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ANTONY'S SPEECH IN SHAKESPEARE'S *JULIUS CAESAR* AND THE ANCIENT SOURCES

Antony's speech at Caesar's funeral in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is one of the best-known texts in world literature. I remember learning it by heart when studying English in high school: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; / I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him". In it the bard resorts to all the fireworks of rhetoric to create an unforgettable piece bearing all the marks of genius. The flamboyant character of this speech is further enhanced by the contrast with the sober speech of Brutus that comes shortly before. Brutus speaks in prose, as he never does elsewhere in the play, which contains no other prose except most of the lines spoken by Casca, one of the conspirators sworn to kill Caesar. Significantly, he is portrayed as an ignorant man, who avows his ignorance of Greek, a language which every educated Roman of the time knew well, with words that have become a cliché in English. When asked to report the words uttered by Cicero, he says the latter spoke in Greek, promptly adding "it was Greek to me"[1]. It can then be no coincidence that Brutus' speech after the death of Caesar is in subdued prose. A contrast with the ornate rhetoric of Antony's ensuing speech is obviously intended.

I will partly anticipate the conclusions of this paper by pointing out that the speech Shakespeare has Brutus deliver before Antony's has a historical counterpart in one spoken by Brutus not before Caesar's funeral, like in the tragedy, but on Capitol hill, where he and Cassius had taken refuge after the murder of Caesar, before an audience mainly composed of plebeians summoned by him to defend himself and explain the reasons for his action. This *contio Capitolina* is mentioned and evaluated by Cicero in a letter to Atticus[2] and is also referred to by Plutarch in his biography of Brutus[3]. It is reported in a free arrangement by Appian in the second book of his historical work on the Roman civil wars[4]. Some of Brutus' words as reported by Appian seem to be echoed in the speech he utters in Shakespeare's tragedy. I will quote them in Horace White's translation in the Loeb Classical Library: "if he [i.e. Caesar] had requested us to swear not only to condone the past, but to be willing slaves for the future, what would our present enemies have done? For my part I think that, being Romans, they would have chosen to die many

[1] Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* I.ii.284.

[2] Cic. *Att*. 15.1a.2.

[3] Plut. *Brut*. 18.11.

[4] App. *bell. civ*. 2.137-141. On Brutus's speech as reported by Appian see A. Balbo, *Riflessi dell'oratoria reale nei discorsi sulla morte di Cesare,* "I Quaderni del Ramo d'Oro online" 4, 2011, 152-167.

times than take an oath of voluntary servitude"[5]. Let us now quote a few words taken from Brutus' speech in Shakespeare: "Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all freemen? … Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him I have offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him I have offended" (III.ii.23-32). It is actually worth noting that, in the passages closest to Appian's text, Brutus's speech rises to the formal level of poetry. The last words we have quoted do indeed follow the pattern of blank verse. At the end of the speech the people declare their approval and support to Brutus both in the ancient historian[6] and in the Elizabethan dramatist, just like, in both authors, Antony's speech will later turn the situation around. We will have to bring this correspondence back to mind later on, while comparing Antony's speeches in Shakespeare and in Appian.

Can we identify any ancient source for Antony's speech in Shakespeare? It is well-known that the latter made extensive use of Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's biographies, published in 1579. But Plutarch does not report the speech spoken by Antony at Caesar's funeral. In his biography of Caesar he merely mentions the reading of the dictator's will and the displaying of his wounded corpse[7]. In the *Life of Cicero* Antony does show the people Caesar's torn and bloody garment, but utters no speech[8]. It is only in the biographies of Antony and Brutus that a reference is made to a funeral eulogy delivered by Antony and accompanied by his displaying of Caesar's torn garment. In the *Life of Antony* the latter also attacks the dictator's murderers[9].

In both cases it is apparent that Plutarch considers Antony's speech as a formal *laudatio funebris,* which was customarily recited at a prominent citizen's funeral. In this he agrees with the other main sources, the historians Appian and Dio Cassius, as we shall presently see. The only contemporary witness, namely Cicero, does not offer conclusive evidence in this respect, though his terminology might seem to imply that he believed Antony to have delivered a formal *laudatio*. In his second *Philippic* he does in fact appear to

[5] App. *bell. civ*. 2.137 (end) εἰ δὲ ἡμῖν ὀμνύναι προσέταττεν οὐ τὰ παρελθόντα μόνον οἴσειν ἐγκρατῶς ἀλλὰ δουλεύσειν ἐς τὸ μέλλον ἑκουσίως, τί ἂν ἔπραξαν οἱ νῦν ἐπιβουλεύοντες ἡμῖν; ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ὄντας Ῥωμαίους οἶμαι πολλάκις ἀποθανεῖν ἂν ἑλέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ δουλεύειν ἑκόντας ἐπὶ ὅρκῳ.

[6] App. *bell. civ*. 2.142. Cf. also the chapter of Plutarch's biography of Brutus quoted above (note 3).

[7] Plut. *Caes*. 68.1.

[8] Plut. *Cic*. 42.3.

[9] Plut. *Brut*. 20.2-3 and *Ant*. 14.3-4 respectively.

reproach the latter for stirring up the people's hostility against Julius Caesar's opponents by means of a *laudatio* that appealed to their emotions: *tua illa pulchra laudatio, tua miseratio, tua cohortatio*[10]. Possibly, however, the word should be taken as a reference to a speech of praise rather than to a formal *laudatio*, a position defended by Monroe E. Deutsch[11]. Surely such a *laudatio* uttered by Antony is ruled out by the only Latin historical source: the biography of Caesar by Suetonius. According to him, Antony did speak at Caesar's funeral, but only briefly, after having a public herald read the decree of the senate bestowing all sorts of human and divine honors on Julius Caesar and the oath of loyalty that had been sworn to him. More important, Suetonius states that this reading was meant to take the place of the formal *laudatio*[12].

We may leave to the historians the task of solving the problem posed by this disagreement in the ancient sources[13]. What we are concerned with here is not historical truth, but the theatrical adaptation we find in Shakespeare. I have only mentioned this historical and philological problem to point out a possible trace of Suetonius' testimony – which obviously could not be exploited as a source for Antony's speech, in that not only no speech is reported, but it is clearly stated that Antony uttered just a few words – at the very beginning of Shakespeare's oratorical piece: the words we have quoted at the beginning: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; / I come to bury Caesar, *not to praise him*". If Shakespeare found in one of his sources that no formal *laudatio* was delivered, he could well have his Antony say that he had not come *to praise* Caesar. This, indeed, may be pure coincidence; but it is perhaps not unworthy of some consideration, in that the use of Suetonius by Shakespeare can by no means be ruled out[14]. It is true that the earliest English translation of Suetonius by Philemon Holland dates from 1606, while *Julius Caesar* was composed in 1599; it is also true that in the poem *To the memory of my beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare and what he hath left us* prefixed to the First Folio of 1623, Ben Jonson, in the midst of the most lavish praises heaped on the bard, drops a line that may cast some doubt on their sincerity: "though thou hadst small Latine and lesse

[10] Cic. *Phil*. 2.90. Cf. *Att*. 14.10.1 *in foro combustus laudatusque miserabiliter*.

[11] M. E. Deutsch, *Antony's Funeral Speech,* "University of California Publications in Classical Philology" 9.5, 1928, 127-148.

[12] Suet. *Iul*. 84.2 *laudationis loco consul Antonius per praeconem pronuntiavit senatus consultum, quo omnia simul ei divina atque humana decreverat, item ius iurandum, quo se cuncti pro salute unius astrinxerant; quibus perpauca a se verba addidit*.

[13] An attempt to reconcile the different versions can be found in G. Kennedy, *Antony's Speech in Caesar's Funeral,* "The Quarterly Journal of Speech" 54, 1968, 99-106.

[14] Cf. e.g. S. Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books. A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sources,* London-New York 2001 (repr. 2004), 475.

Greeke", words that some, rather unconvincingly, propose to understand in a more flattering way, as meaning "even if you had had little Latin and less Greek", implying that Shakespeare was well versed in both. However, while it seems to be largely true that he did not normally read the Greek texts in the original, there can hardly be any doubt that he was capable to get direct access to Latin works, as testified by his quotations and his frequent use of Latin authors such as Ovid. As far as Suetonius in particular is concerned, the Latin words uttered by the dying Caesar in the tragedy, "*Et tu, Brute?*" (III.i.77) seem reminiscent of those that according to Suetonius some believed to have been spoken by the dictator as Brutus stabbed him. They may even testify that Shakespeare was able to understand and translate into Latin a simple Greek sentence, since similar words are reported in Greek by Suetonius: καὶ σύ, τέκνον; ("even you, son?")[15]. True, Shakespeare may have found references to Caesar's dying words elsewhere, but together with the hint at the lack of a proper and formal *laudatio*, this seems to confirm the use of Suetonius as a source in this tragedy.

We have seen that Suetonius could not be used as a source for Antony's speech, since no speech by him is reported by the Roman historian. But neither could Plutarch, who, though he does refer, as we have seen, to a funeral eulogy delivered by Antony in the biographies of the latter and of Brutus, does not report any such speech. On the other hand, Dio Cassius, though he offers the most developed *laudatio* of Caesar by Antony, as he presents it himself[16], and was not unknown to some contemporary Elizabethan authors, such as Ben Jonson, who employed him for his *Sejanus*, does not seem to have been used by Shakespeare. It remains to assess the likelihood that the source utilized by Shakespeare for his masterful piece might be Antony's speech as reported by Appian in his history of the Roman civil wars. It should be emphasized that Appian had been translated into English in 1578 by a certain W. B., perhaps to be identified with Walter Barker, who also translated Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. A selection of the parts of this translation that have a special interest for Shakespeare's plays was made easily accessible by Ernest Schanzer[17].

In a seminal essay dating back to the beginning of last century[18] Mungo William MacCallum could find little in Shakespeare suggesting the influence of Appian on Antony's speech. However, today the situation has changed

[15] Suet. *Iul*. 82.2.

[16] Dio Cass. 44.36-49.

[17] E. Schanzer, *Shakespeare's Appian. A Selection from the Tudor Translation of Appian's Civil Wars,* Liverpool 1956.

[18] M. W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and their Background,* New York 1910, 644-647.

and such an influence has come to be accepted by a great number of scholars[19].

After a careful examination of the two speeches, it seems to me that this conclusion is indeed correct. However, the reasons adduced are rarely related to specific and precise contacts. The attitude of most scholars towards the two speeches may be summarized by Ernest Schanzer's words, according to whom "it is in their manner that the kinship lies"[20]. Those who stress the structural similarities of the two orations surely have a point: unlike Antony's lengthy *laudatio* in Dio Cassius, detailing in succession and with no interruption Caesar's lineage, physical and spiritual qualities, deeds, offices held, honors received, etc., his speech as reported by Appian is frequently interrupted by the description of Antony's gestures, of the audience's reactions, and of Antony's adapting his attitude accordingly – not unlike his behavior in Shakespeare's play. One capital element, however, seems to have escaped the scholars' attention, namely the evident and repeated theatrical references in Appian, which may have provided a direct inspiration for the playwright, who, so to speak, found the speech already cast in the mold of drama.

True, some of these theatrical references have all but disappeared in W. B.'s translation, which, as we have already suggested, was the link between the bard and the ancient historian. In Appian Antony acts as though he were "on stage" (ὡς ἐπὶ σκηνῆς)[21]; in the Tudor translation it becomes a tent – actually a shrine, probably following a biblical suggestion: Antony stands by Caesar's funerary litter "as from a Tabernacle". Shortly after the people joins Antony's lament over Caesar as the chorus in a tragedy (ὁ δῆμος οἷα χορὸς αὐτῷ πενθιμώτατα συνοδύρετο)[22]. In the Tudor translation this becomes "the people like a Quire, did sing lamentation about him", suggesting a company of singers rather than a tragedy's chorus. However, unmistakable theatrical suggestions survive even in the translation used by Shakespeare. Let's read a passage from it, in which the people again act like a choir (rather than a chorus: ὑπὸ χορῶν in Appian's text), but do recite, almost re-enact (as suggested by the verb used, "rehearsed" in lieu of Appian's more neutral κατέ-

[19] Cf., for ex. Schanzer, *op. cit.,* xix-xxviii; Id., *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare. A Study of Julius Caesar, Measure for Measure, Antony and Cleopatra,* London-New York 1963 (repr. 2005), 43-44; Vivian Thomas, *Shakespeare's Roman Worlds,* London-New York 1989 (repr. 1991), 40-92; Vanna Gentili, *La Roma antica degli Elisabettiani,* Bologna 1991, 68-76; Gillespie, *op. cit.* 17-19; S. Beta, *Lo spettacolo dei discorsi alla morte di Cesare: dal foro al teatro,* "I Quaderni del Ramo d'Oro on-line" 4, 2011, 168-174; etc.

[20] Schanzer, *The Problem Plays…* 43.

[21] App. *bell. civ.* 2.146.

[22] App. *ibid.*

λεγον) Caesar's deeds and fate, and the dictator himself seems to rise to recite the famous line by Pacuvius *men servasse, ut essent qui me perderent!* Here are the Tudor translation's words: "other lamentations wyth voice after the Country costume, were sung of the Quires and they rehearsed again his acts and hap. Then made he *Caesar* himselfe to speake as it were in a lamentable sort, to howe many of his enemies he hadde done good by name, and of the killers themselves to say as in admiration, *Did I save them that have killed me?*"[23].

The scenic and psychological adaptations made by Shakespeare are of course the product of his genius and can hardly help in establishing a source. One should rather look for factual details that can be classed as belonging to a specific text transmitting them. One might believe to have run into such a detail when Shakespeare's Antony reads Caesar's will. In the play the dictator bequeaths seventy-five drachmas to each Roman citizen and his private gardens to the people: "Moreover, he hath left you all his walks, / his private arbours and new-planted orchards, / on this side Tiber"[24]. The legacies of both the seventy-five drachmas and the private gardens are mentioned both in Appian (though the will is not read by Antony in him) and by Plutarch in the *Life of Brutus*[25]. However, in Plutarch the gardens are on the far[26], not on the near side of the river, as they are in Shakespeare, whereas Appian does not specify on which bank they are located. One might be led to believe that here the playwright did not follow Plutarch and that the detail of the location of the gardens on the near side of the Tiber was his addition to Appian. When however one compares North's translation of Plutarch, that was used by Shakespeare, it is immediately clear that this is indeed the source for this detail and that the change in the location is due to the translator's mistake: "he left his gardens and arbours unto the people, which he had on this side of the river Tiber" we read in North's translation[27].

There is however another way of documenting Shakespeare's use of the Tudor translation of Appian: namely the linguistic traces this may have left in the play.

[23] Cf. App. *ibid*. The appearance of Caesar's moving wax image turned by a mechanism is also described with a theatrical expression (App. *Bell. civ*. 2.147 ἐκ μηχανῆς ἐπεστρέφετο), which becomes "was by a devise turned about" in the Tudor translation. Beta, *op. cit*. 169-170, does point out the theatrical elements in Appian, but seems to attribute them a direct influence on Shakespeare, without referring to the Tudor translation.

[24] Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* III.ii.249-251.

[25] App. *bell. civ*. 2.143; Plut. *Brut*. 20.2.

[26] Plut. *Brut*. 20.2 τῷ δήμῳ τῶν πέραν τοῦ ποταμοῦ κήπων ἀπολελειμμένων.

[27] The mistake was already in Jacques Amyot's French translation, on which Thomas North based his own: "il laissoit au peuple les iardins et vergers qu'il avoit deçà de la riviere du Tybre".

Vivian Thomas[28] points out one such reminiscence in Antony's famous words referring to Brutus's stabbing of Caesar: "this was the most *unkindest* cut of all" (III.ii.186), since in the Tudor translation of Appian the people are urged to "purge themselves of this *unkindnesse*". One could add that shortly before Brutus's action is similarly characterized: "mark how the blood of Caesar followed it, / as rushing out of doors, to be resolved / if Brutus so *unkindly* knocked, or no" (III.ii.181-183). But another verbal correspondence is more striking, since it refers to the very same situation. In the Tudor translation of Appian Antony "uncovered Caesar's body, holding up his *vesture* with a speare"[29]. In Shakespeare the same word is placed in Antony's own mouth, as he performs the act described in Appian: "Kind souls, what weep you when you but behold / our Caesar's *vesture* wounded?" (III.ii.198-199).

Finally, Antony's reference to the ransom of Caesar's prisoners that, in his words, "did the general coffers fill" (III.ii.92), is paralleled by his remark in Appian about "the spoils he had sent home"[30].

It is difficult to attribute all these correspondences to mere chance; and Shakespeare's use of Appian as a source appears to receive a decisive confirmation by the further trace that can be detected in Brutus' speech, shortly preceding Antony's, that we have pointed out at the beginning of this paper.

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ABSTRACT.
The speeches delivered at Caesar's funeral by Brutus and Antony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* are both influenced by the Tudor translation of Appian's historical work. Possibly Shakespeare also echoes Suetonius's remark about the lack of a formal *laudatio* when he has Antony say "I come to bury Caesar, *not to praise him*". Appian's influence is further confirmed by the numerous theatrical features in his rendering of Antony's speech echoed in Shakespeare as well as by lexical correspondences with Appian's Tudor translation.
KEYWORDS:
Shakespeare; *Julius Caesar;* Antony; Suetonius; Appian.

[28] In the work quoted above, note 19.

[29] Cf. App. *bell. civ.* 2.146 τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Καίσαρος ἐγύμνου καὶ τὴν ἐσθῆτα ἐπὶ κοντοῦ φερομέμην ἀνέσειε.

[30] White's translation (App. *ibid.* λάφυρα, ὅσα πέμψειεν).