



## **BIOPOLITICS IN SHAKESPEARE'S *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*: POWER, SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE REGULATION OF LIFE**

<sup>1</sup>**Ihsan Ullah**

*PhD. Scholar, Department of English, Islamia College University Peshawar,  
Pakistan.*

*Email: [Ihsanpmdc88@gmail.com](mailto:Ihsanpmdc88@gmail.com)*

<sup>2</sup>**Shehbaz Siraj**

*PhD. Scholar, Department of English, Lincoln College University, Malaysia.*

*Email: [Shexy993@gmail.com](mailto:Shexy993@gmail.com)*

<sup>3</sup>**Mehak**

*M.Phil Scholar, Department of English, Qurtaba University, Peshawar, KPK,  
Pakistan.*

*Email: [mehakhussain100@gmail.com](mailto:mehakhussain100@gmail.com)*

### **Abstract**

*The study explores how the Shakespearean tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra* reflects various structures of power through Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics. The shift from sovereign power over death to the regulation of life in modern biopolitics is vividly illustrated in the final scenes of the play. Drawing on Foucault's concept of biopower, Giorgio Agamben's idea of the "state of exception," and the notion of Empire by Hardt and Negri, this research highlights the struggle over the control and resistance of bodies—both physical and symbolic. Key scenes and quotations are analyzed to show how political structures seek to direct individuals' bodies and identities. Rather than serving as simple romantic gestures, the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra are interpreted as acts of resistance against biopolitical domination. Finally, the study argues that *Antony and Cleopatra* questions the boundaries of state authority and individual agency, aligning itself with broader political discourses in literature and contemporary thought.*

**Keywords:** *Biopolitics, Michel Foucault, Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, Sovereignty, Biopower, State Control, Body Politics, Political Resistance, Cleopatra, Mark Antony, Power Dynamics, Empire, Agency, Death and Governance.*

### **Introduction**

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes that Biopolitics does not restrict politics to sovereign power administered over a territory or human population but also encompasses the ways that human life becomes the site of political strategies and interventions. This concept emerged alongside a change from sovereign power over a right to "take life or let live" to a right to "make live and let die" in Western societies' power/dominions (Andreucci & Rosenberg 2021; Árnason 2012; Liu 2022). Biopower generally operates in two ways: the anatomo-politics of the human body, which aims to discipline and optimize individual bodies and the biopolitics of the population, which teaches us how to manage the population's biological processes such as birth rates, death rates, and public health (Árnason 2012). Biopolitics requires a practical organization of considerable scientific knowledge, and various authorities to establish themselves as competent actors to authorize those who articulate the truth about the vital characteristics of human beings (Árnason 2012; Rabinow & Rose 2006). Foucault's exploration of biopolitics traces the evolution



of power from a sovereign model, characterized by the right to kill or spare life, to a more nuanced approach focused on managing and optimizing the life processes of populations (Mills, 2008). This modern governance places greater focus on organizing and steering the day-to-day activities of citizens.

William Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra* explores love, political authority, the empire, and personal identity. In the context of Rome's expansion and allure of Egypt's queen, the play portrays the constant struggles of its protagonists. Most scholars have analyzed the play by looking at imperial decline, gender conflict, and tragic love. This research seeks to reframe *Antony and Cleopatra* through Foucault's concept of biopolitics.

Mark Antony's fall from a disciplined soldier to a sensual and emotional figure; affronts the traditional Roman values of governance, masculinity and bodily control. Octavius Caesar symbolizes order and discipline in society, while Cleopatra in depicts the opposite by highlighting excess, unpredictability and opposition. The story becomes a clash where rules of bodily discipline and liberties are fought out by governments. Foucault's idea that modern man becomes an *animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question* finds poetic resonance in how the bodies and lives of Antony and Cleopatra are politicized, judged, and ultimately extinguished.

Antony and Cleopatra both echoes and responds to the issues outlined in Foucault's biopolitical perspective through how its story unfolds. It is shown in the play that power can be enforced from above using rules and violence, as well as from within through discipline, inner guilt, and society's expectations. The personal desires, mistakes, and disobedience of the characters are always set within the framework of power that seeks to control all aspects of life. The suicides of Antony and Cleopatra are merely acts of romantic desperation; they represent deliberate refusal to be dominated by biopolitics.

By analyzing Antony and Cleopatra through Foucault's Biopolitical lens, this study enriches both Shakespearean studies and contemporary political thoughts. It points out the ongoing importance of Shakespeare's work in addressing problems like who controls society, political control over bodies and how far power can go. This analysis examines the struggle between an individual's free will and the forces of society in *Macbeth* and discovers new aspects of rebellion, self-awareness and independence.

William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play that explores the tension between personal desire and political duty, set against the backdrop of the Roman Empire and the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt. The action tells the story of Mark Antony and Cleopatra as they try to balance love, power and their positions as leaders. Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics—the governance of life and populations—provides a compelling framework for analyzing the play's exploration of power dynamics. The paper looks into how Antony and Cleopatra displays and challenges the aspects of biopolitics, especially how bodies are controlled, the clash between authority and life power and the boundaries of state regulation. By connecting Shakespeare's work to Foucault's theories, this study reveals the play's relevance to contemporary discussions of power and governance.

### Research Questions

1. How does *Antony and Cleopatra* dramatize the tension between individual agency and biopolitical control?

2. In what ways do the characters of Antony and Cleopatra resist or succumb to the biopolitical mechanisms of power?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the representation of biopolitics in Antony and Cleopatra, focusing on the regulation of bodies and the exercise of power.
2. To explore how the play critiques the tension between sovereignty and biopower through the characters of Antony and Cleopatra.
3. To demonstrate the relevance of Foucault's biopolitical theory to the interpretation of Shakespeare's play.

### **Significance of the study**

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it presents a new reading of *Antony and Cleopatra* using Foucault's concept of biopolitics, showing how the play's exploration of power becomes not only salient but also expands on other political considerations. Second, this paper illustrates the relevance of Shakespeare's potential biopolitical concerns for contemporary discussions regarding biopolitics, sovereignty, and resistance. Lastly, this paper enriches the interdisciplinary exchange between literature and political theory and, in doing so, illustrates the relevance of Shakespeare's plays to modern concerns.

### **Literature Review**

Existing research on *Antony and Cleopatra* has focused typically on the themes of love, empire, honour, and identity. The works of Janet Adelman and Michael Neill are among many critical examinations which present the play in terms of gender and power, while historical approaches and postcolonial readings have equally proliferated. However, biopolitical studies of *Antony and Cleopatra*, especially those rooted in Michel Foucault's theory of biopower and his successors Giorgio Agamben and Michael Hardt, seem to be uniquely rare. This review will outline five scholarly works that discuss, either directly or indirectly, the biopolitical aspects of the play and in doing so we can begin the process of establishing a basis for the current investigations.

Grady (2022) offers a rich discussion of *Antony and Cleopatra* through the lens of political and aesthetic imaginaries or hegemonies. Grady presents the notion that Cleopatra's Egypt can be understood as an aesthetic-utopian space that was at odds with Rome's masculine and militaristic political authority. He uses Cleopatra as a central figure of affect, performance and sensuality to undermine the rigid sovereignty of the Roman Republic. His own interpretation ties to mentions by Foucault who states that modern power complicates the notion of sovereign power as a sovereign way of doing power, thus increasing our understanding of power to encompass areas of regulating life, pleasure and the body. Grady implicitly associates Cleopatra with what Foucault refers to as the "life-administering" pole of biopolitical discourse presenting her as an antagonistic and disruptive figure of aesthetic freedom in contrast to Rome's biopolitical forms of governance (Grady, 2022).

In her analysis, Tufan (n.d.) examines biopolitical issues through the lens of gendered spaces and mobility in two Shakespearean plays: *The Merchant of Venice* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. She especially emphasizes the ways in which Cleopatra navigates the constraints of an androcentric society's control over the sexuality and power of its female subjects. Employing Foucault's theories, Tufan suggests that social construction of identity through spatial and ideological controls enables the imposition of gender roles. Cleopatra subverts these constructions by demonstrating



exertion of political agency through her sexuality and reflectively strategic performative context. Additionally, Cleopatra's manipulation of expectations of gendered realities signifies a critical lens on a biopolitical order that normalizes discursive practice to regulate bodies, reproduction, and sexuality. Tufan's scholarship is an important contribution to showing how Cleopatra's femininity represents a site of resistance against biopolitical containment (Tufan, n.d.).

Lippard (2017) investigates the logic of empire's globalization found in *Antony and Cleopatra* and its risks for local identities. Lippard views the various geographical and cultural differences between Egypt and Rome as metaphors for contemporary global political struggles. She argues that Egypt, under Cleopatra, emerges as a hybrid or fluid space that resists Roman attempts to stabilize and control identity. Which can be seen as a counterpoint to the state desire to regulate life in ways that deploy borders, surveillance, and normative values. This interpretation resonates with Foucault's argument that the modern state must utilize biopolitical technologies to manage populations in a manner wherein subjects are identified as either those who must live or those for whom death is permissible. As a final act of sovereign defiance, Cleopatra commits suicide, in effect reclaiming her body from the power of empire. Ultimately, Lippard's analysis situates the play in a larger framework of biopolitical power and cultural autonomy (Lippard, 2017).

Alulis (2012) examines the conflict between personal desire and political obligation in the play. He argues that Antony and Cleopatra's tragic downfall illustrates the paradox of sovereignty in the biopolitical age. In Alulis view, Antony's decision to leave public office and focus on his private feelings weakens the stability of the political system. Unlike what the Romans expected, Cleopatra stands for a completely different form of power, which depends on her emotions, attractiveness, and alliance. This private sovereignty challenges the Roman model of public virtue and discipline, which Alulis associates with the modern state regulation of citizens' lives. His interpretation echoes Agamben's theorization of the "state of exception," where traditional distinctions between public and private collapse under sovereign control. Through this lens, the lovers' deaths symbolize a refusal to submit to the totalizing logic of biopolitical governance (Alulis, 2012).

Kurtuluş (2021) approaches *Antony and Cleopatra* through the framework of cosmopolitanism and cultural hybridity. She indicates that the many identities and links across nations among the characters highlight the conflicting aspects of colonial rule. Cleopatra is depicted as someone who embodies many cultures and goes beyond the customs of ancient Rome. According to Kurtuluş, Cleopatra tries to break away from any clear borders related to race, politics, or gender. Because racial views change, the need to organize people into easily managed groups becomes less reliable and challenging to the empire. According to her, their point is that people's lives are managed by bureaucratic institutions and prevailing ideologies using modern forms of sovereignty. By refusing such control, Cleopatra reclaims a form of self-determination that undermines the biopolitical imperative (Kurtuluş, 2021).

All these articles indicate that *Antony and Cleopatra* could be examined through a biopolitical lens. The notions of power, identity, resistance, and death are relevant to Foucault's observations on the function of the modern political state as a regulator of life. *Antony and Cleopatra* portrays the struggle of sovereign power with the irreducible and autonomous individual body and desire—an ongoing struggle in biopolitical discussion today.



## Research Gap

Although significant scholarly work has examined *Antony and Cleopatra* through various critical lenses—including aesthetics (Grady, 2022), gender and space (Tufan, n.d.), imperialism and identity (Lippard, 2017), political sovereignty (Alulis, 2012), and cosmopolitan hybridity (Kurtuluş, 2021)—a notable gap persists in applying Michel Foucault’s biopolitical framework directly and comprehensively to the play. Several scholars implicitly link concepts with biopolitical ideas in their work, such as rules around gender, border control, and whether to put duty before one’s private life, yet they do not include these authors in their work in a thorough way.

These days, most studies explore themes and symbols in Cleopatra’s life, but do not fully explain how she or others interact with things like government, managing the population, or being in charge. The connection between Antony and Cleopatra and the modern state’s biopolitical strategies—such as the control of sexuality, death, and the political body—remains underexplored. Furthermore, there is little work that looks at the early modern background of Shakespeare’s play in the context of biopolitical theories that are widely used these days.

In this study, Foucault’s idea of biopower, Agamben’s view on the “state of exception,” and Hardt and Negri’s theory called Empire are applied to Antony and Cleopatra to deal with this gap. It works to clarify how the play presents modern anxieties about the body, rule, and how life is run, therefore adding to the criticism of Shakespeare’s works and to biopolitical theory.

## Theoretical Framework

Michel Foucault’s concept of biopolitics is most comprehensively articulated in his lectures at the Collège de France, particularly in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-1979) and *Society Must Be Defended* (1975-1976). Foucault explains biopolitics as a way of governing people and life, which is different from traditional sovereignty that involves being able to either take lives or let them go. In *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1: An Introduction (1976), Foucault writes: *For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.* The message points out that sovereign rule based on threat of death has changed to biopower concerned with monitoring and managing people’s lives. Foucault states that biopower tries to influence people and groups by using institutions, speech, and practices to supervise and guide them. This paper shows that *Antony and Cleopatra* explores the conflict between traditional power and the methods of running the state introduced by biopolitics.

## Methodology

To explore the biopolitical aspects of *Antony and Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare, this study relies primarily on qualitative analysis of the play text. In literary criticism, textual analysis is one of the common techniques in which the text is carefully read and interpreted to identify hidden ideologies, cultural norms, and structures of power (Belsey, 2002). This approach suits the study as it provides a detailed view of the ways Shakespeare’s techniques and language show Foucault’s biopower.

The analysis pays attention to several chosen scenes and speeches exploring how life, authority, power, and subjectivity are managed and related. The key aspect of this framework explains how Foucault highlights a move from power over life or death to the administration of life functions (Foucault, 1978). In *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 (1978), *Society Must Be Defended* (2003),

and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), Foucault uses his theories to look at how a war of “life and death” influenced Cleopatra and Antony’s roles.

Likewise, in order to compare the play and today’s politics, *the logic of Empire* introduced by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in 2000, together with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “*state of exception*” (1998), is applied to add new insights to the Foucauldian approach. With these theories, we can explore how Shakespeare and his contemporaries staged questions about modern life and the political control of people’s lives.

Using this theoretical and methodological approach, the study attempts to demonstrate *how Antony and Cleopatra* not only echoes Renaissance anxieties about sovereignty and empire but also prefigures the modern condition of being governed as living bodies within systems of control.

### Discussion and Analysis

#### I. The Body Politic and the Individual Body

*Antony and Cleopatra* investigates the relationship between the body politic and a powerful person’s individual body. It is especially seen in the examples of Antony and Cleopatra in the play. Mark Antony is someone who leads in politics and also tries to maintain his personal desires. Because of his role as a Roman general and a triumvirate leader, he illustrates the important Roman traits of discipline, order, and devotion to the empire. But when he falls in love with Cleopatra, he forgets his responsibilities and position as an important person of the triumvirate. He begins to act against what honorable men are expected to do in such situations.

In Act 1, Scene 2, it becomes obvious as Antony says:

*Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space." (1.2.33–34)*

These lines reveal that Antony walks away from his duties and responsibilities in the empire and finds happiness in the pursuits of love and desire. He gives priority to his personal goals and desires over what he is supposed to do in politics. Here is what we can see the main conflict; should citizens answer to the needs of the state or keep their personal freedom?

We can better understand this situation with Foucault’s idea of biopolitics. The author reveals in *The Birth of Biopolitics* that in modern times, the main concern of governance is not territory, but rather the population. *The new art of government is not directed at the territory but at the population, and it is exercised through the management of life. (Foucault, 2008, p. 108).* It implies that the state focuses on controlling land and also on directing human actions, wishes, and behaviors. As a result of being between Rome and Egypt, Antony becomes an important place for political action. His body and mind are not completely controlled by him anymore. Rome wants people to follow its rules and obey. Cleopatra stands for having emotions, sensual thoughts, and challenging rules. In her comments, Cleopatra points out that Antony has abandoned the Roman ideals and way of life. *My lord is fallen into an honorable madness. (3.13.143)* “Madness” means that Antony did not behave rationally or disciplined like the Roman rulers should have. In Roman eyes, Antony is not able to continue leading. The love he has for her has let him do whatever he wants. This is consistent with what Foucault stated in *Discipline and Punish*. According to Foucault, *The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. (Foucault, 1977, p. 25)* Antony body signifies the uncertainty between strict Roman

rules and the enjoyment of the Egyptian people. His problems are political as well as emotional or moral. Since he does not follow the rules of Rome, both his government and nation can fall apart. *Antony and Cleopatra* dramatizes the profound conflict between biopolitical control and individual liberty. By examining the downfall of Antony, Shakespeare shows how political power tries to govern even our most personal experiences in life—desire, love, and the very body we possess. This play is affected by modern anxiety about how states can shape individuals, both in terms of institutional power through law and the military and their biopolitical capacity to shape the life experiences and biographies of individuals, namely their bodies, behavior, and emotion.

## II. The Regulation of Bodies

In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, political power can be seen controlling and regulating people, using overt commands as well as secret beliefs and pressures. The reputation of Cleopatra's Egypt as a place for pleasure and luxury stands in clear opposition to how the Romans practiced self-control and austerity. However, as critics have pointed out, both places pay close attention to controlling the actions of bodies and their appearance. Octavius Caesar, the embodiment of Roman discipline and imperial order, expresses strong disapproval of Antony's lifestyle. In Act 3, the scene titled "6", Caesar says: *From Alexandria / This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel.* (3.6.1–3) This complaint reveals that Caesar does not simply oppose Antony's political alliances—he also controls his bodily practices, using moral judgment as a tool of governance. Foucault stresses this point in his book *Discipline and Punish. Power relations have an immediate hold upon the body: they invest it, mark it, train it...* (1977, p. 25).

Antony's perceived indiscipline signals not just a private failure but a political one; his body becomes a site of ideological struggle, coded as Eastern and feminized, and therefore in need of rectification by Roman authority. Ania Loomba, undertaking a study of race and gender in early modern texts, interprets the Roman critique of Egypt as a validation of European fears about the "Oriental other." She claims that Cleopatra's Egypt is *constructed as sexually excessive, racially other, and politically dangerous* (Loomba, 1998). We can see that Cleopatra's body becomes the embodiment of a cultural and political threat to Rome; a spectacle that must be tamed and conducted for public display as evidence of Rome's colonization.

In Act 5, Scene 2, we see that Caesar intends to control Cleopatra by marching her in a triumphal parade. *And I will take her to my guard and she / Shall be called the beggar and slave of Rome.* (5.2.190–191) Here, Cleopatra character has been reduced from a sovereign ruler to a docile, defeated body, fitting Foucault's description in *The History of Sexuality: Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private* (Foucault, 1978, p. 138) Still, by committing suicide, Cleopatra gains control over her own body against biopolitical regulations. When she kills herself, she stops Caesar from using her in his scheme to highlight Roman victory. Judith Butler's view of performativity can be used in analysis of this issue. Even through what she did in both public and private life, she couldn't be easily put into a single category. Butler's idea that the body is a *variable boundary* shaped by discourse (Butler, 1990) allows us to see Cleopatra's death as an act of counter-performance, resisting state-imposed identity.

### III. Sovereignty and Biopower

It is important to consider the connection between sovereignty and biopower to fully understand Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Michel Foucault's theorization of biopolitics—where power is exercised not merely through the right to kill (as in classical sovereignty) but through the capacity to "foster life or disallow it to the point of death"—offers a profound framework for analyzing the decline of Antony's imperial agency and the mechanisms through which Octavius Caesar consolidates control (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1978, p. 138). The play *Antony and Cleopatra* displays a strong conflict between past rulership and new forms of control over people, which we can study using Michel Foucault's theory of biopower. It demonstrates how Mark Antony's kingdom gradually falls apart and how Cleopatra does everything she can to stay free from Roman rule. Foucault makes his views known in *Society Must Be Defended. These days, sovereignty is applied to a population, and it is enforced through handling their lives* (Foucault, 2003, p. 247). At the beginning in the play, Antony is depicted as powerful individual, but Caesar makes him lose it by controlling him through both desire and punishment. After the important defeat at Actium, Antony yells out in lamentation, *I am Antony yet* (Act 4, Scene 14). In this line, the Shakespeare illustrates the hero's final effort to defend his identity, in spite of changes happening within the empire. His self-declaration is not merely rhetorical; it is an existential struggle to reclaim his authority over his body, choices, and legacy. What Foucault terms *subjectification*, where the individual resists power's attempts to define and delimit identity (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1977). After his defeat, Antony makes a defiant statement that clearly shows how he realizes his authority is gone. *I am Antony yet* (4.14.13). This assertion, made in the face of overwhelming defeat, reflects Antony's struggle to maintain his sovereignty. Cleopatra also resists Caesar's attempts at biopolitical domination when she asserts: *I will not wait pinioned at your master's court* (5.2.53). This defiance speaks to her refusal to become a docile body under Caesar's control.

Foucault in both of his works, *The History of Sexuality* and *Society Must Be Defended*, uses biopower to describe the way that modern times have changed sovereign power, so that maintaining life instead of death is the ruler's main task. Foucault mentions that in modern times, power is exercised over entire populations, and this is mainly done by managing everyday life and activities of the subjects. The biopolitical shift is illustrated by the way Octavius Caesar gained power. He managed to establish control over people not just with armies, but by restricting their actions and modifying how they looked and behaved. In contrast, Antony's body becomes symbolic of the failure to conform to this new order—marked by emotional vulnerability, sensual indulgence, and eventual physical collapse. Historian Paul Kottman argues in *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare* (2009) that Shakespearean tragedy frequently examines the ways in which the individual's formerly stable identity begins to unravel and transform with the flux of political change. In the case of *Antony and Cleopatra*, we can think of this tension as the sovereign rulers, Antony and Cleopatra, face the emergence of a different kind of imperial logic: one not governed by honor or virtue, but rather by the conditions of surveillance, classification, and spectacle. Antony's suicide becomes political, as much as Cleopatra's becomes a reclaiming of the body; an act of resistance to biopower.

Therefore, we can see the Foucauldian narrative in *Antony and Cleopatra*: sovereignty, defined by the power to kill, gives way as biopolitical regimes prioritize the regulation of life. Antony and



Cleopatra's personal and political downfall serves as a testament to the tension to this shift. If Caesar represents the emerging order of surveillance and constituent power of the state, Antony and Cleopatra then, through their defiance and tragic ends, represent the remains of a sovereign authority resisting its dissolution to biological necessity.

#### **IV. Death and the Limits of Biopower**

The play's tragic conclusion, in which both Antony and Cleopatra take their own lives, can be seen as a critique and resistance to biopower. By refusing to accept Octavius Caesar's power, Antony and Cleopatra showed they were prepared to throw away their lives instead. In this part of the play, Cleopatra announces: *Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have / Immortal longings in me.* (5.2.279–280).

This line underscores Cleopatra's rejection of Caesar's biopolitical control, as she chooses death over a life of subjugation. Her act of suicide shows that she wanted to retain control over what happened to her body and life. Foucault's concept of biopower helps to illuminate this dynamic, as it reveals the limits of biopolitical control. This idea is presented by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: Death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it.*

With this statement, the book shows death represents freedom from biopolitical control, as it enables individuals to challenge power. Antony and Cleopatra's suicides can be seen as acts of resistance against the biopolitical order, as they assert their sovereignty over their own bodies and lives. Antony also values honor and decides to die rather than show dishonor. *I will be / A bridegroom in my death, and run into't / As to a lover's bed* (4.14.98-100). Such acts confirm Foucault's thought that death cannot be controlled by biopower and highlights the ultimate point where a person exhibits agency and power.

#### **Conclusion**

*Antony and Cleopatra* exhibits the tension between personal autonomy and the sovereignty of power through a state. The play suggests that power has begun trending in a new direction, that is, power in the early modern age, is not only about acquiring land, but about controlling human lives. Rome embodies this type of power, it surveils its subjects, attends to rigid morality, and punishes bodily control. Conversely, Egypt embodies freedom, embodied desire, and rupturing normative structures.

Antony and Cleopatra's death and demise epitomize the struggle between individuals, no matter how socially and politically powerful, who confront socially authoritative power that aspires to define them with such authority. Both their decisions to die could also be perceived as a political act. Their deaths represent an active choice both to resist the final state interested in assuming control over their bodies. In this way, Shakespeare explores modern concerns about power, the body, and agency.

This reading offers an insightful engagement, even in contemporary terms. It establishes how the drama continues to resonate today and stimulates dialectic approaches to debates about governmental control, individual autonomy, and the limits of state power.



## References

- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (D. Heller-Roazen, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Alulis, J. (2012). The tragedy of politics: Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. *Perspectives on Political Science*, 41(4), 190–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10457097.2012.713262>
- Andreucci, D., & Zografos, C. (2022). Between improvement and sacrifice: Othering and the (bio)political ecology of climate change. *Political Geography*, 92, Article 102512. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102512>
- Árnason, G. (2012). Biopower (Foucault). In R. Chadwick (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics* (2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 295–299). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-373932-2.00236-2>
- Belsey, C. (2002). *Poststructuralism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (2003). *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (D. Macey, Trans.). Picador.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (G. Burchell, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230594180>
- Grady, H. (2022). From the political to the aesthetic-utopian in Antony and Cleopatra. In *Shakespeare's dialectic of hope* (pp. 111–150). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009106986.008>
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Harvard University Press.
- Liu, C. (2022). Biopolitical imaginaries in early modern drama: Sovereignty, life, and power. *English Literary Renaissance*, 52(1), 1–29
- Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. Routledge.
- Kottman, P. A. (2009). *Tragic conditions in Shakespeare: Disinheriting the globe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kurtuluş, G. (2021). Cosmopolitanism, mobility and hybridity in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. *IDEAS: Journal of English Literary Studies*, 1(2), 101–120.
- Lippard, L. R. (2017). Boundaries in a globalized world: Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. In *Renaissance Papers 2016* (pp. 69–78). Boydell & Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787441507.006>
- Rabinow, P., & Rose, N. (2006). Biopower today. *BioSocieties*, 1(2), 195–217. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1745855206040014>
- Tufan, E. (n.d.). *Gendered spaces in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice and Antony and Cleopatra* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Academia.edu. <https://www.academia.edu/52751463>