

Three Eras, Two Men, One Value: *Fides* in Modern Performances of Shakespeare's
Antony and Cleopatra

Depictions of Marc Antony and Caesar Augustus have changed dramatically between the first and twenty-first centuries, partially because of William Shakespeare's seventeenth-century play *Antony and Cleopatra*. In 2006 and 2010, England's Royal Shakespeare Company staged vastly different interpretations of this classically influenced Shakespearean text. How do the modern performances rework ancient views of Antony and Augustus, particularly in light of the ancient Roman value *fides* (loyalty or good faith)? This paper answers that question by examining the intersections between Greco-Roman literary-historic narratives – as received in Shakespeare's early modern play – and the two modern performances. The contemporary versions of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* create contrasting constructions of Antony and Augustus by modernizing the characters and/or their worlds. The 2006 rendition (directed by Gregory Doran) presents an explosive but weak-willed Antony (Sir Patrick Stewart) and a prudish yet petulant Augustus (John Hopkins). On the other hand, the 2010 adaptation (directed by Michael Boyd) shows a hotheaded and frank Antony (Darrell D'Silva) who struggles against a cold and manipulative Augustus (John Mackay). Both performances reveal the complexity of these ancient figures as the men engage with and evaluate claims upon their familial, societal, and personal *fides*.

Representations of Antony and Augustus necessarily involve *fides*, though classical accounts do not always feature this term. As military and political leaders, both men led lives filled with decisions about loyalty, specifically what deserved it and in what degree. The modern dramatizations further underscore *fides* in their portrayals of Antony and Augustus. The 2006 staging probes personal choices about loyalty, while the 2010 version explores societal contexts

of loyalty. Accordingly, *fides* provides the lens for this paper on modern performative interpretations of Antony and Augustus.

Methodologically, this analysis combines classical reception studies and Shakespearean performance studies to investigate how ancient views of Antony and Augustus are reworked in modern renditions of Shakespeare's play. Classical reception studies "yield[s] insights into the receiving society ... [and] focus[es] critical attention back towards the ancient source and sometimes frame new questions" (Hardwick 4). At the same time, Shakespearean performance studies view the theater as a place "where 'Shakespearean' meanings are produced in contemporary culture," with each performance creating a new iteration of the text (Worthen 38). This paper employs both approaches to explore how directors Doran and Boyd used modern reference points to "frame new questions" in their productions of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare would have probably known Plutarch's *Lives*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, Tacitus' *Annals*, and Appian of Alexandria's *Civil Wars*. While the adaptations did not necessarily draw upon ancient works, they engage with perceptions of Antony and Augustus' *fides* from classical narratives, reworked in Shakespeare. Thus, ancient Greco-Roman accounts of the two men provide frameworks for understanding modern representations of Antony, Augustus, and their interactions with *fides*.

Both interpretations highlight questions of loyalty in their portrayals of Rome's leaders, and even of Rome itself. Doran set his 2006 dramatization in iconic ancient Rome and Egypt, yet this production's Antony had the characteristics of a present-day "manic-depressive," problematizing conventional understandings of his motivations (Rutter). Similarly, this version's young Augustus exhibited an inferiority complex, raising questions of how *fides* connects with issues of dependency and control. Boyd's 2010 adaptation clearly connected *Antony and*

Cleopatra with contemporary society, representing Rome and Egypt as modern-day England and Afghanistan/Iraq. This performance's candid Antony seemed out of place in Rome. Augustus embodied Rome's corruption, wielding deceptive rhetoric to cover his political machinations. Indeed, the production interrogated a traditional picture of *fides* by asking whether Rome was worthy of Antony's loyalty.

Despite the contrast between their approaches, both renditions showcased the modern relevance of Antony, Augustus, and the concept of *fides*. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* serves as both a reception site for classical accounts of Antony and Augustus engaging with *fides* and a launching pad for modern (re)interpretations of their loyalty. The triumvirs lived and died 2,000 years ago, but performances such as Doran and Boyd's keep Antony, Augustus, and perhaps even *fides* in the public discourse. Whether by finding modern psychology in the ancient world or by investing that ancient world with modern characteristics, the two productions reveal the trans-temporal resonance of these leaders and their dilemmas about loyalty.

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