Contrasting Identities
A Study of Power and Freedom in the Roman Empire As Depicted in John Williams’ *Augustus*
Abstract

Upon being announced as one of the winners of the 1973 National Book Award, John Williams’ novel Augustus (1972) was classified as a book of a supposedly more traditional form compared to John Barth’s experimental work Chimera (1972) that Augustus shared the prize with that year. This essay will examine John Williams’ novel Augustus, with the purpose of analysing two of the novel’s main characters, Augustus and his daughter Julia. To define both of the characters, this essay will be looking in-depth into how Williams showcases the various ways both characters go about using the power that is bestowed upon them. This essay will be employing Fredric Jameson’s Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991) to establish the environment of nihilism present in the Roman Empire that nears the “waning of affect” and exhaustion Jameson states occurs with the coming of postmodernism. Ferdinand de Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics (1916) will be placed in dialogue with Luce Irigaray’s Speculum of the Other Woman (1974) to showcase the varying masculine and feminine practices of language both characters employ and the consequences these forms of expression bring with the duplicitous ways of the Roman Empire looming in the background behind both Augustus and Julia.
1. Introduction

Upon being announced as the winner of the National Book Award in 1973 for his novel *Augustus* (1972), John Williams was queried during an interview for a publication based in his residual town of Colorado as to what his acceptance speech would concern. Upon hearing this question, Williams’ “relaxed manner” altered into a heated one before answering: “A defense of the goddamn novel!"¹ Despite the fact that *Augustus* had received favourable reviews upon its publication, any notion of a “defense” taking place upon the announcement was completely gone due to the jury causing an uproar when they decided to split the fiction prize between two works - *Augustus* and John Barth’s *Chimera* (1972). Many in the literary community considered this move to be a consolation towards the previously overlooked Williams, whose novels *Butcher’s Crossing* (1960) and *Stoner* (1965) had slowly been gaining in esteem over the years among a small group of admirers.² Even though *Augustus* had received such a prestigious honour, it would only go on to sell 10,000 copies in America.³ But considering the obscurity and lack of attention Williams’ work endured during his lifetime, this form of response should come as no surprise.

*Butcher’s Crossing* and *Stoner* both revolve around fictional everyman characters, dealing with questions of failure and disappointment. There are several autobiographical elements embedded into *Stoner* that mirror John Williams’ own profession as an academic. *Stoner* is the novel that has been the most successful, developing a large following during these past few years and topping bestseller lists worldwide. But in his final book, *Augustus*, Williams turns his attention away from the everyman to a figure often associated with greatness and grandeur. *Augustus* chronicles the life of the Roman Emperor Gaius Octavius Thurinus, or as he is later known as, Augustus. The first section of the book deals mostly with Augustus’ rise to power, after the death of his uncle Julius Caesar, a meaningful figure during Augustus’ early life. Caesar describes in letters he sends to Augustus the corrupt and violent state of the Roman Empire that Caesar wants to put an end to, and see the Empire flourish for once. But Julius Caesar is assassinated when Augustus is only 18 years old. In turn, Augustus becomes the new ruler. He swears vengeance upon the murderers, all the while wanting to fulfil Caesar’s vision of a new Rome, free of any corruption.

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³ Ibid.
Augustus is constantly surrounded by political rivals competing for his power, such as Marcus Antonius, Marcus Tullius Cicero and Marcus Junius Brutus. This first section displays, through the voices and differing perspectives of those around Augustus, the various schemes and tactics the young Augustus creates to fight against the political intrigues of the Roman Empire, and claim his position as Rome’s first Emperor. The second part of Augustus focuses more on Augustus’ daughter Julia. Unlike Augustus, whose actions are all told and spun by the various figures around him, Williams gives Julia her own voice. Through the means of a journal, she recalls her life in Rome up until being evicted onto the island of Pandateria by her father, following her love affair with Jullus Antonius, the son of Marcus Antonius. The third and final section of the book has Augustus at last gaining a voice. While on his deathbed, Augustus dictates a letter addressed to the poet Nicolaus of Damascus, who wrote a biography on Augustus’ life. The previously enigmatic Emperor looks back over his life in this letter. Augustus evaluates the various conducts he has engaged in throughout his life and the consequences these choices produced in regards to the Roman Empire and its people.

The obliviousness Williams received throughout his life not only from various literary circles but his academic colleagues at the University of Denver where he taught, seems to span from the fact that compared to a work such as Barth’s Chimera, Augustus stands as the more classical or traditional work, at least on the surface. As Charles J. Shields points out in his 2017 biography on John Williams, Chimera features elements and techniques that are deeply indebted to postmodernism and metafiction, applying these when Barth attempts to transform “myth into reality”, “not Williams’ cup of tea at all”. Yet what is interesting, as Daniel Mendelsohn points out in his introduction to the 2014 edition of the book, that in dealing with Augustus, he is a figure “about whom we know at once a great deal and very little, […] therefore invit[ing] both description and invention”. In an interview with Bryan Woolley conducted for the Denver Quarterly, Williams himself also states that he had no interest at all in handling Augustus in the manner of “a straight narrative style […] making it sound like a […] historical romance”. Therefore, Williams takes a slice of history dealing with the Roman Empire, and constructs it into an epistolary novel. This slice of history in turn becomes a collage of various letters, diary entries, unfinished writings and

4 Shields, 8.
5 Ibid., 11.
occasional historical tidbits, which don’t depict the book through the point-of-view of the Roman Emperor, but rather through the perspectives of his contemporaries, also real-life figures, yet for the most part impersonated by Williams. Not only does the use of this technique produce what can be considered to be a rather fragmented piece of work, but also a novel where we have historical figure depicted as a figure who appears as a static and desensitised one in his attributes up until the third and final part of the book. This also means that the vernacular employed here remains understated and at a complete distance, just like our protagonist. In this case, Julia emerges as the more sensitive and sympathetic character. But in his introduction to the 2004 edition of *Augustus*, John McGahern displays the influence that Julia had on Williams. Williams first heard about the story of Julia’s exile through his friend and fellow writer Morton Hunt, who briefly speaks of her in his book on love from the Greek times to the present.\(^8\) Considering that it was mainly the life of Julia and the overall relationship between her and Augustus that influenced Williams the most in the early stages of the book’s conception, this should come as no surprise then.

### 1.1 Aim and Purpose

This essay aims towards a more clearer understanding of these two characters, Augustus and Julia, and how Williams takes these two real life historical figures and through the means of fiction rather than the straight-forward non-fiction biography route, builds his own depictions of them. Both characters are associated with differing styles of prose in Williams’ book, as I have briefly touched upon already. In the case of Augustus, we have a character who in many ways nears an artificial quality in the first two sections of Williams’ novel. His actions and emotions are all presented through the means of differing opinions or accounts that are purely based on hearsay and gossip. Whether these accounts be good or bad portraits of the Emperor, it obfuscates his identity. A distance between the character and the reader is in turn created. But Julia on the other hand tells everything from her own perspective for the majority of the novel, all through an inner monologue that is filled with passionate and emotional currents when describing her days in Rome, before being exiled to the island of Pandateria for her violation of Augustus’ laws on adultery. Yet anytime that even the most ardent of John Williams’ supporters are asked to discuss Williams’ approach to prose, such as Rexford Stamper in his breakdown of all three of Williams’ novels, stating that

Williams is the one who “work[s] [and] accept[s] traditional novelistic forms”. But if we look at the measures Williams takes to differentiate both Julia and Augustus through his use of language, and the shifts in the style of *Augustus* that this causes, coincidentally or not, makes it near the experimentation of John Barth’s *Chimera* rather than any kind of traditional form when approaching its characters through the text. Therefore, I will be looking in-depth at how both of these characters are constructed through the means of fiction, taking both the external surroundings of the Roman Empire and their overall appearances and the internal means of language and their personal desires, or lack of, into account.

### 1.2 Theories and Methods

Providing a touchstone for the various ways and techniques that an author can use to portray characters in literature is important to establish, in displaying how Augustus and Julia are portrayed. This is why Lis Møller’s writings on characters will be employed here. A part of the book *Litteratur: Introduktion till teori och analys* (2015), Møller showcases in her chapter titled “Karaktär” how ever since the 19th century, instead of using obvious literary techniques such as the one of internal focalisation, authors have found various other ways in playing around with the narrative and its characters. An example of this happens to be the rendering of perspective, where a fragmentation of opinions occurs when one is to describe this one “conscious”, or character. Through the abilities of “mind reading”, most readers can make a connection between a character’s inner feelings and perspective together with his outer resemblance. In creating this connection through the information we receive in the text, a dimensional character is formed. The reader can then get an idea of who this character is, and the various motivations behind his choices in the story. But the danger of misinterpretation, based on the deciphering of an interaction with others, body language or their doings, can easily find its way in here and set up a flawed picture of a

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11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 51.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 52.
character. This practice can be achieved not only by the reader, but even within the inner world, through the perspective of another character existing in the text itself. A link is then created between character and ethics in fiction, and how the reader is to judge a character from an ethical perspective. But the reader forms this perspective not only from how the character is represented, but even in the way they are written and told of in the text. As Møller herself points out by the end of her own discussion, is that however immoral the outcome may be, if the concept of ethics is all about putting oneself in someone else’s shoes, then literature will always be an undertaking revolving around ethics. Considering how the first two sections of *Augustus* are built on the perspective and interpretations of motivation and feelings of others when it comes to building the identity of Rome’s first Emperor, acts of “misreadings”, or misinterpretations, abound throughout.

*Augustus* was written at a time when the term “postmodernism” started being used frequently. A vast group of writers were associated with this movement, such as John Barth. In this case, something needs to be brought up in regards to the time period of the early 1970’s in America when *Augustus* was first published. This will be done through the help of Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Having established the various possibilities existing in literature to depict characters, saying something of the environment of violence and chaos that John Williams has both Augustus and Julia navigating in and have their identities formed through, is important. This is also to illuminate to new ways of thinking in Williams’ approach to depicting the society of the Roman Empire, which is far and away from the supposedly classical style.

Jameson’s portrayal illustration of the term “postmodernism” suggests that instead of spotting the historical consequences that come with the changes that occur in the human culture, postmodernism is a lot more interested in the changes. What this practice causes in the culture is the production of a content that is nothing more than just more and more images piling up upon one another. In turn, a rejection of depth occurs that implies a diminishing of emotions in a subject that

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15 Ibid., 56.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 59.
18 Ibid., 60.
Jameson calls a “waning of affect”\textsuperscript{20} Jameson demonstrates the term “waning of affect” through deconstructing Edward Munch’s painting The Scream (1893) as an example. Munch’s painting is an embodiment of the human expression of anxiety and alienation highly associated with modernist thematics. In contrast, the feelings one finds in postmodernist art “wane”, ergo the waning of affect. Jameson sees one’s expression divided into two distinct categories: the inner and outer world that projects the subject as an individual.\textsuperscript{21} Jameson then brings in the example of Andy Warhol’s postmodernist Marilyn Monroe portrait where any notion of the human experience of emotion demonstrated above is nowhere to be found.\textsuperscript{22}

What the term of postmodernism implies then, is that the individualism or private sphere associated with human culture during the early 20th century is no longer to be found. The individual can no longer produce a linear, or somewhat coherent, narrative in organising the past, the present and the future. This makes the narrative consist of erratic “heaps of fragments”.\textsuperscript{23} In regards to the character of Julia, Jameson’s ideas on the “waning of our historicity” are important in understanding the feelings of isolation and melancholy she experiences, trapped on the island while thinking of her past life in Rome. This is because the kind of “past” that postmodernism appropriates to its aesthetic style in literature is one that comes in the form of a “blank parody” called pastiche, devoid of any humour or underlying depth behind its intentions.\textsuperscript{24} This causes an inability to experience history “in some active way” while all at once at a complete remove from our own current present experience.\textsuperscript{25} When these piles of historical styles upset the balance of the “‘real’ history”, what happens is that it is no longer able to shape the historical past, but only ideas and superficial stereotypical portrayals we associate with what we know of the past constructed by our perceptions of this imagery.

Upon trying to find a term to define the certain set of practices he discuses in his book Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Jameson settles for “postmodernism”, but does so with a degree of caution.\textsuperscript{26} Jameson himself briefly mentions the shortcomings that exist

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 11 f.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 25.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. xiii.
\end{itemize}
when one loosely throws around a term as broad in its dimensions as postmodernism is. Yet Jameson does explain how various other formulations such as “poststructuralism” or “postindustrial society” which share similar ideas with postmodernism were too precise in their ties to their own specific fields of origin, such as philosophy and economics. Covering only Jameson’s ideas around postmodernism in this essay is not an intention on my part to say that Jameson’s depiction is the only accurate one in existence, as various other prominent theorists such as Linda Hutcheon’s *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), which Jameson even references at one point in his book, and Richard Dyer’s *Pastiche* (2007) have all gone in-depth into similar ideas of the practices of affect and the simulacra of pastiche. But given the expansive scope of academic texts in circulation existing in relation to postmodernism, this essay unfortunately cannot cover a larger discussion around the term.

The contrast of appearances between Julia and Augustus in relation to the environment they are products of will be discussed through Jameson’s ideas regarding the human figure in the postmodernist climate. Just as the culture and spatial qualities around the individual change, so does the individual’s appearance along with his surroundings. Jameson states that along with the “euphoria” and “intensities” coming with “the newer cultural experience” of postmodernism, the representation of the body changes as well through a process of “dereali[s]ation”, transforming into “dead and flesh-coloured simulacra”. This is unlike the natural state that the body was in before these various “intensities” took place, upon the arrival of postmodernism. Along with this transformation and loss of depth, other surroundings of the world and the world itself acquire a “glossy skin […] without [any] density”.

The utilisation of language is another key factor when discussing the characters of Augustus and Julia. When analysing how linguistic practices are applied around the character of Augustus, Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) will be put to use. Jameson briefly mentions some key systematic thoughts on the “postmodernist” obsession with language, where the work of art turns into a text that differentiates rather than unifies the words and sentences. This form of thought was first developed by the structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Saussure.

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 32 ff.
30 Ibid., 34.
31 Ibid., 31.
that proved to carry ideas influential to postmodernism. Saussure highlights various differences within linguistics, but I am only interested in Saussure’s writings on speech and language. This is particularly important in regards to Augustus’ character to highlight the effect that is created when someone is doing the speaking for Augustus rather than himself. A very indifferent persona is portrayed through the help of Saussure’s writing. The way that the prose figures into *Augustus* displays how the mind of the Augustus character is built and how Williams in turn employs these aspects to the character as traits. Crucial passages that demonstrate these traits of indifference, such as the way that the death of Julius Caesar plays out, will be dissected with the help of Saussure’s theory. Saussure states that “langue” (language) and “parole” (speaking) need to be seen as two separate entities whenever one discusses both terms. Saussure goes on to say that this separation occurs because “langue” is a collective yet passive act that occurs within our studies of the “language system”, a system wherein the signs we apply to convey thought, all comparable to practices of the written word, symbols, formulas and various signals. “Parole” on the other hand, is an act of reflection, a highly individual and intellectual one where the speaker is expressing his own thoughts and has the means of manipulating the aforementioned language system within his statement of intent.

Luce Irigaray’s feminist ideals behind language in her book *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) will be applied to the character of Julia, in order to show a shift away from any static quality associated with the portrayal of Augustus. In order to display Julia’s rebellious and free spirit, I will use these ideas to show how she overthrows Augustus’ adherence to a prose influenced by the violence and indifference found in Saussure’s ideas of “langue”. In a field dominated by representation of a “subject” that has always been “appropriated by the ‘masculine’”, being “female”, the woman subjects “herself to objectivi[s]ation in discourse”. The woman in turn becomes the mirror both of and for the man, her function reduced to being a supplement. This sentiment makes it clear that the woman then in turn lacks a “signifier” to be given a freedom of speech and thought, with “her body the only reminder of what has been”. But Irigaray wants to go

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33 Ibid., 15f.

34 Ibid., 14.


36 Ibid., 61.
against this repressive mode of representation, where “no clear univocal utterance, can in fact, pay off this mortgage since all are already trapped in the same credit structure”. This line of thought is associated not only with the structuralist ideas of Saussure, but the vision of a postmodernist society that Jameson outlined in his book. In order to make a commitment to the woman finding her own individual voice, Irigaray suggests a disruption to this system of thought through the utilisation of language. This disruption, or “disconcerting” of language, as Irigaray puts it, involves a process of wordplay. The “reasonable” words, which can only be achieved through the act of mimicry that she nevertheless is “powerless [in accurately capturing or translating] all that pulses, clamours, and hangs hazily in the cryptic passages of hysterical suffering-latency”. But by overthrowing and deconstructing the linguistic practices such as the syntaxes, divergencies, eclipses and ellipses of discourse, the woman can “say what disturbs her”, and be free of the “crises that her ‘body’ suffers in her impotence.” What this fragmentation implies then is a mode of writing that favours the feminine imagery and metaphors of the polysemic, diverse and fluid rather than the rigid and rule-bound stability of the masculine language.

### 1.3 Prior Research Overview

Overall, research concerning the work of John Williams has been scarce so far. The writing that does exist of his novels tends to revolve around *Stoner*, mostly dealing with the aforementioned novel’s restraint and spareness, such as Tony McKenna’s essay “John Williams’ Novel *Stoner* and the Dialectic of the Infinite and Finite” (2015). Mel Livatino’s and particularly Steve Almond’s writings dealing with *Stoner* do manage to mention John Williams’ construction of William Stoner’s identity that touches upon the importance behind building one’s own private and personal identities. But *Stoner* aside, the closest one can come to discussion based on his other work would seem to be Rexford Stamper’s write-up *An Introduction to the Major Novels of John Williams* (1974), where Stamper provides an in-depth analysis on all three of Williams’ novels - *Butcher’s*...
Crossing, Stoner and Augustus. In discussing Augustus, Stamper mentions that it differs from the other two books in how instead of having Augustus develop as a character and be changed by the events of the world like Stoner and William Andrews in Butcher’s Crossing, the Roman Emperor himself is the one behind the changes occurring around him and in turn already possesses a deep understanding of the circumstances.

In terms of how Augustus has been portrayed in other more conventional “historical” biographies of his life, two most recent noteworthy accounts on Augustus are Adrian Galsworthy’s Augustus: First Emperor of Rome (2014) and Augustus: The Life of Rome’s First Emperor (2006) by Anthony Everitt. Both seem to continue the tradition previously accounted on the ruler by accentuating the violence and tyranny that came with Augustus’ rise to power, and while Galsworthy doesn’t outright compare him to a fascist dictator like historian Ronald Syme did in his 1939 study The Roman Revolution, he nevertheless follows it up by saying “to be not as bad as Hitler is scarcely a ringing endorsement”. As I will later depict, Williams chooses another route in his portrayal, opting for understatement rather than the sensationalism that is found in the other depictions of Augustus discussed above. When it comes to portrayals of Julia, she is depicted in Robert Graves’ book on the Emperor Claudius titled I, Claudius (1934) as a sympathetic person with a rebellious side to her. However, unlike Augustus whose life is more than accounted for, Julia was written out of history books due to her banishment from Rome by her father, Augustus.

2. Analysis

2.1 Rome As a Backdrop for Augustus and Julia

When it comes to portraying the Rome of not only Augustus but Julius Caesar as well, it is done so in the form of an Empire built on murder and corruption. But on the level of pure surface, you could never tell. Strabo of Amasia, the Greek philosopher and historian, upon arriving in the city, describes it as a city that is grand, with “great columns of marble support[ing] the official buildings; […] dozens of statues, […] temples to their borrowed Roman gods […] good deal of open space.

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42 Technically Williams wrote four novels and a collection of poetry in his career, but he would go on to disavow his debut novel Nothing But the Night (1948).

43 Stamper, 96.

[...] [always feel[ing] [...] at the center of the world” (Augustus, p. 76). But what lies beneath this grand surface with stunning architecture, is what Julius Caesar describes, in a letter he addressed to Augustus, as a city built on “the Roman lie” (p. 18). Caesar goes on to elaborate in the same letter that he “see[s] murder, theft, and pillage in the name of the Republic” (p. 18). If Jameson, when envisioning his postmodernist state, outlines a culture that is constantly obsessed with variation as one that will eventually experience an exhaustion of facts and imagery, these treacherous acts of the Roman Empire then stand in as varying conducts “produced” by the numerous figures vying for the power that Julius Caesar occupies. Instead of focusing on the improvement of the Roman Empire by moving forward and living in a state of peace, these political figures shroud themselves with a piling up of battles and schemes of corruption. This creates a city with a surface but next to no depth in its substance, only a mass of scatology existing underneath the supposedly pretty surface, similar to the one that Jameson illustrates when a “rejection of depth” occurs. But while Julius Caesar complains of the acts his enemies take part in, he himself, ironically so, also engages in a questionable behaviour in return. Caesar himself is obsessed with the “production” of these treacherous acts, and in turn becomes associated with this new envisioned state. In an episode where Caesar has to deal with a tax issue concerning Marcus Antonius, matters are resolved when he gives a fine to both of the quarrelling parties in the issue, stating that “[t]hey were well-pleased, and I have no fear of them; I know that they are corrupt, and they think that I am….And so the morning went” (p. 18). For Julius, these functions are norms, “the necessary price we pay for freedom” (p. 18). They are accomplished under his ruling all for the sake of the Republic, to ensure safety. This harkens back to what Julius calls “the Roman lie” (p. 18), in having to obey by the treachery all for the sake of the Roman Empire.

Upon the death of Julius Caesar, Augustus swears vengeance upon the murderers, wanting to act quick instead of staying behind and “remain[ing] in ignorance” (p. 24). More or less, Augustus wants to continue where his uncle and father figure left off, even adopting his uncle’s name, making him Gaius Julius Caesar. Augustus is ready to go about his actions all in the favour of witnessing the flourishing of the Roman Empire. This becomes apparent when he joins forces with political enemies Marcus Antonius and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus “in what amounts to a military dictatorship” (p. 80 f). This alliance occurs in an effort to proscribe the enemies who murdered

45 Referred to only by the page number from now on.

46 Jameson, 11 f.

47 Ibid.
Julius Caesar. Strabo, who at first was in awe of the grandeur of Rome, gets to eventually witness the constant reproduction of treachery that lies beneath this grandeur. In his correspondence with fellow philosopher and historian Nicolaus of Damascus, Strabo sees how this action causes nothing but only more bloodshed in Rome, with slaughterings and executions daily taking place, even betrayals. The most violent of acts are accomplished by Antonius’ soldiers, all the while Augustus himself stays out of sight completely, but rumour has it that he “insists that the proscriptions be carried out ruthlessly, at once […]” (p. 81). These barbaric qualities cause a disillusionment in Strabo, who questions whether the Rome he thought he knew has deceived him: “Is this the Rome that I thought I was beginning to know […]? Have I understood these people at all?” (p. 81). Strabo subscribes to the feelings of expression and alienation that Jameson suggests were associated with the modernist era, where the individual can still have a sentiment to his self.48 But emotionally, this treachery seems to take a toll on not only Strabo who is the bystander in this situation, but Augustus, who is actually a part of this nihilism, as well. But his demeanour is not one of outright shock and anxiety, but rather one that portrays a certain decrease of any emotional currents. If Strabo is associated with Edward Munch’s The Scream painting, crying out for help, then Augustus belongs to Jameson’s writing on Warhol’s postmodernist Marilyn Monroe portrait, free of any compassion that makes the subject a thinking individual.49 Augustus previously viewed the meeting with Antonius as a “game” where he could sense the latter being scared of Augustus and have a laugh about it (p. 37), but this joyful mood now becomes replaced with a state of aloofness, “contained, withdrawn, almost secretive” (p. 52). Salvidienus speculates that this is due to the feeling of “grief” in regards to the death of his uncle still present in him, “which has hardened into ambition” (p. 52). This supposedly contained grief is put on display when Augustus learns of Salvidienus Rufus’ betrayal. Marcus Antonius hands Augustus the letter revealing Salvidienus’ treachery in wanting to desert his supposedly good friend and offer his three legions of soldiers to Antonius. Maecenas’ reaction to the letter is one of sorrow: “I did not look at the letter again; I did not have to. The words were in my mind, and they still are, after these more than twenty-five years, like an old scar” (p. 70). But Augustus’ reaction is one free of any emotion: “Octavius picked up the paper, unrolled it, and read. His face did not change expression. He read for a long time. He handed the paper to me” (p. 69). Williams enhances the indifference by making the prose revolving around Augustus have a quality of deadpan to it. The prose remains this way, with Augustus not once

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 14.
raising his voice when officially declaring Salvidienus no longer a friend or ally of his (p. 70), no matter how painful the proceedings may be. If we are to follow Lis Møller’s writings on character and how much of an ethical endeavour literature really is, the ethics of Augustus’ behaviour is put into question by the reader here, even though it is told from someone’s perspective. He comes off as bleak and distant, a blank canvas of a character with whom the reader has a difficulty having any form of sympathy towards.

If Augustus becomes a blank canvas upon becoming the Emperor and gaining his power, Julia’s life with the backdrop of Rome looming behind her is one filled with various joys due to the power she obtains being the Emperor’s daughter. But in the present, she is away from Rome, on the island of Pandateria. Julia has been there for five years upon her commencement of writing in the journal she depicts these events in. She is now away from the grand scale of Rome and her father, only allowed to walk a distance of one hundred yards on this island, not allowed to engage in any form of human contact. She is isolated from any form of activity, removed from the present life. The history of her early life in Rome is the only present that exists for her on this small island, but it is a present experience that is filled with an artificial quality. These constant melancholic reflections on her past make her incapable of realising a natural quality in her own current experience, that only results in a feeling of numbness among “this barren earth” (p. 145). Yet, instead of entailing a “waning of […] historicity” that comes with the advent of Jameson’s ideas on “pastiche” when one interprets the past, Julia’s rendering of it is one that is free of any artifice. The difference between Julia’s reflections on the past and Jameson’s postmodernist subject who recreates a nostalgic superficiality in his portrait of the past, filled with various stereotypes and whatnot, is that Julia has actually lived through these representations that induc feelings of melancholy for her, having seen these events flash by with her own eyes when previously living in Rome.

To Julia, the violence and other acts her father engages in with his title of “Emperor”, causes a shift in how she views him. She recalls a “visual memory” of Augustus during a ceremony celebrating Rome’s military when she was nine years old. Before the commencement of this ceremony, Julia had not seen her father for more than a year (p. 157). Upon nearing Julia and her stepmother Livia during this ceremony, Augustus embraces Julia in his arms, laughing and happy. This is the last time that Julia says she saw Augustus “as if he were a father like any other” (p. 157).

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50 Møller, 60.
51 Jameson, 21.
52 Ibid.
Soon enough, Augustus is led away into a chariot with an extravagant cloak fastened around him, with the sounds of the loud horns and trumpets and people crowding and yelling all throughout the procession. Although both Julia and Livia are by his side, seeing this image of Augustus leads Julia to feel as if he were a stranger rather than a father, “drawn away from me into the world that I was beginning to see for the first time” (p. 158). In the following accounts of her past in Rome, she distances herself away from any kinds of political activities revolving around the Roman Empire in favour of the discovery of herself, an act followed by the various lovers she took on and the extravagant parties she was a part of with other friends and acquaintances of hers. Julia protests against the “waning of affect” that Jameson states comes with the pillage of depthless ideals and rejection of emotions, or in the case of the Roman Empire, the constant reproduction of murder and other treacheries.53

But in being the daughter of “the ruler of the world, and a god” (p. 156), she cannot escape the treacheries indebted into the culture of the Roman Empire. Julia not only gets involved with Jullus Antonius, but falls in love with him as well. This has drastic consequences when Jullus’ plan to conspire against the government of Rome and assassinate Tiberius Claudius Nero, the husband of Julia whom she despises, is revealed. When Augustus tells Julia of her impending exile and suicide of Jullus earlier that morning, a similar decrease of emotions happens within Julia that Augustus had displayed earlier on. She has here become a subject that has experienced the “waning of affect” she originally rallies against.54 The individualism that Jameson claims vanishes with postmodernism is put on display here.55 Despite Augustus’ display of emotion in his final moments alone with his daughter, coming upon the realisation that he will never see her again, Julia is more subdued. What begins as a show of shock, with her “voice tremb[ling] [and] body [… stiffer[ing]]” ends with a bittersweet acceptance of her fate (p. 260). The only thing she is able to muster up in response to Augustus’ “I shall not see you again” realisation, is “[i]t does not matter” (p. 262).

But this is nevertheless a moment that the reader can fully sympathise with. As Møller demonstrates, the way that a character is both written and told plays a big deal when judging the actions that occur.56 Julia is a character that throughout the book has done her best to stay away from any acts of violence or corruption, making her life in Rome revolve only around what brings

53 Ibid., 11 ff.
54 Ibid., 11.
55 Ibid., 14.
56 Møller, 59.
her any form of happiness. Yet when Julia insists that she loves Jullus and reveals their plans of marriage, her father replies that this has nothing to do with love, and shows her the papers documenting Jullus’ conspiracy. Her happiness provides a threat for the Roman Empire, and she is in turn charged with committing a crime by Augustus. Julia continues living with this decrease of emotion on the island, everything “becom[ing] the object of an indifferent curiosity, and nothing is of consequence” (p. 147). The only moments of joy she can now cling on to are her memories of the city of Rome.

2.2 The Employment of Language Around Augustus and Julia

The main reason as to why the reader feels a cold distance to Augustus is due to the approach to language that Williams creates in his storytelling technique. When it comes to Williams’ portrayal of Augustus, everything revolving around him in the first two sections of the book is built on the perspectives and interpretations of motivation and feelings from others, rendering him a man of many different voices but his own. In turn, the emperor’s true persona is one constantly shrouded in secrecy, operating exclusively in the private sphere. Upon first meeting Augustus after many years, the character of Hirtia seems to ponder as to what exactly constitutes the making of a ruler. Hirtia’s mother was a foster nurse in the household of Augustus’ family when he was still a child, with Hirtia taking care of the baby Augustus. But now, as Emperor of Rome, Hirtia describes his image as “on the hearths of the country folk throughout the land” (p. 141), leaving her in a state of ignorance in not embracing his “greatness” early on when Augustus was only a child, according to her one that was “like any other” (p. 141). But Hirtia isn’t the only one who expresses this disbelief. Upon first meeting him in his youth, Gaius Cilnius Maecenas describes the features not of a man who has the appearance of an Emperor, but instead someone “with a face too delicate to receive the blows of fate, with a manner too diffident to achieve purpose, and with a voice too gentle to utter the ruthless words that a leader of men must utter” (p. 15). But if we were to follow the belief that someone else’s perception of another person is enough information to go on in forming that person’s consciousness, this attitude would lead to the fragmenting of the most internal emotions of repression, isolation and ideology the person being described may have. As Saussure emphasises upon in his work *Course in General Linguistics*, a big difference exists between the acts of “langue” and “parole”.57 A passive identity would be put on display if only the act of “langue” is

57 Saussure, 9.
demonstrated when constructing the character. What we get is a character that doesn’t adhere to freedom of speech, ergo is free of any individualism.\textsuperscript{58}

But if we are to turn back and look at the way that the Roman Empire is depicted in \textit{Augustus}, this fragmenting of Augustus’ identity through the prose makes a lot more sense. If violence and corruption are conducts repetitively occurring in the Republic, a sense of exhaustion and detachment must be imbedded in the figure in question. This physical trauma reaches a point where the perspective or opinions Augustus may have fall into a category of passivity rather than providing any kind of cohesion or insight in his thought-process. Therefore, the term of “parole” that Saussure demonstrates, through which the subject gains a voice and an ability to speak, vanishes entirely.\textsuperscript{59} One of the most pivotal displays of this occurs upon the death of Julius Caesar. The way that Augustus’ processing of this news is depicted by John Williams is not played out as a powerful moment on the page. While there is an element of grief bestowed upon the four friends, no adjectives of heart-tugging emotion are found:

He says, in dull, flat voice: “My uncle is dead.” We cannot take in the words; we look at him stupidly. His expression does not change, but he speaks again, and the voice that comes out of him is grating and loud and filled with uncomprehending pain […] (p. 21).

Even when Augustus’ voice is one of pain, the emotion on display is categorised as “uncomprehending”. But this feeling of incomprehension is also expressed by Augustus’ allies, such as Salvidienus: “My hand is shaking so that I cannot read what is written. I steady myself. My voice is strange to me […] I look around me, not knowing what I feel. An emptiness?” (p. 21). Any notions of feeling are out of place, as if expression of emotion that come with Saussure’s concept of “parole” should not be there. Only the systematic and robotic “langue” should be displayed by these individuals. The scene ends with Augustus walking away onto a deserted field, all by himself, “moving slowly, this way and that, as if trying to discover a way to go” (p. 22). The consequences of this news, and what it means for the fate of Augustus, is never once brought up by Augustus himself or anyone else. On the surface, it is just more news that Octavius is unaffected by, but has deep down recognised, if not yet fully processed, with regards to his destiny following this particular death. The feelings of grief and loss are all nothing more than additional layers to the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 14 ff.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
constantly increasing piling up of nihilism Augustus is already familiar with, even having been a part of several of Julius Caesar’s campaigns during his rule.

But in the third section, John Williams alters his technique around how Augustus is depicted. The gears have been shifted all of a sudden, and Williams’ previously blank character gains the ability to speak, and in turn, gains a voice and singularity absent in the first two sections of Williams’ book. In a letter addressed to Nicolaus of Damascus, Augustus, on his deathbed, looks back at the various events that have previously been accounted by other characters in the book. Glancing over at the statement of his accounts now before him, in the form of a document, he sees these fragments of activities “as if written by someone else. […] I read and wrote of a man who bore my name but a man whom I hardly know” (p. 269). So whose identity has it been then? Is he making the assumption that he has constructed a false self throughout all of these years as the Emperor of Rome? This is where Augustus comes to terms with the cruel irony behind the life of his former self: in giving away his life to the construction of the Roman Empire, he never gave the attention that his inner self needed to discover the man deep down in his soul, outside of the political doings. In this letter, he finally gets the chance to come close to an authenticity. He exhibits the emotion Saussure outlines should come with the freedom of speech. But in transforming himself from the boy who joked of Antonius’ irony behind his fear of him to the leader doing everything in his power to make Rome flourish, Augustus notes that in getting into the required character, “it was more nearly an instinct than knowledge” (p. 273) that made him realise this was the persona to take on. His doings weren’t showcasing something personal, but rather only business, done for the sake of his “second daughter”, Rome (p. 295). Since “langue” is all part of an enclosed and strict system of language, as Saussure explains, so did Augustus’ doings gain an impersonality to them when exhibiting it. But if his self became an impersonal one with the gaining of power to the point where he had to have the others do the speaking for him, in this final section of the book, the reader finally finds some kind of sympathy to cling on to, one with an intelligence and thought to his character. No traces of any megalomania or paranoia are to be found in this leader, only a humbleness in explaining that he is not more special than any other man, and came to gain the power he did because of a God, named “Accident”, whose “priest [Augustus in this case] “is [only a] man”, not a second coming or force of nature (p. 293).

While Augustus’ contemplation on his life from his own perspective does not figure into the book’s narrative until the very end, the life of Julia is all depicted in the form of an inner monologue.

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60 Ibid., 15 f.
recalling her past life, while she is writing this in her journal by herself. If the people around the male figure of Augustus have so much information or hearsay to offer of his life and doings in such a detailed depth, to the point where they are virtually controlling his psyche, nothing is ever drawn of the female character of Julia in such intricate depth. In this case, Julia has to create a personal voice for herself, one where she does not remain simply being an object in all the discourse revolving around her. However, as Irigaray points out, when the woman is to seek her voice, this shouldn’t be one in the same vein as employed to Augustus in this case, but an entirely singular one, in the form of a “disruption”.\textsuperscript{61} From an early age, Julia is more drawn to poetry and language in her scholarly activities. “[T]he more feminine parts of her curriculum” such as music and dancing, “are not so much to her liking” despite her possessing a “natural physical grace” (p. 162). When Augustus tells her of Cleopatra, a woman who had the power and audacity to get “caught up in the world of events” (p. 159), Julia seems to become even more fascinated and excited in achieving her objective. But Julia never gets the chance to achieve any kind of singularity, or a “disconcerting” of language through her very own means.\textsuperscript{62} Soon enough, she is “exiled” from her studies, not being able to pursue her love for Greek and Latin studies due to her “body” going through changes in order to enter “womanhood” (p. 165). With this feeling of happiness gone, Julia cannot give shape to who she truly wants to be and free herself of any “impotence” that Irigaray shows when the woman is stripped of any forms of expression.\textsuperscript{63} A new unwanted identity is forced upon Julia. But gradually, she does find a singularity to this persona. Rather than being left with a sense of repression, Julia learns how to express and take advantage of this power, or voice, that is present within herself, and comes to apply it in the form of a protest. Julia soon starts to overthrow what is considered the norm of how a daughter of the Emperor is supposed to behave in public with others around her. These “joy[s] of power” may seem to be devious ones, but are means of performativity that achieve the “disconcerting” of language that Irigaray outlines.\textsuperscript{64} Nothing is of a rigid or strict quality in the language anymore, beliefs heavily indebted to the masculine means of linguistics.\textsuperscript{65} This practice becomes a necessity not only for Julia, but for all women to discover power, to “exert it and enjoy it”. (p. 199). New ways of thinking are achieved by the overthrowing of the most

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Irigaray, 143.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 142.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
common of linguistic practices, and Julia continues Irigaray’s line of thought through her own discourse:

Unlike a man, she [the woman] she cannot seize it [power] by force of strength or mind or desire, nor can she glory in it with a man’s open pride […] She must contain within her such personages that will disguise her seizure and her glory. (p. 199).

The others around her, such as Nicolaus of Damascus in a letter to Gaius Maecenas, suspect that Julia’s behaviour takes a turn for the worse upon her marriage to Marcus Agrippa, her second husband. Nicolaus goes in depth about Julia’s partaking in a secret “female cult” devoted to worshipping a goddess whose name is not known. Despite priests being involved here, they are castrates, “who at one time allowed themselves to be used as sacrificial victims to the goddess” (p. 205). This display is a part of their rituals, where the priestesses select a victim of their choosing, but it must be a “willing victim” (p. 205). From the perspective of Nicolaus, based on various rumours and the sounds of the ritual heard from afar, the ritual consists of flute music and chants, with the members of the cult ”purify[ing] themselves by abstinence from all fleshly things”, and dancing, singing and drinking “certain libations” (p. 205). As for the victims, “save for the fur of [a] wild animal tied loosely about his waist” is completely naked, with the fur eventually being loosened by the goddess with a knife. The selected victim is led into a cave in the “sacred grove”, where an unsanctioned marriage between the goddess and “the mortal” takes place (p. 206). A stipulation demanded from all members of the cult is the renouncing of authority “beyond the dictates of their own desire, and have no allegiance to any man, […] law, or mortal custom” (p. 206). In partaking in these rituals, Julia finds the freedom she so desperately seeks for prior to this, demonstrating her protest in terms of how these “mortals”, the male, are treated. She is far away from the demands set upon her. But Augustus eventually forces her to return back to Rome. Julia is resentful of “being exiled from the only life in which I had ever been myself” (p. 207). If Augustus accepts the duty granted him upon the death of Julius Caesar without deliberating on the consequences of this undertaking until the very end, then Julia follows Irigaray’s ideas and questions the undertaking in order to unleash herself from it, by taking her own rights and interests into account. But in obeying her father, she is back to “performing a kind of duty in which [she] […] no longer could see any meaning [to]” (p. 207).
2.3 Masculinity and Femininity

As Augustus continues his battles, such as avenging the murders of Julius Caesar, he develops a certain kind of fatigue. His health takes a turn for the worse, with his face likened to a corpse and his appearance a gaunt one, and only worsens as time goes on (p. 84 ff). Despite being only 22 years old, according to Maecenas, Augustus “looked double - treble - that age” (p. 88) by that point. But even though his body has completely given out on him, to the point where he’s not able to eat nothing, and constantly coughing up blood (p. 88), his will “hardened”, so much that Augustus “drove himself even more fiercely in his illness than […] in his health” (p. 89). Augustus himself tells Maecenas that “[t]hough my body can’t move, my mind can” (p. 89). Despite Augustus being able to carry on with his mechanical acts of violence and corruption, such as allowing Marcus Antonius to “steal from the Asians and the Egyptians” (p. 89), his body cannot function any longer among this kind of culture and its demands. This occurs along with his disability to speak, ending up being exhausted, and any sense of depth to the representation of his body evaporating. As Jameson states, just as the appearance of the person’s surroundings alter, so does the appearance of the individual himself completely change with the coming of this postmodernist climate of various “euphorias”.66 If the Roman Empire is free of any depth, then so are the people that are doing all this damage. Augustus, who is uncomplainingly a product of his environment, plays a big role as Emperor of the Roman Empire and its various norms, is in turn a victim to many of the changes that occur with the coming of this culture of nihilism.

Julia on the other hand, is not. When she in turn constructs her own language and identity, away from “the cultural experience[s]”, of the Roman Empire in this case, she saves herself from the deterioration that happens to Augustus’ body.67 She has done her best to keep away from the various “intensities” and “euphorias” of Jameson’s linked to Augustus and the masculine figure.68 She believes she has served her body “with much care and art” (p. 146), considering that it “began its service later than it might have done” (p. 246). This is due to the fact that by the time Julia learns of her body and its ways of expression, she had already been married twice, and given birth to three children. Upon marrying her second husband Marcus Agrippa, she discovers the virtues of bathhouses, that the people of Rome are reluctant to at first. But upon entering one the first time at the encouragement of Agrippa, she quickly sees the joy in bathing. The bath serves as a place that is

66 Jameson, 34.
67 Ibid., 32.
68 Ibid., 34.
free of any classes, but instead everyone merges into one undistinguishable carnal identity, sitting naked in the bath, “surrounded by hundreds of women who shout and scream and laugh” (p. 245). The body becomes a power through which “she became herself […] the goddess to the mystery of all my pleasure”, serving not only her in return, but other “lovers” as well (p. 247). Julia, with her figure of femininity, moves away from how the masculinity of Augustus is constructed in the book, where the idea of any needs that please himself, such as happiness, are non-existent entities in Augustus’ vocabulary. All his actions are done out of a political necessity, for the “pleasure of Rome” (p. 227), such as forcing Julia to marry Tiberius to “guarantee the safety of [his] authority” (p. 227). Julia and Tiberius despising one another is completely irrelevant in this situation. When Julia asks him whether his authority and the Rome he has built and saved has been all worth this trouble, Augustus replies that “I must believe that it has […] we both must believe that it has” (p. 228). But when Julia engages in the acts of bathing and serving both herself and the others around her, she is attempting to return to a natural state that has been all but deteriorated with the ways of the masculine figure in the Roman Empire. The “natural” past, all but exhausted with the coming of postmodernism as Jameson claims, has resurfaced through Julia.69

One of the lovers Julia takes on is Jullus Antonius, meticulously planning her steps in seducing him, all in the vein of a performance. These meticulous steps are all a part of a game where both participants, Jullus and Julia in this case, “pretend helplessness beneath the weight of passion” (p. 251), but where the woman always has the upper hand and ends up as the victor in her ways of “conquer[ing] and us[ing] […] her antagonist, the man (p. 251). After encountering him at various gatherings, throwing glances only to hurriedly look away, and brushing against him only to confusedly draw away, she manages for both of them to be alone one evening, and plans the seduction:

I languished on my couch; I said words that invited the hearer to offer comfort; I let my dress fall away from my legs a little, as if in distracted carelessness. Jullus Antonius moved across the room and sat beside me. I pretended confusion, and let my breath come a little faster. I waited for the touch, and prepared a little speech about how fond I was of Marcella [Jullus’ wife, Julia’s cousin] (p. 251 f).

But the seduction does not go as planned. Jullus at first rejects her, “not intend[ing] to become another stallion in [her] stable of horses” (p. 252). The final blow towards Julia comes in the form of Jullus, with his dark and intense eyes, “as if something were burning behind them”, looking

69 Ibid., 34.
intently at Julia and telling her that if they ever did become lovers, both “shall do so in [Jullus’] own time […]” (p. 252). Unlike her previous performances of seduction, her body fails her this time. The failure of the attempt leaves her in a state of shock and numbness. She secludes herself in her home for a period of time. The main difference between Jullus and the other lovers, is that he is someone Julia cares for deep down, and to achieve a sense of happiness, to satisfy herself, she needs control over the situation. Even though Jullus soon returns, changing his mind, he has the control over this situation, to his advantages:

For several moments neither of us moved. I shut the door behind me, and came a little into the room. […] He came toward me. He took the large towel that I wrapped around me and slowly unwound it from my body. […] Then he moved back from me, and looked at me where I stood, as if I were a statue. I believe I was trembling. Then he stepped forward, and touched me with his hands (p. 253).

The “disruption” Irigaray suggests the woman can achieve against through her freedom of expression is no longer in function. But soon it does not matter to her that Jullus has the control, because Julia discovers “the pleasures of love” (p. 253) she had not known of before that afternoon with Jullus Antonius. Her body is no longer one of multiple lovers after this, but rather one belonging completely to Jullus. Julia describes that she “came to know the flesh of Jullus Antonius as I had known nothing else in my life” (p. 253). But the differences between the male and female figure soon factor in, and Julia’s life comes crumbling down. Jullus continues to stubbornly plan his attack against the Roman Empire, leaving his love for Julia as a secondary wish. The only means to an end for Jullus, the masculine figure, is engaging in acts of violence that are all for the sake of the Republic to him. But Julia, the figure of femininity, is busy focusing on only her means of happiness, in her want to marry Jullus in this case. She is completely blind-sided to not only the consequences of her happiness, but the real ambitions of the masculine figure, and has a price to pay for it at the end. These plans of marriage are shattered when Augustus reveals that Jullus had already committed suicide. The potential that Irigaray shows the feminine figure is capable of is completely destroyed by Julia here. Not only was she the one who started the revolt, but she was the one who would put an end to it as well, through her own naïveté.

But upon reflecting on these memories of Jullus in the present, she doesn’t seem to be holding any air of anger or resentment towards his betrayal or her failure to fulfil many of the ideals of freedom she sought for. Jullus intimately remains in Julia’s memories after all these years, even if his flesh is “dispersed into the air” (p. 253). She is even content with the fact that no man has

70 Irigaray, 143.
touched her since getting involved with Jullus, finding her true love through him. She reiterates this with the statement that “[n]o man shall touch me for as long as I live” (p. 253). By the end, she manages to block out these treacheries the masculine figure is capable of, and focus only on her identity, the feminine figure. She achieves this by reflecting on only the moments of complete satisfaction as her journal nears its end, no matter how painful the scenes of seeing her father for the last time and Tiberius’ victory are to her (p. 262). She has come to the realisation that she served her body well, “with much care and art” (p. 146), unlike the one of Augustus, rich with decay and artifice by the end. As the tide of the water rises gently in Pandateria, the water moving gently over her body, Julia is only able think of the one “ultimate pleasure” (p. 247) of her life: Jullus Antonius.

3. Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to come a lot closer to deciphering the various schemes that John Williams employs in his portrayals of Augustus and Julia. In the past when discussing Augustus, any ideas of something “radical” or “innovative” occurring beneath its surface have largely been neglected in the favour of terms such as “traditional” when describing the novel and its supposed designs. What I have arrived at when focusing on these two characters is the way that Williams differentiates them does not adhere to a simple relationship where the daughter is estranged from the father due to an obvious neglect and large absence on his part, but rather because both choose contrasting paths to take with the power that has been bestowed upon them. To continue on in this thought of differentiation between the two characters, these practices are not portrayed through simple conventions such as clear thematic content for the reader to easily digest, but instead is done through various intense enactments of fragmentation found in its composition. This is achieved through both the language and shifting depictions of the masculine and feminine contours of Augustus and Julia.

I have demonstrated these features of both characters through the use of theoretical perspectives of Jameson and Saussure that challenge these older aesthetics of literature, and showcase a new kind of culture where any ideas of substance or emotional depth are done away with. In my analysis I show that it is the male figure of Augustus who subscribes to this kind of culture where, as Fredric Jameson calls it, a “waning of affect” occurs. Williams depicts Rome as a society where nihilism is a form of change, yet ignoring the consequences this will have in the long run. The piling up of these nihilistic tendencies leads to a loss of identity, which is exactly what happens to Augustus. With this loss come the exhaustions of both language and appearance, and Williams enhances this effect by having the identity of Augustus filtered through varying
perspectives of the people surrounding him. While this process of complete desensitisation may cause the deterioration of his identity, his mind continues to operate, but focused only on practices that in some way relate to violence and corruption, such as avenging for the death of Julius Caesar. It’s only when he can finally sit down and relax at the end of the book that he begins to reflect on the choices that he has made throughout his life. But the irony is that when this moment occurs, Augustus is on his deathbed.

But the ideas demonstrated by Irigaray go against this representation so indebted to masculinity, believing that the patriarchy has failed to recognise the fact that women can have a language and identity of their own, free of any notions of objectivity. Applying this theoretical stance to the character of Julia, she in turn challenges the culture of “depthlessness” her father is a part of by taking a form of protest against these norms of the Roman Empire. The violence her father and his military engage in alienate her from an early age. While at first indifferent to “feminine activities” and more drawn towards poetry and language, she finds ways of utilising her femininity as a means of expression, and in turn overthrowing the traditional linguistic practices of Greek and Latin she was at first drawn towards. She chooses her own path, viewing her power as a means of happiness rather than an ambition to carry on the legacy of Julius Caesar as Augustus does. But her attempt to gain an individualism is put to a stop when she is exiled from Rome. Her previous freedom that she experienced with the employment of her femininity is diminished, and the desensitisation Augustus envelops himself in becomes her present state on the island of Pandateria. However, despite Julia’s exile, in reminiscing different events of her life in Rome, she comes to realise that she has experienced a joy and freedom in her lifetime she can proudly look back at. Augustus never will, due to his impending death. As she herself states, she has treated her body, her true identity and way of expressing herself, with care. She gave birth to three children, and managed to find someone she cares for in Jullus Antonius.

Through this differentiation, Williams contrasts not only between the two characters and their ways around constructing their lives, but also how their personas effect the book’s structure. Upon altering his technique and giving a voice to Augustus, the relationship between the artifice and reality in storytelling is revealed. The composition of Augustus that revolves around the Emperor showcases the illusion that is always in existence in literature when one character gets access into the inner life of another character. Whether this character be a fictional or nonfictional one, based on a historical figure does not make a difference. The moment that Williams makes us participate in the feelings Augustus experiences when he is forced to exile Julia because of the very laws he has bestowed upon Rome, filtered through the voice of Julia, we officially stepped into the
territory of fiction. But no matter how questionably unethical this practice may be, the genre of fiction is a way, and perhaps the only one, in which we can gain access into the inner lives of other characters.

So in conclusion, a work like John Williams’ *Augustus* not only elucidates what it is like to live in a society of constant treacheries and nihilism and the toll it takes on ones individualism, but also highlights a relationship existing between fiction and reality which is far from the supposedly conventional or traditional means of storytelling it is claimed to be indebted to.
4. Bibliography

4.1 Literary Sources


4.2 Online Journals and Websites


