

The Production of Musical Meanings in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*

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Abstract: *This essay analyses the production of musical meanings in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra. In Julius Caesar, the action takes place during the Roman festivals of the Ides of March and Anna Perenna. After a formal sacrifice and public prayers to secure a healthy year, people spend the day socializing, drinking, singing popular songs, and dancing. However, instead of the social and political harmony suggested by the Roman festival, the dramatic exchange involving music indicates political disorder, dissolution, and even death. It is not insignificant that Julius Caesar is deaf in one ear, so he is probably tone deaf as well, and deaf to public requests, self-ensconced in his globe of political power. In Antony and Cleopatra, on the other hand, there are individual drunken songs, which typify the broken harmony of the political and social milieu. In both plays, Roman history is used to allude to Elizabethan or early Jacobean political situations, while collective scenes of music, involving many people, refer to the power of the human voice (in harmony or disharmony) to disrupt political arguments. I argue that the false or broken music in the two Roman plays suggests the instability of the political world, with contemporary reverberations in Shakespeare's time.*

Keywords: *Antony and Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, music, Shakespeare, early Jacobean politics*