new cultural currents generated different understandings of masculine behaviour. The Kinsey Report's research on male sexuality (1948) located sexuality at the centre of masculine identity; *Playboy* magazine, first published in 1953, made the distribution of sexually suggestive material more popular and socially acceptable; and the Beat Generation challenged mainstream values by identifying nonconformity, unrestrained sexuality, and homosexuality as acceptable male behaviours. Brando's characters embodied these conflicting understandings of American manliness. (Carroll, 2003:70)

We can immediately recognize "unrestrained sexuality" and "homosexuality" (in its Roman semantic equivalent, passive sexual performance) as items in Antony's twentieth century screen iconography, and Brando's casting, carrying with it a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, would seem to represent a recuperation of the feminized Antony, or, at the very least, a step away from socio-cultural censure. It is therefore revealing that his Antony embodies none of the above.

Rather, a reading of *Julius Caesar* (1953) informed by the conventions the historical epic requires us to view the figure of Antony as no more representative of positive, or acceptable, masculinity than are any of his feminized counterparts. It is simply that the mechanisms by which this is expressed are different.

Returning to Davis' notion of Shakespeare's interrogation of masculinity as embodied in performing leadership, the negative positioning of Brando's Antony becomes increasingly apparent. Indeed, it might more properly be regarded as the forerunner of Antony's masculine deficiencies in more recent, twenty-first century texts, in which censure is awarded on the basis of masculine *over*-performativity. This is not as improbable as it might first appear: although I would argue that the twenty-first century Antonies perform hypermasculinity as their measure of distance from the paradigm in response to the increasing interrogation and

cultural rejection of the twentieth century model of hegemonic masculinity (which privileges emotional inexpressivity and action), a similar mechanism problematizes the masculinity of the Other in the 1950s historical epic. Here again it is not simply a question of underperformance in the masculine sphere, but rather the *wrong kind* of performance. That is to say that where Antony-as-Lover might be castigated for his non-masculine inability to operate in the (masculine) political sphere, and this device be used to specifically bound the limits of acceptable masculinity, it clearly does not follow that acceptable performance in the political sphere immediately imbues a man with acceptable masculinity. The Nero of *Quo Vadis* (1951), the Caligula of *The Robe* (1953), the Messala of *Ben Hur* (1959), the Crassus of *Spartacus* (1960): all these men perform comfortably within the political sphere, yet none embody paradigm masculinity. The measure by which they fall short of the ideal is the extent to which their performance impacts positively or negatively upon the *res publica*. This is key: since the *res publica* represents the public, or the greater good, political action can only really be coded *masculine* when its goal is to improve wider, civic conditions. Where political activity is embarked upon in favour of personal gratification or enhancement, it is no longer public-sphere oriented and is, by definition, private-sphere – or feminine.

This is where the non-diegetic discourse of liminal masculinity surrounding Brando clearly impacts on the positioning of Antony. Within the Shakespearian text, the masculinity of Antony may not be as overtly idealized as that of Brutus, but it remains open to identification as *an* ideal. Antony acts within the play as an agent of Caesar – the proverbial “limb” – and his actions permit him to be read as a gifted acolyte, devoted to his mentor and determined to carry on the work of Caesar-as-putative-father following the assassination. The extent to which this is to be desired or otherwise is a subjective position, afforded to the reader/viewer. Such a position remains open, in theory, to the audience of the 1953 film, but Antony’s ideological positioning is much less ambiguous.

We have seen that the movie falls most credibly under the genre classification of historical

epic, with the concomitant interrogation of socio-cultural anxiety. At least part of this anxiety, as noted above, concerns the Imperialist overtones of Nazism, and an available reading of many of these movies is as a direct interrogation of Fascism and/or totalitarianism, and concerns as to where America sits on this spectrum now that it is in a position of global power. *Quo Vadis* (1951), for example, repeatedly invokes pseudo-Nazi imagery in relation to the figure of Nero: the early triumphal procession into Rome explicitly recalls the Nuremberg Parades, whilst the Roman eagle – ancestor of both the Nazi and American eagle – is configured to resemble the stylized, squared-off former rather than the latter (which is generally pictured with its wings spread for flight). Winkler (2001) aligns *Julius Caesar* (1953) with this overtly Nazi/Fascist imagery:

Two years after *Quo Vadis*, the mob scene in Joseph Mankiewicz's film of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1953), in which Mark Antony speaks over Caesar's dead body, resembles fascist rallies as well: the crowd yelling in unison, their arms raised. Since Antony is about to 'unleash the dogs of war,' the scene may even have carried overtones, at least in some viewers' minds, of the infamous moment in February of 1943 when Joseph Goebbels had asked the German people amassed in the Berlin Sportpalast, 'Do you want total war?' Mankiewicz's Roman mob is as susceptible to demagoguery as the mob in Nazi Germany. (Winkler, 2001:58)

Winkler goes on to note that, in *Julius Caesar*, "the very first image, immediately after the MGM lion, is a huge eagle banner, which fills the screen and over which the film's title and credits appear" (2001:59). The imagery of the Roman eagle, Winkler says, is to be found throughout the film, mirroring the "squat and square-looking" (p59) eagle of the Third Reich.

Moreover, the film telegraphs its ideological intent repeatedly in its deviations from the Shakespearian text. The opening titles quote from Plutarch, setting the tone uncomfortably alongside totalitarian cults of personality:



“Upon Caesar’s return to Rome, after defeating Pompey in the civil war, his countrymen chose him a fourth time consul and then dictator for life... Thus he became odious to moderate men through the extravagance of the titles and powers that were heaped upon him.” Plutarch’s LIVES. (Mankiewicz, 1953)

Brando’s Antony confirms this ideological reading through audience privilege, when the camera captures his sly evaluation of the mob during his “Friends, Romans!” speech, and his dangerous, smug little smirk as he leaves the impassioned crowd to build their makeshift pyre for Caesar. Later, as he, Octavian and Lepidus discuss the proscriptions, he waits for his colleagues to leave, and then makes his way to the balcony overlooking the city, where a bust of Caesar ornaments the balcony wall. He turns the bust towards him and smiles murderously at it from under hooded brows, then crosses to his chair – previously Caesar’s – which takes up the right third of the screen, the better to show off the magnificent Nazi-esque eagle adorning the back. Caesar has already been linked to Fascism through repeated affiliation with Nazi symbology prior to the assassination; this sequence confirms Antony as his heir. None of the above appears in the Shakespearian text.

### **Conclusion: Deviating from the Deviant**

Brando’s non-diegetic baggage of liminal masculinities is certainly at play in this text, but it is the anti-hero, fresh from his 1951 performance of Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (dir. Elia Kazan) that *Julius Caesar* references. I have said that the same sense of socio-political anxiety informs both Brando’s Antony and, later, Burton’s Antony in *Cleopatra* (1963), and this is true: however, each movie falls at separate ends of the cycle, and each is informed by slightly altered cultural imperatives. The early portion of the cycle – from *Quo Vadis* in 1951 up to, perhaps, *Spartacus* in 1960 – evidences a level of national psychological trauma that must be interrogated, made safe, and exorcised, while the later movies suggest a sense of looking forward to a future informed by the lessons of the past. Fitzgerald explains it as follows:

By the end of the period covered by these movies, a new generation that had not lived through the Depression or the war was making itself felt. What would the sons make of the world their fathers had bequeathed them? Both *Cleopatra* (1963) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) seem to pose this question through their bipartite structure in which the first part is dominated by great men (Julius Caesar, Marcus Aurelius) whose sons, real or symbolic (Mark Antony, Livius, Commodus), must struggle to live up to their example in the second part. The appropriately named *The Fall of the Roman Empire* was the last of the Hollywood toga epics before *Gladiator*: for the new generation, the world-historical struggles of Christianity and Rome were no longer viable dress with which to clothe their concerns (2001: 46).

It is a generic imperative that might be tailor-made for the “standard” Antony, he of the feminized masculinity, “struggling to live up to” the idealized (or, at least, partially idealized) masculinity embodied in Caesar-as-father. Caesar, that perpetually unstable avatar of both Roman Republicanism and, conversely, Imperialism, is semi-recuperated and, all other things being equal, returns to his standard positioning as a measure of the paradigm to which Antony cannot adhere. It is, in short, an indication of the extent to which the spectre of American imperialism has been laid to rest.

We must, therefore, understand the aberrant deficiencies of Brando’s Antony in terms of the specific anxieties he is being made to perform. Although the play leaves the question open, the film goes out of its way to make sure that we understand that Antony is not performing paradigm masculinity. Deviations from the source text demonstrate unequivocally that Antony’s motivation is not to be trusted. He is not acting for the good of the *res publica*; he is actuated by a desire to possess power for power’s sake – his leadership embodies dangerous imperialism, the more so since the play does not allow for it to be contained: Antony remains dangerous as the credits roll. Brando’s liminal masculinity may not be overtly on display, but knowledge of it helps to Other the character of Antony – by virtue of Brando’s cultural iconography, we are able to understand that this is not an avatar of Shakespeare’s possible idealized masculinities, but rather an unknowable quantity: certainly no Brutus. While his Antony unquestionably performs non-paradigm masculinity, it is embodied in a discourse of political threat rather than emasculation. A rare opportunity to imbue a screen Antony with a

*Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011)*

subtle, nuanced, and pluralistic performance of masculinity that is also, by virtue of its leading man's star persona, invested with a high degree of hegemonic appeal, is instead put to the service of political allegory. Antony-as-cipher triumphs once again.

## **Bibliography**

Davis, Lloyd: "Embodied Masculinity in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*" in Harold Bloom: *William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009)

Carroll, Brett E: *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (New York: The Moschovitis Group, 2003)

Crowl, Samuel: "A World Elsewhere: The Roman Plays on Film and Television" in Anthony Davies and Stanley W Wells (eds) *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television* (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1994)

Cyrino, Monica Silveira: *Big Screen Rome* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005)

Duff, Tim: *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Fitzgerald, William: "Oppositions, Anxieties and Ambiguities in the Toga Movie" in Sandra R Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T McGuire (eds) *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)

Humphreys, Arthur: "Introduction" in Shakespeare, William: *Julius Caesar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

*Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011)*

Jörgens, Jack J: "Realizing Shakespeare on Film" in Robert Shaughnessy (ed) *Shakespeare on Film: Contemporary Critical Essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998)

Joshel, Sandra R, Malamud, Margaret and Wyke, Maria: "Introduction" in Sandra R Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T McGuire (eds) *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)

Kelly, Rachael: "The Iconography of Mark Antony" in *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network, Vol 2, No 1 (2009)*:

Kelly, Rachael: "'Th' Abstract of All Faults': Antony vs the Hegemonic Man" in *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network vol 3 no 1 (2010)*

Koller, Brian (2000) "Review of *Julius Caesar* (1953)" [online] Epinions, Available from [http://www1.epinions.com/review/mvie\\_mu-1011328/mvie-review-66D7-22C5937F-39F311F5-prod3](http://www1.epinions.com/review/mvie_mu-1011328/mvie-review-66D7-22C5937F-39F311F5-prod3) (Accessed 28th April 2011)

Pelling, CBR: "Introduction" in *Life of Antony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 3<sup>rd</sup> edition

Smith, Bruce R: *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Winkler, Martin M: "The Roman Empire in American Cinema After 1945" in Sandra R Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T McGuire (eds) *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)

Wyke, Maria: *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York: Routledge, 1997)

## **Filmography**

*Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011)*

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1974) Dir. Jon Scoffield, UK: ITC, Royal Shakespeare Company [DVD]

*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) Dir. Elia Kazan, USA: Charles K Feldman Group, Warner Bros Pictures [DVD]

*Ben-Hur* (1959) Dir. William Wyler, USA: Metro Goldwyn Mayer [DVD]

*Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945) Dir. Gabriel Pascal, UK: Gabriel Pascal Productions [DVD]

*Cleopatra* (1917) Dir. J Gordon Edwards, USA: Fox Film Corporation [No copy exists]

*Cleopatra* (1934) Dir. Cecil B DeMille, USA: Paramount Pictures [DVD]

*Cleopatra* (1963) Dir. Joseph L Mankiewicz, USA: 20th Century Fox [DVD]

*Cleopatra* (1999) Dir. Franc Roddam, USA: Babelsberg International Film Produktion, Hallmark Entertainment [DVD]

*Imperium: Augustus* (2002) Dir. Roger Young, Germany/Italy/France/ Austria/Spain/UK: EOS Entertainment, Lux Vide, Radiotelevisione Italia, Telecinco, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen [DVD]

*Julius Caesar* (1953) Dir. Joseph Mankiewicz, USA: MGM [DVD]

*Quo Vadis?* (1951) Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, USA: Metro Goldwyn Mayer [DVD]

*Rome: Season 1* (2005) Dir. Michael Apted, Allen Coulter, Alan Poul, Steve Shill, Timothy van Patten, Alan Taylor, UK/USA: BBC/HBO [DVD]

*Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011)*

*Rome: Season 2* (2007) Dir. Michael Apted, Allen Coulter, Alan Poul, Steve Shill, Timothy van Patten, John Maybury, UK/USA: BBC/HBO [DVD]

*Serpent of the Nile* (1953) Dir. William Castle, USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation [VHS]

*Spartacus* (1960) Dir. Stanley Kubrick, USA: Universal [DVD]

*The Robe* (1953) Dir. Henry Koster, USA: 20th Century Fox [DVD]