

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI  
PEDAGOGICKÁ FAKULTA

Ústav cizích jazyků

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

The Theme of Love in Shakespeare's plays *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*,  
*Antony and Cleopatra*

Natálie Švagerová

Olomouc 2024

Mgr. Petr Anténe, M.A., Ph.D.

Prohlašuji, že jsem svou bakalářskou práci napsala samostatně, s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

I declare that I have written my bachelor's thesis by myself, working only with sources mentioned in the biography.

V Olomouci 10. Června 2024 | Olomouc, June 10, 2024

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Natálie Švagerová

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Petr Anténe, Ph. D., for his patience, help and comments throughout the writing of this thesis.

## Annotation

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	Natálie Švagerová
<b>Katedra:</b>	Ústav cizích jazyků
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b>	Mgr. Petr Anténe Ph.D
<b>Rok obhajoby:</b>	2024
<b>Název práce:</b>	Téma lásky v Shakespearových hrách Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, Antonius a Kleopatra
<b>Název v angličtině:</b>	The Theme of Love in Shakespeare's plays Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra
<b>Zvolený typ práce:</b>	Výzkumná práce – přehled odborných poznatků
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Cílem bakalářské práce je analyzovat téma lásky v Shakespearových hrách <i>Coriolanus</i> , <i>Julius Caesar</i> , <i>Antonius a Kleopatra</i> . Teoretická část se zabývá vývojem tématu lásky v literatuře a současně pokrývá průřez Shakespearovým dílem. V následující části je provedena literární analýza výše zmíněných her v souladu s tématem této práce.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	William Shakespeare, Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, Antonius a Kleopatra, láska, patriotismus
<b>Anotace v angličtině:</b>	This bachelor thesis aims to comprehensively analyse the theme of love in Shakespeare's plays <i>Coriolanus</i> , <i>Julius Caesar</i> , <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> . The first part outlines the development of the theme of love in literature and covers Shakespeare's work. The second part provides an analysis of the plays in accordance with the theme of this thesis.
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině:</b>	William Shakespeare, Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, love, patriotism
<b>Přílohy vázané v práci:</b>	
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<b>Jazyk práce:</b>	Angličtina

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## Introduction

William Shakespeare is probably the best-known dramatist and poet of all time. His plays and sonnets remained timeless and belong to the literature canon with countless translations and studies. In his work, Shakespeare explores the themes of revenge, politics, betrayal, ambition, transformation and, last but not least, love.

The theme of love, whether as a form of romance, maternity or patriotism, is present in nearly all Shakespeare's plays. Sometimes being the main motive of a play, sometimes being put aside.

Thus, this thesis aims to analyse and explore the theme of love in Shakespeare's plays *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. My initial interest in this area developed from my concern for antiquity and Shakespeare's work. The choice of these particular plays was determined by the fact that all three plays cover a part of Roman history, are based on real historical figures, and belong to a subgroup of Shakespeare's plays called "Roman".

This study aims to reveal whether there is the theme of love as a romantic motive in Roman history plays or whether the romantic element is entirely overshadowed by patriotism and traditional antiquity in the Roman worldview.

This study sets out to:

1. Consider whether love as a romantic element is the main theme in these plays.
2. Analyse the degree of patriotism and compare it with the degree of romantic motive.
3. Determine the main theme of these plays.

This thesis consists of an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion

The first chapter outlines the development of the theme of love in literature while using examples from Sontag and Dostoyevsky to show different views on specifying the term "love". The end of this chapter then offers Shakespeare's connection to Dante's treatment of the love theme.

The second chapter provides a general overview of Shakespeare's work, the division of his plays, and their first appearance in *Folio*.

The third chapter discusses the influence of Greek writer Plutarchos and his work *Parallel Lives* on Shakespeare's plays *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The fourth chapter provides an analysis of the play *Coriolanus* in order to identify the theme of love or patriotism and summarizes the findings. Moreover, the chapter also introduces Coriolanus as a real historical figure and provides the historical context.

The fifth chapter examines the play, *Julius Caesar*. It provides the story's origin and the relationship between patriotism and love in this play and again provides a summary regardless of the theme.

The sixth chapter studies the play *Antony and Cleopatra* and its relation to the theme of love as a romantic element and as love towards a homeland. The chapter includes the origin of the story, a summary of the play and mentions other adaptations of the story as well.

In the conclusion, all the previous findings finalize the thesis and provide the final comparison and analysis of the theme of love.



# 1 The Theme of Love in Literature

Undoubtedly, love is one of the most frequented themes in literature, and there are several definitions and approaches to this theme. Traditionally, love has been defined as “an emotion characterised by strong feelings of affection out of kinship, companionship, admiration, or benevolence” (Decherney, 2023). However true this definition may appear, it stays very general and only supports the previous claim about this term being hard to define, even for writers and philosophers. Sontag, an American writer, supports this argument and claims. “Nothing is mysterious, no human relation. Except love” (Sontag, Rieff, 2012, p. 97). Sontag suggests the issue of understanding this term, as already mentioned above.

By contrast, Dostoyevsky chose a less rational and more poetic way of defining love, or rather, what it is when there is no love. “What is hell? I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love” (Dostoyevsky, Garnett, 2019, p. 246). Dostoyevsky highlights the importance of love and being able to love and even compares the inability to love to hell. Forster also chose the poetical way of describing what love is. “You can transmute love, ignore it, muddle it, but you can never pull it off you. I know by experience that poets are right: Love is eternal.” He sees love as an unconditional feeling beyond our understanding, similar to Sontag. These definitions and points of view suggest that no general description of love is applicable universally.

It is valid to say that the theme of love plays an irreplaceable and significant role in literature history, and its roots can be found in antiquity. This is undoubtedly true in the case of Greek and Roman myths, such as the myths about Aphrodite and Ares or Orpheus and Eurydice. Not only was the theme of love represented in myths, but it happened to be the subject of many philosophers. This is certainly true in the case of Plato, who, in his work *Symposium*, introduced the idea of soulmates. “Methinks I have a plan which will humble their pride and improve their manners; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg” (Plato, 1992, p.131). He introduces the idea of incompleteness without a life partner that people should search for.

The most significant expansion of romantic themes in literature happened during the Medieval era with a phenomenon dubbed “Courtly Love”. In the literature, the term “Courtly

Love” is associated primarily with Troubadour poetry (Lewis, 1958, p. 2). Troubadour poetry originated in France at the end of the eleventh century and introduced a new approach towards love. According to Gillet, whose definition is used in Briffault’s work: “The troubadours had done something extraordinary. While addressing an audience of women, they had invented the cult of women. It was an immensely far-reaching revolution” (Briffault, 1965, p. 103). Lewis supports this opinion and adds that this new concept of love set by the Troubadours influenced literature, not only in French, for centuries ahead and he also argues that Renaissance did not have such an impact on literature compared to Troubadours’ new approach. These findings support the idea of Troubadours’ significant influence on expanding the theme of love in literature (Lewis, 1958, pp 4-5).

Several factors can influence the frequency of romantic and love themes in literature. Surveys such as those conducted by Baumard (Baumard et al., 2022) showed that romantic elements in literature were most likely to occur in the literature of countries with high economic growth. In his survey, he examined the effects of urbanisation, increase in population and economic development on occurring romantic elements in fiction and then suggests that quick social development may have played a vital role in expanding the romantic elements in fiction. Likely, the love theme in literature was directly influenced by real life experiences. For example, Lindholm claims that: “romantic love (...) was the direct response to capitalism” (Lindholm, 2006). This combination of findings from Baumard and Lindholm provides some support for the conceptual premise that the theme of love in literature was likely to occur more in countries with higher economic growth.

## **1.1 Love in Shakespeare**

The theme of love is one of the most frequent themes used in Shakespeare’s plays, and it is often compared to Dante’s work and his love traits. Fergusson suggests that Shakespeare and Dante share three attributes connected to love that are used universally in their works. The first of them is that love is only dedicated to gentili or nobles. Second of them is that love requires absolute acquiescence. This trait is closely related to the first attribute since Fergusson then claims. “Only gentili are capable of devoting all their love to one object, and so get completely get away: their more pedestrian counterparts love, food and money too, and therefore can more easily keep their feet on the ground” (Fergusson, 1975). As a last trait, Fergusson presents love as a mysterious feeling for lovers. To prove his argument, he chose

the play *Romeo and Juliet* where he introduces his idea of a love as a conundrum through the young lovers (Fergusson, 1975). Similarly, Gray also compares Shakespeare to Dante but unlike Fergusson, Gray refers to one main difference. According to Gray, the biggest difference between these two authors is in their approach towards erotic love which he finds more represented in Shakespeare work and especially in sonnets (Ronald Gray, 2011).

## 2 Shakespeare's work

Shakespeare is said to be the author of 36 plays and two plays he co-wrote (*Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, these two plays were not included in *First Folio* (Frye, 2005, pp. 7-8).

### 2.1 First Folio

Many of Shakespeare's plays firstly appeared in Shakespeare's First Folio called *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies* which was firstly published seven years after he died in 1623 by John Heminge and Henry Condell. The First Folio consists of 36 plays while 18 plays were never published before and most likely would disappear. The Folio also divides the plays according to the genres for the first time. It divides the plays into comedies, tragedies, and histories<sup>1</sup>. The plays in Folio are not in chronological order.

Using the division from First Folio the plays are divided followingly. Among comedies there are: *The Tempest*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, *The Winter's Tale*

Among tragedies are *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Troilus and Cressida*.

Among histories are *Henry IV. (2 parts)*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI. (3 parts)*, *Henry VIII.*, *King John*, *Richard II*, *Richard III* (Shakespeare, Hilský, 2010, pp.54-57).

### 2.2 Another Division of Shakespeare's Plays

There are more perspectives according to which Shakespeare's plays can be divided, such as comedies, tragedies and histories, on the other hand, the modern approaches added two more divisions, and these are romances and Roman plays. Among romances, there are *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. (Hilský, 2010). *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus* belong to a group called Roman Plays.

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<sup>1</sup> Plays from the English history.

Baroll even uses another subgroup called “Caesar” plays where he puts the plays *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* (Baroll, 1958).

### 3 Inspiration in Plutarch

While writing *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, the main source for Shakespeare was Plutarch's most famous book, *Parallel Lives* (also known as *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*). Plutarch portrays over 20 famous and influential Greek and Roman figures in this book. Plutarch places these figures into pairs (one Greek and one Roman) based on their character similarities and lifestyle and then compares them in a separate chapter afterwards. For the plays *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare used biographies of Mark Antony, Marcus Brutus, Julius Caesar, and Gaius Coriolanus.

While writing *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch also focused on describing the complexity of the historical figure. "This psychological method of interpreting history, equally removed from that which simply records occurrences and that which investigates complex social phenomena, is the one most fruitful for dramatic purposes." (Verity, 1911). Apart from only transferring Plutarch into a dramatic form, Shakespeare also made some changes in interpretation. For example, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra is the play's main protagonist, while in Plutarch, she is only briefly mentioned in the biography of Marcus Antonius.

## 4 Coriolanus

The play was probably written between 1608 and 1610 (some sources also consider the years 1607-1609) and is often considered to be his last tragedy as well as his last Roman play. *Coriolanus* made its first appearance in *The Folio*, which was published in 1623. This play also describes events in Rome in about 500 B.C. This play can also be, to a certain extent, labelled as a political one since Marius Coriolanus was, like Antony, a great soldier capable of incredible actions. Although this play may be considered lesser among Shakespeare's tragedies now, T. S. Eliot finds this play even better than *Hamlet*. "Coriolanus may not be as "interesting" as Hamlet, but it is with *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare's most assured artistic success" (Eliot, 1920, p. 99).

Thus, it might seem that Coriolanus might not belong among Shakespeare's most popular plays nor with the readers or critics. It, therefore, faces a certain criticism due to the behaviour of the main protagonist, which is often seen as too unlikeable for a conservative audience. Coriolanus's character is surrounded by controversy, and the whole play seems monotonous to many. According to Alexander, whose comment can be found in Oliver's study, "It lacks the colour and warmth" (Oliver, 1959, p.53).

Hilský marks *Coriolanus* as Shakespeare's last tragedy and most complex political play; however, Rabkin challenges this view by saying that either Coriolanus or Antony and Cleopatra may be considered Shakespeare's last tragedy (Rabkin, 1966, p. 195). On the other hand, Josek questions the genre division of *Coriolanus* and suggests that together with Shakespeare's other play, *Troilus and Cressida*, marking the play *Coriolanus* as a tragedy may be misleading (Josek, 2004, p. 5).

The origin of the story of Coriolanus can be found in antiquity in Plutarch's work called *Parallel Lives* where he introduces famous figures from Greek and Roman history and compares and makes certain analogies among their lives. *Coriolanus* first appeared in *First Folio*, published in 1623, and its name was *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*. The play is believed to be written around 1608 and was first performed in 1609 (Shakespeare, Hilský, 2016, p. 1289).

### 4.1 The Summary of the Play

Coriolanus is a Roman general who was offered a position by the Senate as a consul. However, to get this position, Coriolanus must get enough votes from the public. His initial success in getting votes is then followed by his eventual failure because of the influence of

tribunes Sicinus and Brutus, who see Coriolanus as a potential danger. Feeling betrayed and angry, Coriolanus decides to plot revenge against Rome and to do so; he wants to reunite with his enemy, Aufidinus, who also wants to attack Rome. Causing a huge chaos by attacking Rome, Coriolanus' mother, Volumnia eventually comes begging for mercy for Rome. After talking to his mother, Coriolanus stops attacking. Seeing his action as a betrayal towards Aufidinus, Coriolanus is assassinated.

## 4.2 The Origin of the Story

The play found its inspiration in a Roman hero, Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus. He is said to have gained his surname because of his actions during the battle against Volsci, particularly the city of Corioli<sup>2</sup>. After his unsuccessful attempt to become a tribune, he allied with the king of the Volsci and eventually attacked Rome together. After the urging of his mother and wife, Coriolanus changed his mind. The following events remain unclear, although the most common version is that Coriolanus was assassinated, being seen as a traitor by the Volsci and the Romans (Mitchel, 2024).

## 4.3 The Theme of Love in *Coriolanus*

Even though this play is more concerned with themes such as pride, class, reputation, and power, the theme of love is not completely omitted, and in some cases, love and battle work as synonyms.

### 4.3.1 Hero Coriolanus

The theme of love in this play occurs mainly in Coriolanus' relationship towards his mother, and their strong bond is, paradoxically, one of the causes of Coriolanus's assassination. The relationship towards Coriolanus is greatly shown throughout the following lines.

VOLUMNIA

I pray you daughter, sing or express yourself in  
A more comfortable sort. If my son were my husband,  
I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won  
honour that in the embracements of his bed where  
he would show most love.

(4.3. 1-5)

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<sup>2</sup> 493 BC.



By “daughter”, Volumnia means Coriolanus’s wife, thus her daughter-in-law, Virgilia. Coriolanus is currently at war with Aufidinus, the leader of Volscis, while his wife and his mother are staying in Rome. Volumnia tries to comfort her daughter-in-law by saying what she would have done if Coriolanus had been her husband, suggesting that she would not spend the time waiting for her husband to be sad. As she continues in her monologue, it is obvious that Volumnia is proud that her son is in the war since if he succeeds, he can be later honoured, which could bring potential success to his mother.

The dialogue between Volumnia and her daughter-in-law continues

VIRGILIA

But he had he died in the business madam; how then?

VOLUMNIA

Then his good report should have been my son; I  
therein would have found issue. Hear me profess  
sincerely: Had I dozen sons, each my love  
alike and none less dear than thine and my good  
Marcus, I had rather had eleven die nobly for their  
country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.

(1.3. 18-24)

Virgilia, Coriolanus’ wife, asks what would happen if Coriolanus died at war and the reaction of his mother again shows her strong interest in state affairs which he puts in the first place. She even claims that if she had twelve sons, she would rather have eleven of them die in a fight than one surrender. This portrays her strong need for honour and success which she tries to achieve through her son and therefore her love towards his son is strongly connected to his achievements. Volumnia symbolises the perfect example of Roman values when she puts the state affairs above her own.

#### **4.3.2 Counting Scars**

The fact that Volumnia is more concerned with Coriolanus’ reputation of a hero and military leader than with his well-being is illustrated in the following scene.

VOLUMNIA

I’ the shoulder and i’ the left arm there will be  
large cicatrices to show the people, when he shall

stand for his place. He received in the repulse of  
Tarquin seven hurts i' the body.

(2.1. 139-142)

This monologue follows the conversation about Coriolanus returning to Rome after defeating Aufidius. When Volumnia learns about Coriolanus's injury, her only interest is whether the wounds are visible enough for the public to see and, therefore, her son can be appreciated for his military achievements. Moreover, Volumnia knows the exact number of Coriolanus' scars. Volumnia loves the image of her son as a strong hero. Only declaring her strong interest in the symbol of pride.

Coriolanus is well aware of his mother's interests, as shown in the next scene.

CORIO LANUS

O'

You have, I know petition'd all the gods  
For my prosperity!

(2.1. 163-165)

This scene follows Coriolanus's return to Rome as a hero who defeated his enemies. Praising his mother for supporting him and praying for him.

#### **4.3.3 Maternity Love**

Nevertheless, the best example of Coriolanus's strong affection towards his mother is shown almost at the end of the play when Coriolanus plans to attack Rome, and his mother and wife come into his tent to convince him to change his mind, begging for mercy. There is a strong representation of their bond to Rome, which is displayed throughout all this play. The strong bond is then shown through these verses.

VOLUMNIA

Alas, how can we for our country pray,  
Whereto we are bound, together with thy victory,  
Whereto we are bound? Alack, or we must lose  
The country, our dear nurse, or else, thy person,  
Our comfort in the country.

(5.3. 106-111)

Using rhetorical question about praying, Volumnia suggests the unsolvable situation in which they occur. She claims that she is supposed to pray on behalf of her country (Rome), but doing so means not praying for her son since he intends to attack Rome. She then finishes by saying they will lose either him or their country, and either option would be devastating. She represents the paradox of inner conflict since she cannot take a side and is determined not to betray Rome.

Despite being angry, feeling betrayed, for the love of his mother Coriolanus eventually decides not to attack Rome.

CORIOLANUS

You have won a happy victory to Rome;

But, for your son – believe it, O believe it,

Most dangerously you have win him prevail'd,

If not most mortal to him. But, let it come.

(5.3. 186-189)

Suggesting that Volumnia won a happy victory for Rome but not for Coriolanus only declares his awareness that his fate is no longer connected with the fate of the Roman empire and, therefore, he completely breaks from the traditional Roman values. Not for the love of Rome, of his homeland, but for the love of his mother, he decides to stop eventually and, because of this, is then assassinated by Volsci.

#### **4.3.4 Summary of the Theme of Love in *Coriolanus***

This play mainly explores the relationship between Volumnia and Coriolanus and shows her desperate need for honour and appreciation. As shown during the play, Volumnia's interest in Coriolanus is determined by his achievements since she was the one who "framed" him and therefore takes advantage of him.

Despite only Volumnia showing the importance of military career and roman values, Coriolanus loves his mother which declares the scene where he overcomes his anger and impulsivity and eventually listens to her. His love towards her is therefore stronger than his ambitions.



## 5 Julius Caesar

*Julius Caesar* also belongs to Shakespeare's tragedies and among his Roman plays.<sup>3</sup> The play was probably written in 1599. Despite being named *Julius Caesar*, the play mainly tells the story of Brutus whom Shakespeare shows as a passionate leader who would do anything to keep Rome safe. Although the events described in this play happened between the years 45-42 B.C., Shakespeare makes them look as if they happened during a few days. This play may be seen as political since the theme of politics and the political conflict is the main one here. However, the theme of love is also very strongly represented here in two ways. Firstly, Brutus represents love towards the nation. Secondly, Cassius represents love towards power.

Hilský makes certain analogies between *Julius Caesar* and Shakespeare's other and probably more famous play, *Hamlet*. Hilský not only mentions a similarity between the opening scenes of both plays but also suggests that the characters of Hamlet and Brutus have similar philosophical backgrounds (Hilský, 2010, pp. 443-445). Taylor even comments on the events in *Julius Caesar* with a quote used in *Hamlet*: "Engineer hoist with his own petard." By saying this, Taylor highlights the failed attempt to save Rome by killing Caesar. (Taylor, 1973, p. 301).

Hilský also points out the ambiguity in the character of Julius Caesar. According to Medieval tradition, Caesar should be celebrated for his heroic actions, whereas, in the classic era, the reactions to this figure were mixed. Shakespeare, to a certain extent, adopted a rather "Renaissance"<sup>4</sup> approach. Yu suggests that such an approach might be based on another famous Roman, Cicero (Yu, 1995). Dante, for example, puts Brutus and Cassius in the lowest pit of hell in his *Divine Comedy* (Hilský, 2010, p. 445).

### 5.1 The Summary of the Play

The play begins with Caesar's return to Rome after a winning Battle of Pharsalus.<sup>5</sup> Afraid of Caesar's now ultimate power and his god-like role model in the eyes of the Roman people, Cassius eventually persuades Brutus, and they plot the assassination of Caesar. After Caesar's assassination and funeral, Caesar's supporters Lepidus, Octavianus and Marc Antony ally and decide to punish and kill the plot-makers. Later, at a battle between the supporters and assassinations, Octavianus, together with Antony and Lepidus, defeats Cassius and

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<sup>3</sup> Group of plays that deals with Roman history.

<sup>4</sup> Refusing the cult of Caesar.

<sup>5</sup> 48 BC, a battle in which Caesar defeated Pompey and later became the only ruler of the Roman Empire.

Brutus, who eventually both commit suicide while being defeated at the final battle of the play.

## 5.2 The Origin of the Story

The story of Julius Caesar originates from real historical events and is directly inspired by the ancient figure Gaius Julius Caesar.<sup>6</sup> He was a Roman ruler and part of the first Triumvirate with Pompey and Crassus. During his rule, he managed to conquer Gaul, win the civil war against Pompey and become the only Roman ruler. He had an affair with the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra VII, and even had a son with her. Gaius Julius Caesar was assassinated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, also known as “the Ides of March”<sup>7</sup> (Toynbee, 2024).

## 5.3 The Theme of Love in *Julius Caesar*

Speaking about “love” as a romantic relationship between two people, it does not stand in the centre of this play. This fact, however, does not mean that no romantic relationships are included in this play. For example, Portia, Brutus’s wife, who consequently commits suicide or Caesar’s wife, Calpurnia, who, based on her dream, tries to warn and save Caesar. However, neither of these relationships plays a significant role in this story, so further analyses of these relationships will not be done.

Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of a romantic theme in this play, it does not mean that the play lacks the theme of love completely. This play is built on a conflict between love and loyalty, appreciation and respect towards a person, in this case, Julius Caesar, and on the other hand responsibility and affection towards the country and what one is able to sacrifice to save one or another. This great conflict of patriotism and fondness for Caesar is portrayed in the character of Brutus, and despite naming the play *Julius Caesar*, it mainly tells the story of him, Caesar’s friend and later assassin.

### 5.3.1 The need of a “greater good”

An example of Brutus’ divine mind is well displayed in the following monologue scene.

BRUTUS

It must be his death. And for my part

I know no personal cause to spurn at him,

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<sup>6</sup> \*100 BC – 44 BC

<sup>7</sup> Date in the Roman calendar that signalises the full moon’s rise. Later, it is remembered as the day of the assassination of Gaius Julius Caesar.

But for general. He would be crowned:  
How that might change his nature, there's the  
question.

(2.1. 10-15)

This monologue shows that Brutus does not intend to kill Caesar as an act of jealousy or for the need for power, unlike Cassius. Brutus is concerned for the "greater good" of Rome and is convinced that one man holding power over the whole Roman empire could be fatal. Despite not having any evidence, thus being influenced by Cassius, Brutus eventually makes a decision to kill his friend Caesar to save Rome. As Brutus continues his monologue, it becomes obvious that he does not want to kill Caesar for his past actions but out of fear for his following ones. For the patriotism and the love of his country.

He then ends his monologue.

BRUTUS

And therefore think him as a serpent's egg,  
Which, hatch'd, would as his kind grow mischievous,  
And kill him in the shell.

(2.1. 32-34)

At the end of his monologue, Brutus compares Caesar to a serpent that should be killed in the shell before gaining too much power.

### **5.3.2 Patriotism over Friendship**

Another conflict between the "greater good" and the friendship follows Antony's speech after the death of Caesar. At this point, Brutus, on one hand, is a proper Roman man who does what he believes to be the best for his country; on the other, he is still a friend of Caesar.

BRUTUS

O Antony! Beg not your death of us.  
Though now we must appear bloody and cruel,  
As by our hands and this our present act  
You see we do; yet see you but our hands,  
And this the bleeding business they have done  
Our hearts you see not; they are pitiful;

And pity to the general wrong of Rome,

(2.1. 165-172)

In Brutus' direct response to Antony, he tries to justify Caesar's assassination. He suggests that Antony can only see their "bloody hands" although their hearts are full of pity. There is, again, contrast, this time represented by hands as the "doers" of the action and the heart as the centre of emotions. Brutus did not want to kill Caesar, but being too afraid of his ambition, he eventually did it.

### **5.3.3 The Public Speech**

Probably the best representation of Brutus's inner conflict might be seen in a public speech in which he tries to justify the assassination of Caesar.

BRUTUS

If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of

Caesar's, to him I say, that Brutus' love to Caesar

was no less than his. If then that friend demand

why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer:

--Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved

Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living and

die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live

All free men?

(3.2. 18-24)

This speech perfectly summarizes the motives of Brutus' actions. Brutus again shows a perfect example of a Roman noble who puts the concerns of a state before his own. Patriotism was a very common topic throughout Roman history, and scholars argue that patriotism was a key factor in the success of the Roman Empire. Thus, Brutus, influenced by his experiences and Roman education, chooses Rome over Caesar, and his love for a country over respect and affection for his friend.

In addition, Brutus asks a rhetorical question to support his previous claims and justifies his actions and wonders whether it is more beneficial to have Caesar alive knowing he could misuse his great power or whether it is better to have Caesar dead and thus prevent misusing of such power.



Brutus then continues.

BRUTUS

As Caesar loved me, I weep for him;  
as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was  
valiant, I honour him: but as he was ambitious, I  
slew him. There is tears for his love; joy for his  
fortune; honour for his valour; and death for his  
ambition.

(3.2. 24-29)

In the beginning, Brutus again mentions the relationship between him and Ceasar. He suggests that the love between him and Caesar was mutual. He does so to support his argument about his great love for Caesar and his even greater love for Rome. He supposes that the public will understand Brutus' need for the "greater good" and consequently forgive him for the assassination.

In the second part, Brutus gives Ceasar credit for his merits. He says that he appreciates Caesar because of his bravery and fortune, but because of his ambition, he eventually killed him.

#### **5.3.4 Summary of the theme of love in *Julius Caesar***

Although the play *Julius Caesar* might be seen only as one of Shakespeare's political plays, patriotism and friendship also play a very significant role. Unlike, for example, *Romeo and Juliet*, this play does not offer a great explicit love story between two people, but it rather features the elements of patriotism and, therefore, love towards a homeland. The play introduced such a conflict and put it in the foreground. By choosing love towards a nation over love towards a person, Brutus is presented here as a proper Roman who sacrificed his friendship for the "greater good".

Thus, it can be concluded that the main theme related to the theme of love is the play's theme of patriotism, which overshadows the theme of love as a romantic motive.

## 6 Antony and Cleopatra

The play *Antony and Cleopatra* belongs to Shakespeare's latest tragedies and can often be seen as the continuation of another and more famous Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*. This approach, however, would be very hidebound since the play *Antony and Cleopatra* has its own very strong theme and tells the story of politics, but mainly about lovers who also happened to be powerful and famous leaders. Czech translator Jiří Josek even marked *Antony and Cleopatra* as the "most famous lovers in antiquity" (Josek, 2006, p. 7). This play perfectly displays the political situation at that time and the romantic relationship between the two main protagonists. Considering this fact, it is valid to say that Antony and Cleopatra is the play where the theme of love, understood as a romantic feeling between two people, is the strongest.

It is valid to say that there is also a genre inconsistency when talking about this play. Bradley says, "For tragedy, this play is not painful. Though unfit for children" (Bradley, 1909, p. 282). Hilský shares the same view and suggests that this play combines features of the previous tragedies and the following romances Shakespeare had already written (Hilský, 2010, p.646). Bradley then adds that this lack of genre consistency may be why *Antony and Cleopatra* is not performed often compared to other Shakespeare plays (Bradley, 1909, p. 282).

### 6.1 The Origin of the Story

As already mentioned, Antony and Cleopatra's story is rooted in antiquity. The character of Cleopatra is a portrait of the historical figure Cleopatra VII. Queen of Egypt<sup>8</sup>; similarly, Antony's character is also inspired by the real historical figure Marcus Antonius,<sup>9</sup> who was part of the Triumvirate<sup>10</sup> with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus<sup>11</sup> and Octavian<sup>12</sup>. The play describes the events from 40 BC to 30 BC, including the famous battle of Actium<sup>13</sup> and the following incidents, which resulted in the suicide of Antony and, later, Cleopatra. After the death of Cleopatra, Egypt was annexed to Rome by Octavianus<sup>14</sup> (Grant, 2024).

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<sup>8</sup> \*69-30 BC

<sup>9</sup> \*83-30 BC

<sup>10</sup> A group of three people held power in Ancient Rome.

<sup>11</sup> \*90-13 BC

<sup>12</sup> \*63-14 BC

<sup>13</sup> 31 BC, a naval battle between Antony and Octavianus, after which Octavianus became the only ruler of the Roman empire.

<sup>14</sup> Later known as Augustus.

## 6.2 The Story of Antony and Cleopatra as a Source of Inspiration

The story of Antony and Cleopatra was well known during the Renaissance, mainly due to the English writer Chaucer, who worked with the characters of Cleopatra and Antony in his work *The Legend of Good Women*. Dryden's *All for Love*<sup>15</sup> only concerns the events after the Battle of Actium. About eight plays that somehow worked with the theme of Cleopatra, Antony, or both were written by the 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. Together with Helen of Troy and Mary of Scots, Cleopatra's story became an attractive source of inspiration.

Not only was the story of two great lovers famous in England, but the story was also a great inspiration to French writers. Moreover, a first-ever adaptation of Cleopatra, which can be found in France, was written by the author Etienne Jodelle; the tragedy *Cléopâtre Captive* was written in 1552. However, this was not the only French play inspired by the famous couple. The play *Marc-Antoine* by Garnier worked with antiquity lovers as well. The number of plays inspired by Antony and Cleopatra indicates the story's importance and magnificence (Wilson, 1950, pp. 4-5).

## 6.3 The Summary of the Story

Antony rules the Roman Empire as one of the Triumvir while spending most of his time in Egypt with his lover Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt. Losing his influence and military status mainly due to his affair with Cleopatra, Antony eventually fights with Octavianus in a famous naval battle of Actium with Cleopatra by his side. However, seeing Antony slowly lose in the battle, Cleopatra returns to Egypt with her army, later followed by Antony, who is defeated by Octavianus. Antony is furious after the betrayal from Cleopatra and promises to kill her. Trying to escape her fate, Cleopatra pretends to commit suicide. When Antony learns about Cleopatra, he decides also to commit suicide to be with his love. The lovers are then reunited before Antony dies. The story ends with Cleopatra committing suicide by poisoning herself with a snake, and the lovers are eventually buried side by side.

## 6.4 The Theme of Love in Antony and Cleopatra

This play is often marked as Shakespeare's political tragedy; however, even the play's title signals the lack of such a view since this is also a story of desire and love between two people. Moreover, the play also describes a collision between Rome and Egypt since the main protagonists come from these different surroundings.

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<sup>15</sup> The play was published in 1698.

#### 6.4.1 From Soldier to a Lover

Antony is greatly appreciated for his military achievements; however, this view of Antony drastically changes when he starts an affair with Cleopatra. The switch of the view is apparent from the opening scene.

PHILO

Nay, but this dotage of our general's  
O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,  
That o'er the files and musters of the war  
Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn  
The office and 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 gypsy's lust.

(1.1. 1-10)

In this scene, Roman soldier Philo highlights transitioning from a great soldier to a “weak” lover. To show this, Shakespeare uses the comparison between the “captain’s heart” that was able to break the buckles<sup>16</sup> and the “lover’s heart” that turned into a fan to cool the gypsy’s lust. The last line also expresses Philo’s disapproval of Antony’s actions.

To highlight the transition even more, Philo compares Antony to Mars. It is not a coincidence that for the comparison, Philo chose Mars since he is a God of war, and moreover, the myth of Venus and Mars is strongly reflected in this play. For example, Cleopatra is often identified with Roman Goddess Venus during this play. This myth appears in Homer’s *Ulysses* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

It might not be coincident that Shakespeare chose this myth to be reflected in his play since the story itself was very popular during the Renaissance; as noted by Adelman, “The union of these divine adulterers was one of the ruling mythological common places of the English Renaissance” (Adelman, 1973, p. 83). Thus, Hilský claims that the relationship between the characters and Roman mythology mainly distinguishes this play from the other tragedies (Hilský, 2010, pp. 652-653). Valentini shares the same opinion and contrasts the

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<sup>16</sup> Part of an armour.

preceding play, *Julius Caesar*, which, compared to *Antony and Cleopatra*, does not relate to mythology at all (Valentini, 2017, p. 89). Another scholar, Danby, even marks this play as: “Shakespeare’s study of Mars and Venus” (Danby, 1952, p. 152). The relevance of this myth in relation to the play *Antony and Cleopatra* and to the theme of love is clearly supported by Danby’s claim and the shreds of evidence provided in the text.

The term “gipsy” has its etymology origin in the term “Egyptian”, and during the Shakespearian era, the word “gipsy” had a very negative connotation since gipsies were often accused of stealing and vandalism, and undoubtedly, calling Cleopatra “gipsy” was done to offend her and refer to Egyptian origin in contrast with the Roman (Cressy, 2016, pp. 46 -70). This line finishes the monologue and completes the whole transition. Due to his love for Cleopatra, Antony lost his captain status. Schalwyk comments on this transition: “We are invited from the first line of the play to view *eros*<sup>17</sup> in traditional ways: as an unstable passion that turns masters into slaves, as something that destroys masculine capacity for action and reason, and as a force that dissolves identity itself.” (Schalwyk, 2008, p. 198).

This transformation from a soldier to a lover continues in these verses.

CLEOPATRA            That time? – O , times! -  
I laughed him out of patience; and that night  
I laughed into patience; and next morn,  
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,  
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst  
I wore his sword Philippan.  
(2.5. 18-23)

The fact that Cleopatra wore Antony’s sword plays a crucial role in this scene because the sword is generally considered a symbol of masculinity, military and power. Again, there is an analogy between Venus and Mars. A strong man “disarmed” by a strong woman and the power of her love. The phenomenon of men being disarmed by women has not been extraordinary throughout history.

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<sup>17</sup> Understanding of love.

Another instance of Antony surrendering his military values is in the following scene.

ANTONY

Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch  
Of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space  
Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike  
Feeds beast as man. Nobleness of life  
Is to do thus, when such a mutual pair  
And such a twain can do 't, in which I blind.  
On pain of punishment, the world to weet  
We stand up peerless.

(1.1. 33-40)

In this part, Antony is willing to “let Rome in the Tiber melt” and “the ranged empire fall.” By empire, Antony means the Roman Empire, and then adds, “Here is my space” By this, Antony means Egypt and more specifically Cleopatra and is devoted to staying with her. He is willing to do so despite the strong disapproval of his fellow triumvir, Octavianus, who wants Antony to return to Rome. Antony calls the relationship between him and Cleopatra “nobleness of life” and wants the world to see it; otherwise, punishment will come.

Another example of Antony’s devotion and affection towards Cleopatra is in the following scene:

ANTONY

But stirred by Cleopatra.  
Now, for the love of Love and her soft  
hours.  
Let’s not confound the time with conference harsh.  
There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch.  
Without some pleasure. Now. What sport tonight?

(1.1. 44-48)

This part directly follows Cleopatra’s scene where she is jealous of Antony’s former wife, Fulvia. Antony tries to comfort Cleopatra since he does not want to spend their time together arguing and rather suggests going for a walk.

### 6.4.2 The Measurement of Love

Strong expression of love may be seen right after the play's opening scene, where Cleopatra asks Antony how big their love is.

CLEOPATRA

If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

ANTONY

There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.

CLEOPATRA

I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.

ANTONY

Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new  
Earth.

(1.1. 14-18)

It is evident that Antony does not want to answer the question and therefore uses a metaphor with beggary signalling that love is not something to be measured and suggests that if he could measure the intensity, it would not be enough. When he finally answers, he uses the idea of a new heaven and a new earth. The idea of a “new heaven and new earth” was first introduced in the *Bible*. However, it is not sure whether Shakespeare used it knowingly because the idea of a new heaven and earth was common during the Renaissance. For instance, John Donne also uses this parallel in his famous poem “The Canonization” (Hilský, 2010, p. 661).

### 6.4.3 The Tragic Death

The difference between the “two worlds” must be mentioned again. In Antony's case, the motive of his suicide is the fact that he is not willing to live without Cleopatra, and therefore, he decides to end his life. The motive for his suicide plays a crucial role because he is once again “disarmed” by Cleopatra, and consequently, he postpones his Roman military values. His death is not a result of a “death before dishonour”. Rauh understands “death before dishonour” as a “shame-based military suicide that follows a defeat in a battle.” He also adds that these “shame-based” suicides were typical for Romans during antiquity (Rauch, 2015, p. 383). However, this suicide cannot be taken as an example of such a case. Antony did not commit suicide because of the loss at the battle; he decided to end his life after learning

that Cleopatra did the same. His death is not a military death of a Roman soldier but more of a devoted and devastated lover.

On the contrary, Cleopatra's faked suicide was more of an act of flirtatiousness. As Gray observed, "It may look like a self-centred flirtatiousness curious to see how he takes the news – she asks to be told about this – seemingly a strumpet's glorying in the expectation that he will promptly come running to her in grief, only to be reconciled when he realises she is still alive" (Gray, 2011, p. 58).

Nevertheless, her plan collapses when she finally realises Antony would not come desperate to forgive and reunite with her again. The scene's flirtatious and self-centred tone strongly resembles the first dialogue between Antony and Cleopatra in this play.<sup>18</sup> In the first case, Cleopatra tries to encourage Antony to "measure" their love, only to see his reaction; similarly, in this scene, Cleopatra once again manipulates Antony. Thus, in both scenes Antony does not succumb to Cleopatra's intentions.

ANTONY

I am dying, Egypt; only

I here importune death awhile, until

Of many thousand kisses the poor last

I lay upon thy lips.

(4.15. 18-21)

In this scene, Antony does not call Cleopatra by her name but uses "Egypt" instead, being aware of her position as the Queen of Egypt. Knowing about his coming death, Antony tries to postpone it only to be kissed by Cleopatra again.

#### **6.4.4 Summary of the Theme of love in *Antony and Cleopatra***

The play *Antony and Cleopatra* portrays a great love between two powerful leaders. Thus, the political theme plays a significant part as well since the "theme of love" is very often connected to political situations and personal values. Roman Triumvir Antony desperately loves Cleopatra, but whether she holds the same affection stays unclear. Interestingly, the collision of these two words is also represented by the tone of their speech. Despite his impulsivity, Antony comforts Cleopatra most of the time, which is an interesting paradox since, during the play, he is usually portrayed as short-tempered when talking about his military career.

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<sup>18</sup> See the chapter "The Measurement of Love".



On the contrary, Cleopatra uses a seductive and often flirtatious tone. This is well portrayed in the scene where Cleopatra takes Antony's sword, a symbol of man's military pride and wears it. This situation, which is described in Scene II Act 5, perfectly shows the whole tone of the play: a strong, powerful leader being disarmed by a strong, powerful woman.

Another significant aspect for the purpose of this thesis is the play's relation to mythology and, specifically, to the myth about Venus and Mars since the protagonists of the play are often identified with them. Thus, the myth is strongly reflected throughout the whole play since it tells the story of great love.

Having examined the theme of love in this play, it can be said that the theme of love here is understood as a romantic emotion between two people due to the actions of the main protagonists and therefore is the main theme of this play.

## 7 Conclusion

This study has aimed to comprehensively analyse the theme of love in Shakespeare's plays *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. After a detailed examination of the three plays, it can be concluded that the theme of love occurs in all of them; however, its focus differs. In *Coriolanus*, the theme of love is mainly represented by the relationship between Coriolanus and his mother and her need for honour. In *Julius Caesar*, the main concern represents the inner conflict of choosing affection and respect towards Caesar or choosing loyalty and love towards Rome. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the theme of love is equally relevant to politics.

Thus, the romantic motive is mainly represented in the play *Antony and Cleopatra*. The tragic death of Antony, who died for his love, puts the theme of love above politics and it can be concluded that although the play tells the story of two great leaders, it mainly tells the story of great lovers. Nevertheless, the elements of patriotism and nationalism are still present but throughout the play overshadowed by the theme of love. The evidence provided from the text has confirmed that the theme of love is the main theme in the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The play *Julius Caesar* also tells the story of a great leader but, unlike *Antony and Cleopatra*, misses the dominant romantic element. The main concern here is the different type of love, a love towards a country. In this case, an unconditional love and responsibility towards the Roman Empire corresponds with the traditional Roman worldview at that time. Thus, the shreds of evidence from the text suggest that the main theme in this play is not love as a romantic element but rather love as patriotism and therefore the main theme of the play is politics.

*Coriolanus* portrays love in a more family-like sense. The main focus is on the mother-son relationship, while Coriolanus's relationship with his wife is put aside due to Coriolanus's mother's dominance and strong pro-Roman thinking. His mother represents traditional Roman values, so honour and the bond towards her country are essential for her. This play displays the inequality between maternity love and patriotism which overshadows the theme of love. Thus the main theme of this play is ambition.

To sum it up, the results of this analysis showed that the theme of romantic love is proved to be the main theme in *Antony and Cleopatra*, while in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* the theme of love occurs as love towards Rome.

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